

“Choose, Cling, and Run”

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Delivered On: June 12, 2010

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Psalms 119 is one of the greatest pieces of poetry in the Bible, and in fact, in all literature. In it the author, King David, extols the beauty and the benefit of God's great law. Being a king, a law-maker in his own right, David understood and appreciated the necessity of law for the stability of his kingdom and God's. We're living in an age when the concept of law is being eroded. "The rules don't apply to me" is the mantra preached by presidents, politicians and celebrities. We are fast on the path to total anarchy, which is the design of the arch rebel himself, Satan. God's law is depreciated and denigrated. It's been made irrelevant and out of touch, archaic and void. It's been nailed to the cross by preachers and theologians. This is tragic, for law is the foundation of government, earthly or heavenly. We need to have a grasp of the significance of His law and how we can, by His grace, live within its safe boundaries. Let's see how the shepherd king approached the sacred ground of God's law.

David dipped his poetic quill deeply when composing this psalm, employing a wide variety of figures of speech and language tactics to construct his song. Structurally, he took the Hebrew alphabet which is comprised of 22 letters, and allocated 8 verses for each of the characters of his alphabet. He then designed each of the 8-verse sections (that's why there are 176 verses in all; $8 \times 22 = 176$, and this makes it the longest chapter in the Bible) so that each verse begins with that letter of the alphabet. In other words, the first eight verses are organized in such a way that each verse begins with the letter aleph, the first letter of their alphabet. It is similar to our acrostic, "A is for apple, B is for boy," only there are 8 verses per letter. In many bibles the sections are headed by the Hebrew letter which is highlighted within that section.

Ingeniously David uses this format as a stage on which to herald the excellence of God's law, using a multitude of synonyms including "commandments," "statutes," "word," "testimonies," "judgments" and "precepts." Some of the verses from this psalm have become favorites for most of us. Some of the familiar verses from this chapter include, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." Verses 9-11. "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law." Verse 18. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Verse 105. "You are my hiding place (this phrase became a popular Christian song recently) and my shield; I hope in Your word." Verse 113. "It is time for You to act, O LORD, for they have regarded Your law as void." Verse 126.

In using a stylized and structured format, David was working in harmony with God's great system of order and arrangement. The Lord is a God of organization. All one has to do is to take a look at the arrangement in the heavens or the molecules to see evidence of this.

The passage we're looking at today comes from verses 30-32, the fourth section of the psalm and it comes within the Hebrew letter *Daleth* (which is the "d" sound in their language, just as the fourth letter of our alphabet). Each of the 8 verses in this section begins with that letter. "I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me. I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart." Beautiful words!

We see a progression in these verses. "I have chosen." To every human being God has granted the power of choice, the ability to decide. We each hold the rudder of our own destiny in our hands. David expresses that he has exercised this vote, this operation of the will. It was something that he did in the past and still maintains. "I have chosen."

Each of us must make that choice. If we don't purposefully and consciously choose God, by default we will have chosen the enemy, Satan. We were born "in the flesh," that is, in sinful flesh and part of Satan's kingdom. We must decide to become part of God's kingdom. Though God claims each of us by creation and redemption, He allows us to choose for ourselves. He will save no one against their will.

Choosing occurs when we place our will on the side of God and righteousness. Our wills may be weak and in need of God's strengthening, yet we still must choose. I am unable to move my car very far by pushing it, especially up an incline. Try to imagine me pushing my car from my house in San Marcos up the hill to our church in Valley Center! I looked up the information and found that San Marcos is at an elevation of 590 feet, but Valley Center is 1,300 feet, a difference of 710 feet. That's a lot of climbing. It's beyond my capability to push my car up the hill to Valley Center. I can't do it. But I can turn a key which will initiate the engine which will power the car up the hill. I can't move the car up the hill on my own power, but the car won't start unless I turn the key. Turning the key is like operating the power of choice. We can't save ourselves, but we must place our will on the side of righteousness and holiness.

Ultimately it will be seen that this opportunity to choose has been generously granted to each of us. Life on this planet began with a choice. Though Adam made the wrong choice and sinned, God miraculously and mercifully made it possible for us to have the opportunity to be given another trial, another opportunity to exercise the power of choice. When Christ died at Calvary, it wasn't to give us a "free pass" so that we could continue to indulge sinful behavior and expect to be saved. Not at all. That's not what happened at the cross. It was to give us another chance to choose Him and allow Him to change us from sinful thinking and doing to righteous thinking and doing. When Jesus died on the tree of Calvary He gave us the opportunity to stand again, as it were, at the tree of knowledge of good and evil and choose. Humanity was granted a second probation, a cosmic "do-over" if you please, by the death of Christ. But we must choose! Have you chosen? Can you say with David, "I have chosen the way of truth"?

When David said, "I have chosen," his voice joined many others, such as Joshua who said, "Now therefore fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seem evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15.

Others expressed their choice, not verbally, but by their actions. Abel chose by sacrificing a lamb. Noah chose by building an ark. Moses chose to obey God's command to deliver Israel, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." Hebrews 11:25, 26. Joseph and Daniel chose the way of the Lord in heathen lands. Have you chosen?

What specifically did David choose? "I have chosen the way of truth." Truth! What a rare and precious gem! A substance hidden and obscured by the father of lies, yet available through Christ. He is the Truth. David could just as easily have said, "I have chosen the way of the Lord," because He is the Truth. His Word is truth. His commandments are truth. That thought is emphasized several times in this chapter. "Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth." Verse 142. "You are near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth." Verse 151. "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever." Verse 160.

The one who has chosen the way of truth will find himself or herself in the path of obedience to all God's requirements. To say "I have chosen the way of God," and knowingly disobey one of His commandments is contradictory. God and His truth are one; God and His law are inseparable, indivisible. You cannot choose God with one hand and deny His law with the other hand. It's not possible.

Notice the noun "way" is singular. "I have chosen the way (not "ways") of truth." There is only one way. Not two, three, or a hundred. There was only one door to the ark, one door to the sheepfold, and that represented Jesus. He is the only way by which we must be saved. Let the world today know that not "all roads lead to Rome" in the spiritual sense. There is only one Name given by heaven among men by which we can be saved, and that name is Jesus.

"I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me." The choice that David made and that we make, is not a choice made by happenstance, chance or fortune. It's not a blind choice. It's not throwing the dice of destiny. It isn't throwing darts with one hand covering your eyes. It is a reasoned decision based on a careful, critical examination of the evidence. Is there emotion in true religion? Yes, there is. But emotion is always the servant of reason. The mind is "higher" than the heart, physiologically and in importance. Feelings do play a part in ones religious experience, but only as guided by an enlightened conscience steered by the Holy Spirit and the

Holy Scriptures. Scripture is the framework into which all emotions must be shaped. Feelings and impressions that do not conform to what God has revealed in His written Word need to be reevaluated. Those who allow feelings to run without the discipline of the written Word will find themselves adrift in a sea of confusion without any GPS.

David's choice was based on solid, compelling evidence. "I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me." The picture David is giving us depicts the articles of evidence, the exhibits, being "laid" out on the tables of his mental courtroom, in that inner chamber, that secret tribunal in which the seat of decision-making resides. David has the grounds of his belief "laid" before him for scrutiny and consideration. Having given due inspection to God's judgments; that is, having considered the acts, the ways and doings of the Lord with his Spirit-led conscience, David is prepared to place the weight of his belief on the side of righteousness.

His decision is based on solid and compelling evidence, but not "proof positive." Don't expect that God will remove all possibility of doubt. What the Lord wants to grow in us is faith, and faith can only exist when there is room for doubt. Where is the weight of the evidence? We must ask. While we are in this earth, there will always be some scintilla, some particle of doubt. Blessed is the one who does not stumble thereon. Today we walk "by faith;" over there, by sight.

Ask yourself, Is there sufficient basis on which faith can rest? Is the evidence for the existence of God sufficient? Is the evidence for the Bible being the authoritative Word of God sufficient for relying thereon? Despite one or two Scriptures that might seem at first glance to suggest otherwise, is there sufficient evidence to believe that the dead rest unconsciously, asleep in their graves, until the resurrection? Is there sufficient Scriptural grounds to believe that the seventh day was, is still and will always be the Sabbath of the Lord? Have you "laid before" you His "judgments" and given careful and complete examination as to the basis of your choice? A lot depends on it!

Verse 31 reads, "I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame!" While verse 30 is presented as something that began in the past (but continues in the present), "I have chosen," verse 31 is forged in the present tense. "I cling." There is danger that a choice, however meaningful it might have been, can fade away. Verse 31 is the guard, the antidote against such failures. "I will cling." It's a word that brings to mind pictures like Jacob clinging to his midnight Assailant, saying, "I will not let You go except You bless me." It suggests the response of Ruth who said to her mother-in-law Naomi, "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." Ruth 1:16. It reminds us of Mary Magdalene clinging to the feet of her Lord on resurrection morning. "Clinging" is the fulfillment of the admonitions "hold fast till I come" and "endure to the end."

It's a word that has meaning in my backyard, where the tender grape vines send out their searching tendrils, eagerly grasping and holding whatever they find to embrace. They cling to the fence for support. Are you clinging to Christ? It's not enough that you chose long ago--you must

cling to Him today. The King James version employs a descriptive term. It reads, "I have stuck to Your testimonies."

David says, "I will cling to Your testimonies." In the Old Testament, this word has a specific meaning. What was "the Testimony"? It was the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, spoken and written by God Almighty. That makes sense, of course, since this whole chapter is dedicated to the exposition of God's law. Moses was instructed, "You shall put into the ark the Testimony which I give you." Exodus 25:16. That was the Ten Commandments, wasn't it.

What is "testimony"? It's a "witness," isn't it. When a person gives "testimony" in court, they are bearing "witness." The Ten Commandments are called the "Testimony" because they bear witness as to Who God is; what His character is. They testify as to God's nature. That's why the devil is on the warpath against God's Law. If he could succeed in destroying His law, he could essentially destroy His government and God Himself. God and His law are one. His law testifies Who He is.

Do we cling to His law? Are the precepts of the Ten Commandments, not a dry list of rules, but precious and valuable to us? Do we agree with the Apostle John when he wrote, "His commandments are not burdensome"? I John 5:3. How did David feel about God's law? Look at what David wrote in this same chapter. "I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word." Verses 14-16. "So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts. I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. And I will delight myself in Your commandments which I love. My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes." Verses 47, 48. It doesn't sound very much like he's trying to get rid of God's law, does it? It doesn't sound like he considers obeying God's law restrictive and a burden, does it?

David prays, "Do not put me to shame." This is a phrase which directs our attention to our standing before the Great Judge in the final trial. To not be "put to shame" means to stand in innocence before the Holy God. Christ's law, embedded, enthroned, enshrined and embraced in the heart of the one who has surrendered his or her will to Him and allowed the power of the Spirit to operate in their heart will result in a joyous verdict on that last day. They will not be "put to shame."

That person will not boast of their attainments or accomplishments, but will know the truth of the promise contained in verse 29 in which David asks, "Grant me Your law graciously." To live righteously and in accordance with God's law is a gift (that's what the word "grant" implies). David is praying, "Give to me the privilege of obeying Your law." Then he uses the word "graciously," because the gift of obedience is given only by grace. Shame was the consequence of sin. That's what Adam and Eve felt when they transgressed. Those covered by Christ's robe of righteousness will not be "put to shame" on that Day. May that be our experience!

Verse 32. "I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart." Verse 30 occurred in the past; "I have chosen." Verse 31 speaks to the present; "I cling." Verse 32 indicates David's intention for the future. "I will run in the way of Your commandments." The word "run" suggests an enthusiastic, willing response. We are reminded of Abraham, who "ran" to prepare a meal for his three heavenly guests. The word "ran" figures prominently in the story of Eliezer's search for Isaac's future wife. He ran to meet Rebecca; she ran to give water to his camels. She then ran to tell her family the news of their visitor and Laban ran to meet Eliezer. We are reminded of the father of the prodigal in Luke 15 who ran when he saw his returning son. David is promising that his obedience will not be lame and haltering, given with slumped shoulders and slow feet, but joyous and willing, for his delight is in the law of the Lord. Is that your attitude toward obeying your Lord, your King?

"I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart." In the physical world, an enlarged heart is not a good condition to have. "Cardiomegaly" isn't something you want to have in the literal sense. What David was talking about was experiencing the power of God in his life which would enable him to render obedience. The Old Testament doesn't teach legalism. David isn't contemplating being able to obey God in his own strength. He anticipates God's healing and restoring touch, giving him an "enlarged heart" spiritually, so that he would be able to comprehend and comply with God's righteous requirements. It's no different for us today. Only through His enabling creative power can we live the way He wants. As Paul testified, "I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13.

Soon everything in the Bible will come to pass. Soon Jesus will return as He promised. Soon the wicked will confess, "The great day of His wrath has come; who shall be able to stand?" David gives us the answer. It will be the ones who can say with him, "I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me. I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart." Is this your testimony today?