

Delighting and Keeping

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[0 : 00] Psalm 119 and verse 16, where we read these words, I will delight in your statutes. I will not forget your word.

I will delight in your statutes. I will not forget your word. There is in the Christian life a direct relationship between our delighting in the word of God and our doing of the word of God. Between our delighting in the word of God and our doing of the word of God. The more we delight in the word of God, the more we shall do of the word of God.

The less we delight in the word of God, the less we shall do of the word of God. And when I talk about doing, I'm not confining our activities to those others can see, but to the activities of the heart and to the mind. The whole person consecration to Christ, where we think the thoughts of Christ and speak the words of Christ and do the deeds of Christ.

Now, over the course of the last number of weeks, we've studied together the second section of Psalm 119 from verse 9 to 16. We'll be singing that in a little while. We've chosen the prayer meeting as the format for that because our delight in and our love for the word of God is to be at least close to the top of the issues for which we want to pray. And this because we delight in the word of God only in as much as we delight in the God of the word. We want to pray, do we not, that God would increase our delighting and our doing and that what God does for us, he would do for others in our families and our fellowship, perhaps especially for those who are struggling in their faith during these strange and weird days of pandemic and lockdown.

So this evening from Psalm 119 verse 16, we want to consider the two themes of delighting in the word of God and doing the word of God. The psalmist prays, I will delight in your statutes, I will not forget your word. Remember the context in which all this is being said, that in the Christian life there is a direct relationship between our delighting in the word of God and our doing of the word of God. First of all then, delighting in the word of God.

[3 : 01] The psalmist begins, I will delight in your statutes. Now the psalmist uses a fairly rare word for delight here. It's a beautifully descriptive word which gives us unprecedented access into his heart.

It is famously translated in the Old Testament as delight, sport or play. So it's used in Isaiah 66 verse 12 to describe a mother who is bouncing her child on her knee. The child is playing and delighting with his mother.

It's also used in Isaiah 11 and verse 8 to talk of a toddler playing. Delight, I suppose, is the more respectable translation, but play is equally as accurate.

I will play in your statutes. When I was a child, as did many other children both then and now, I loved Lego.

You know, I'd spend all day when it was raining outside playing with these Lego blocks. My imagination would run riot as I built spaceships that would send me to Mars, as I built lorries that would transport wood down from the forest and fancy houses in which perhaps one day I'd live.

[4 : 31] As a child, I loved every minute of these Lego blocks. And supposing an adult had come into the room and told me that the sky was falling down at that very moment, I'd probably have completely ignored them.

I had more important things to occupy my mind, namely to find a way to make my starship to Mars symmetrical. The psalmist is playing in the word of God.

His imagination is running riot as he thinks about the God whose word this is, as he meditates on how he may put this into practice in his day-to-day life.

He's not playing with the word of God, as if to accept some parts and reject others. He's playing in the word of God, cavorting as it were, skylarking in the heavenly perfections of God's word.

This is his joy and his delight to be at play in the fields of the Lord. I wonder, do you ever play in the word of God?

[5 : 43] Do you ever allow yourself to bounce on its knee with delighted laughter, knowing that you are safe and secure in the love of God, your heavenly Father?

Do you ever let your imagination run riot in the word of God, meditating on what God's word tells us about him? Not because you must, but because you really want to.

As I was reading around this subject, I came across this quote by the 19th century Anglican commentator Charles Bridges.

Listen to what he wrote. We may observe here an evidence of adoption. Obedience is not a burden, but a delight.

The servant may perform the statutes of God, but it's only a son who delights in them. But what we may ask is the spring of adoption.

[6 : 47] It is the spirit of the son sent into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. It is because we are at peace with God through Jesus Christ, because the statutes are the message of reconciliation through him, that they become delightful to those who are partakers of this great salvation.

The spirit of adoption, therefore, as the principle of delight, is the spring of acceptable obedience in the Lord's service. Let me repeat the most significant section of that rather lengthy quote.

The servant may perform the statutes of God, but it's only a son who delights in them. In other words, no gospel adoption through Christ, no delight in the statutes of God, no play, no enjoyment in him.

We're never going to bounce playfully on the knees of God's word if we cling on to the spirit of slavery, rather than embrace the spirit of sonship.

So I'm asking, do you delight in the statutes of God? If you were to pray Psalm 119 verse 16, would you be pretending the hypocrite?

[8 : 11] How can you make the word of God delightful to you? Answer, by approaching it as a devoted son to the words of his loving father. Not so much the instructions of a master to his slave, but the instructions, the loving instructions of a father to his son.

Then and only then shall we experience the joy of playing in the word of God, rather than the dirge of playing with the word of God.

So pray. Pray earnestly for a fresh understanding, appreciation and experience of your adoption as sons and daughters of the living God.

Always remembering that quote from Charles Bridges, or the gist of it anyway. The servant may perform the statutes of God, but it's only a son who delights in them.

So delighting in the word of God. Secondly, doing the word of God. Doing the word of God.

[9 : 22] At this stage, let me remind you of the big thought of this verse, that there is in the Christian life a direct relationship between our delighting in the word of God and our doing of the word of God.

All too often, the first sign of a Christian beginning to fall away from their faith is when they slip in their Bible reading, and in particular in their attitude toward their Bible reading.

Delighting and doing. This is the relationship. Even as the psalmist says, I will delight in your statutes. I will not forget your word. Well, what does not forgetting mean?

And how does it relate to our delight in the word of God? Well, in the first instance, not forgetting means remembering. And in the second instance, not forgetting means doing.

Not forgetting in the first instance means remembering. Earlier in this section of Psalm 119, we read the words in verse 11, I have stored up your words in my heart.

[10 : 34] And we learned that this corresponds to the spiritual discipline of memorization and meditation. Memorizing the word of God. Treasuring it in our hearts.

And pondering its use in such a way that we may use it against sin and temptation. And we're back to that idea here in verse 16. Remembering the word of God.

Memorizing it. Storing it in our hearts. We do so, though, in this case, in verse 16, because we delight in the word of God.

That which we value precious, we remember long. That which we value important, we remember long.

If we value the word of God and consider it of first importance, we shall remember it. And yet I know that there are some among us for whom Bible memorization is very difficult indeed.

[11:39] And they sometimes feel very guilty that perhaps they can't remember the exact words of a text. The exact words of scripture. You know, in their case, I love the deeply pastoral words of the Scottish minister Thomas Boston from 300 years ago.

And he wrote these wonderful words. He said, grace makes a good heart memory. Even when there is no good head memory.

Grace makes a good heart memory. Even when there is no good head memory. In other words, it is more important to remember the gist of a verse than perhaps its exact words.

To experience its sanctifying force rather than intellectualize its logical truth. Yes, if you can, make every effort to memorize the exact words of scripture.

But if memorization is beyond you, as it is for many of us, for whatever reason, make sure you remember the gist. The general teaching of the scripture you're reading and studying.

[12:51] Be in mind what I said earlier. That what we value precious will remember long. What we value important will remember long.

If the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ really is that valuable and important to us, then we'll make every effort not to forget, but at least to heart remember.

Not forgetting means remembering. And then lastly, not forgetting means doing. Means doing. In the Hebrew thought world, remembering was not just an intellectual exercise.

Perhaps we'd be better translating remembering with the additional words remembering to do.

Remembering to do. Remembering is a covenant word reflecting God's determination to savingly act on the basis of the promises that he made to his people long ago.

And so we're to think of Psalm 119 verse 16 in the Hebrew thought world as saying this. I will delight in your statutes. I will not forget to do your word.

[14:09] I will not forget to do your word. So we're here in the realm of action and obedience of the Christian who puts the word of God into practice in her life.

She's got a really good heart knowledge of the word of God, even if her head knowledge isn't what she'd like it to be. But what she knows of the word of God, she does.

She can't precisely remember the words of Matthew 6, but she knows that she prays to her heavenly father in secret and that to make an exhibition of her piety is hypocrisy.

Furthermore, she is so delighted in the way in which God cares for the sparrows and for the flowers of the field that she's more than happy to put him first in her life and to trust him with the rest.

As a family of believers, he makes it his ambition to love other Christians from the heart and he puts their interests before his own. He takes every opportunity God provides him with to tell others about the Jesus who loves him and to save them from his sin.

[15:20] She's just delighted in the word of God because she knows it's the revealed will of her loving heavenly father. She delights in the word of God to the extent that she does the will of God in her day-to-day life without questioning whether it's in her best interests so to do.

She just knows it is. He loves looking at those pieces of Lego, but even more, he loves to put them together in spaceships and lorries and fancy houses.

Let me remind you of that wonderful quote by Charles Bridges. The servant may perform the statutes of God, but it's only a son who delights in them.

And so as sons and daughters of a living God through adoption in Christ Jesus, we do not merely do the statutes, but we delight in the doing of them. Delighting both in faith and in obedience.

Delighting both in faith and in obedience. Well, at the beginning of our study this evening, I suggested that there is in the Christian life a direct relationship between our delighting in the word of God and our doing of the word of God.

[16:37] Can you now see why and how that is? That in which we delight most, we shall delight most to do.

Given that this is the word of our father, the father who gave us the gospel of Christ and in whom we have adoption as his precious and privileged children, to do his will is not hardship, but hedonism.

It's not pain, but pleasure. It's not duty, but delight. And that gospel hedonism, pleasure and delight is Christ's prayer for you.

And in your best moments, at least. Yours for yourself. Yours for yourself.