

Teach Me Your Statutes!

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Date: 20 January 2021

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[0 : 00] You turn with me in your Bible, please, to Psalm 119 and verse 12. Psalm 119 and verse 12. Blessed are you, O Lord, teach me your statutes.

Blessed are you, O Lord, teach me your statutes. I guess of all the titles a Christian can legitimately claim for herself, the title disciple is at or very near the top.

To be a student of Jesus, a trainee of Jesus, to learn at his feet, is one of, if not the greatest privilege a Christian may claim for herself.

Her daily prayer is that which is found in this verse. Blessed are you, O Lord, teach me your statutes. Because she knows that her greatest need in life is to be taught about God by God.

Like a lark ascending or flying in ascending circles, the more she learns about God, the more she praises God.

[1 : 18] And the more she declares his divine blessedness, the more she praises him. Until finally, by his blessed grace, she sees him face to face.

And then she knows for certain what she's always known to be true. This is a prayer which shall go on forever and ever, because we'll always, always need to be taught God's statutes.

At its most basic level, this verse is an outstanding example of the relationship between prayer to God and the praise of God in the life of a disciple of Christ.

The Christian who does not praise will not pray. And the more a Christian praises, the chances are the more he will pray. The more a Christian delights in the blessedness of God, and we'll look at that in a moment, the more he'll pray for God to teach him more and more about himself.

We're going to be like that lark, flying in ascending circles up to heaven. So in this verse, we have two stages. Praise, blessed are you, O Lord, and then prayer, teach me your statutes.

[2 : 44] Let me go back to this phrase again. The Christian who does not praise will not pray. If, as a disciple of Christ, you want to revitalize your prayer life, this is the verse to begin with.

You are blessed, O Lord. God, teach me your statutes. First of all then, praise, praise. Well, it's easy for us to understand how God could bless us, but in what sense can we bless God?

After all, God is entirely self-contained in that he doesn't need our words to make him more blessed than he already is. And then in what sense can it be said of God that he is blessed?

Well, without trying to deliver a lecture in systematic theology or to delve too deep into the doctrine we call the aseity of God, the answer to the second question is very much found in the answer to the first.

God is entirely self-contained. His name is I am. I am who I am. He exists in perfect holiness and in holy perfection.

[3 : 59] We can't reduce him to our own level and judge him to be conceited because such a thing is blasphemous. But when you think about God, you should envisage him as being entirely taken up with himself.

We say of some people that they're self-sufficient in that they're happy with their own company. And God is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably self-sufficient because he has the perfect holiness of his own essence and character to, for want of better words, keep himself infinitely happy.

And so if we're going to reduce that word blessed to happy, then God is infinitely, eternally, and unchangeable happy in himself and with himself.

Where can he, after all, find greater perfection than he can find it in himself? Greater love than he can find it in himself. Greater glory than he can find it in himself.

Add to this the biblical doctrine of the Trinity that God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And you're filled with the profound mystery of God the Father's infinite, eternal, and unchangeable delight in his Son.

[5 : 28] And of the Holy Spirit's infinite, eternal, and unchangeable delight in the Father. The gloriously infinite pleasure of God in himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We might say there is nothing which makes God the Father happier than to gaze in wonder at the perfections of his Son. God is infinitely sufficient and happy in himself.

That's what it means for God to be blessed. To put it in modern terms, perhaps, God is sorted. He is sorted. Let's never run the risk in our Christian lives and prayers of thinking that somehow God is needy.

That he lacks anything in and of himself which only we can provide him with. Sometimes the God of modern evangelicalism is made out to be rather effect and pathetic.

But this is not the God of the Bible, eternally blessed in and of himself, needing nothing and no one other than himself to make him infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably blessed.

[6 : 47] It's before this God we bow in reverence and fear, trembling and with a deep sense of our own neediness.

How then can we bless God? If that's what it means for God to be blessed, how can we bless God? We do so by declaring his supreme glory, by recognizing and declaring that he is who he is, by falling at his feet to worship him as the God who does not need us, but who we need, even for the very breath of our lungs and the next beat of our hearts.

It means to declare his supreme glory over our living and our dying, over our bodies and our souls, over our forgiveness and our salvation.

The God whose infinite love overflows in Jesus Christ and has been demonstrated in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

We bless God by declaring his infinite and eternal worth and value, by pointing away from our own achievements and our own merits to who he is and what he has done.

[8 : 23] This is true Christian praise. Not that God needs us, but that we need him. And this is true Christian discipleship, that we're disciples of this God.

Like a lark flying in ascending circles, we find that as we are absorbed more and more into the glory of God's eternal blessedness, we want to declare his worship more and more and more.

If we are disciples of this God, not of our own self-imagination, but the God who is infinitely, eternally and unchangeably self-sufficient, then who can measure the limits of the possibilities of our own personal blessedness?

The thing is, the man or woman who does not recognize the blessedness of God has no reason to believe, to praise or to pray.

The cross becomes an act of foolishness, not an expression of the overflowing love of God. So why believe? The God to whom we speak in prayer is weak and needy and rather pathetic, so why bother praying?

[9 : 46] The God who can do nothing without our help, why pray in the first place? And so as I plug week by week, I trust at the prayer meeting, our first need in prayer is to know who God is, the eternally blessed one.

Then we will pray. Praise. Secondly, prayer. Teach me your statutes.

Teach me your statutes. As you know, I used to play golf. Even though I say so myself, I was pretty good at it also. If I'd wanted to get much better, I would have needed to buy lessons from a professional golfer, someone who was better at golf than I was.

No point in me getting better by asking a complete beginner what I was going wrong. You learn from the best. In the same way, if you want to learn about blessedness and where to find it, you'll only really learn from the best, the most blessed of all, God himself.

So how then can I be blessed and content and happy? Not by looking around me for answers, but by praying for God's personal tuition.

[11 : 10] Teach me your statutes. Now the statutes of God are the practical expressions of who God is and what God is like.

They are the expressions of his loving heart. The overflow of his love both within and outside the bonds of the Holy Trinity.

The father loves his son and he's gentle with his son. Gentleness. The son loves the Holy Spirit.

He's kind to the Holy Spirit. Kindness. The Holy Spirit shows deference to the father. Humility, etc.

And so just as the blessedness of God consists in how he is entirely taken up with himself as father, son and Holy Spirit. When we're praying this prayer, Lord, teach me your statutes.

[12 : 08] In essence, in essence, we're praying this. Lord, teach me to be just like you. Just like you.

Teach me to be as gentle and as kind and as humble as you. To live in the blessedness of your character and the overflow of your loving heart.

We're asking that God would teach us to be just like him. And of course, implicit in this request isn't just that he would teach us so that intellectually we might know these things.

That somehow, if we were to be set an exam in the statutes of God, we'd pass with flying colours. But that God would teach us in such a way that what we know about him would change us altogether.

That not only would we know what it means for God to love, but that we too would become people of love. Gentleness, humility, righteousness, purity, and compassion.

[13 : 15] Just like him. We're praying not so that we may pass an exam, but that we may express gospel transformation in solid, practical ways.

That we may love like God loves. That we may be gentle like he is gentle. That we may be pure even as he is pure. Now, when we understand things this way from this verse of Psalm 119, we're opening ourselves out to God doing altogether new things in our lives.

The impression is often given that Christian maturity is attained by ivory tower study of the word of God. that the path to sanctity lies only in study.

Now, the study of God's word is absolutely vital, but God may choose to reinforce the lessons of his word and often does, in fact, most frequently does through situations we face in our lives.

God's teaching method is most often not classroom, but life. He trains his children through the circumstances he places in our lives. And so when we pray, Lord, teach me to be humble, we'd better be prepared for God to honour our prayer and to send circumstances into our lives which cut us down to the knees.

[14 : 37] Circumstances we find humiliating which make us humble. But that's the point, is it not? Because we prayed for God to teach us to be humble.

God never taught anyone humility in a classroom. He teaches it in real-life situations where we've got to apply the truths of God's word in the face of hard circumstances.

Let's take another example. Earlier we saw that the blessedness of God is entirely independent of circumstances. Rather, it consists in God's wholehearted delight in himself.

And so let's say we pray these words, Lord, make me blessed. Lord, bless me. How do we think he will answer such a prayer?

How do we think he will make us such a blessed person? Do you really think we'll wake up one morning and suddenly be different? That we'll become people who are no longer dependent upon the circumstances of our lives?

[15 : 48] What do we take the Father for? Jeannie popping out of a lamp who gives us three wishes? Or do you suppose that he will answer our prayer to be blessed people by sending difficult situations into our lives which will wean us away from depending upon circumstances?

That we shall through hardships that our Father is training us by become rather like the Apostle Paul who said I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

Because through these difficult circumstances God is answering our prayer to bless us. He's teaching us to depend entirely upon the sufficiency of his grace and that true pleasure and genuine delight can only really be found in him.

This is discipleship. That we should be God's trainees learning from him and learning of him seeing his blessedness played out in the life death and resurrection of Christ Jesus and being trained by him through his word and by the circumstances he chooses to send into our lives.

This is true discipleship and it's the greatest privilege of the child or daughter the son or daughter of God. It's the beginning and it's the middle and it's the end of maturity in our prayer lives.

[17 : 27] And so once again we end with that wonderful prayer. Blessed are you Lord teach me to be just like you. Amen.