

Sweeter than Honey, Better than Gold

January 6, 1991 / by John Piper / Scripture: [Psalms 19:7–11](#)

Psalm 19:7–11

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

I came back from vacation last summer filled with the joy of Psalm 19. On August 26 last year I preached a message from verses 1–6 entitled "[Do You See the Joy of God in the Sun?](#)" And on September 9 I preached from verses 12–14 under the topic, "[The Heart You Know and the Heart You Don't.](#)" This morning at the end of Prayer Week I want to finish my exposition of this psalm by looking very briefly at verses 7–11.

Last Week's and This Week's Message

The connection between this message and [last week's](#) is simple. Last week I urged upon us the word of the Lord in Luke 11 that we should prevail in prayer all through the year, especially for the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit. But dead people don't prevail. Foolish people don't prevail for the right things. Miserable people don't prevail in the right spirit. And that is what today's text is about—How do you stay alive and not dead? How do you stay wise and not foolish? And how do you stay happy in God and not miserable?

The answer is: Meditate on the law of the Lord day and night ([Psalm 1:1–3](#)). So for the sake of your life and your wisdom and your joy and your prevailing prayers I want you to give yourself this year with unshakable commitment to being in the Word of God every day. To encourage you and inspire you to do that, I want us to look at verses 7–11 of Psalm 19.

The point of this text is this: Because the Scriptures are the Word of the Lord—the communication and revelation of the living God—they have effects on us that are better than the effects of anything else we can read or study or watch or listen to.

1. The Scriptures as the Word of the Lord

So notice, first, that the Scriptures have these effects on us because they are the Word of the Lord.

David's Six-fold Repetition

This is unmistakable from David's six-fold repetition. Verse 7: "law of the Lord," "testimony of the Lord." Verse 8: "precepts of the Lord," "commandment of the Lord." Verse 9: "fear of the Lord," "precepts of the Lord." Six times he uses the phrase "of the Lord," that is, of Yahweh, Jehovah, the God who says, "I am who I am" and there is no other. The God who created all that is and holds it in being. The God who knows all things that have ever been and that ever will be, and who understands perfectly how everything in the universe works, from galaxies to the subatomic energy. This God has spoken with a law, and with testimonies and precepts and commandments and ordinances.

The New Testament Teaching

The New Testament confirms David's teaching. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable . . ." "Inspired by God!" Peter says in 2 Peter 1:20–21, "No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." "Moved by the Holy Spirit!" "Spoke from God!" Jesus himself said in John 10:35, "The word of God came, (and the scripture cannot be broken)." The Scriptures are the Word of God.

Nothing Can Benefit Us Like the Scriptures

So the first point is that the Scriptures are the Word of the Lord, and that's why they have effects that are better for us than anything else you can read or watch or listen too. Newspapers, magazines, novels, text books, books on psychology or theology, television, radio—nothing can have the good effects on us that the Scriptures have because these things are always the word of man, but the Scriptures are the Word of God. God understands you better than anyone else. He knows how people get to be the way they are and how they are effected by their surroundings. God understands society and groups perfectly. God knows all facts about how the world works. God knows the future and how everything will come out in the end. God is wiser than any wise writer. God is more caring than any counselor. God is more creative than any poet or artist. It simply stands to reason that what God says will be more useful to us than what anyone else in the universe has to say. Not to sit at his feet and soak our minds with his wisdom is sheer craziness if not suicidal. So to help us do what is so patently reasonable and useful for us, let's look at . . .

2. The Good Effects of Meditating on the Word of God

I see a general statement of the immense value of God's Word for us and then three specific benefits it brings to us.

The general statement is found in the first part of verse 10 and the last part of verse 11. David says first in verse 10 that the words of God are "more to be desired than gold,

even much fine gold." And then at the end of verse 11, "In keeping them there is great reward."

If you have a choice between the Word of God and GOLD, choose the Word of God. If you have a choice between the Word of God and MUCH gold, choose the Word of God. If you have choice between the Word of God and much FINE gold, choose the Word of God. The point is plain. The benefits of knowing and doing the Word of God are greater than all that money can buy.

So if you are tempted to read the stock page before you read the Bible in the morning, remind yourself that this is not shrewd behavior. It's like the child who chooses the penny over the dime because it's bigger. Adults look on and shake their heads and try to teach children how to see what is really more valuable. That is no doubt the way the angels in heaven look down at childish businessmen who study the stock page before they study the Bible. There is a difference however: the benefits of the Word of God over the benefits of gold are far greater than ten to one.

3. The Specific Benefits of the Word of God

So what are some these benefits? What is this "great reward" that verse 11 is talking about that makes meditating on the Bible so much better than much fine gold? It seems to me that what David says can be boiled down to three benefits: life, wisdom, and happiness. That's why I said at the beginning that dead people don't prevail in prayer, and foolish people don't prevail for the right things, and miserable people don't prevail in the right spirit, but that the Word of God is the key to prevailing in prayer for the right things and in the right spirit because it makes dead people alive, and foolish people wise, and miserable people happy. Let's look at these one at a time.

The Benefit of Life

It's the first thing David mentions, because it's the basis of everything else. Verse 7: "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." Another good translation would be: "restoring the life." Life is either non-existent or it is in jeopardy, and the law of the Lord brings it back.

Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but [shall LIVE] by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). This is why he was fasting for 40 days—to learn as a man the radical need for the Word of God and the only relative need for food of man. Food can only give physical life. But the Word of God gives spiritual life, life that never ends, life which is life indeed. You cannot maintain dynamic, powerful, vibrant life in God if you neglect the Word of God, because "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul."

Story after story shows that the Word of God has life giving power. Phaitoon Hathamart described to us how it was Matthew 11:28–30 that gave him Christian life when he was a Buddhist. St. Augustine said it was Romans 13:13 that stunned him into life. For Martin Luther it was Romans 1:16. For Jonathan Edwards it was 1 Timothy 1:17. And for the murderer Tokichi Ichii, who was converted just before his execution in Japan in 1918, it was the simple word,

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He said, "I was stabbed to the heart, as if by a five-inch nail."

Our life begins with the Word and we stay alive by the Word. If we abandon the Word of God, we will die spiritually. And this dying is very devious because its chief symptom is the denial that it is happening.

Only the Word of God gives the life which matters in the end. Can you imagine someone on his deathbed whispering to an attending family member, "Please, read to me the figures in my savings account. O, read to me from my portfolio." But you can all imagine yourself saying in that hour, "Read me Psalm 23. Read to me Romans 8. Read Revelation 21."

The law of the Lord revives the soul. God has made it the means of life. Without it we perish.

The Benefit of Wisdom

We see this in the second half of verse 7: "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple"; and the second half of verse 8: "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

A wise person is a person whose life makes sense in the light (the "enlightening") of reality. So for example, self-denial will look foolish and laying up treasures on earth will look wise only if you are in the dark about the reality of heaven ([Luke 12:33](#)) and the danger of riches ([Mark 10:25](#)) and the rewards of sacrifice ([Matthew 19:29](#)). But if you live in the light of the reality of heaven and the reality of the danger of riches and the reality of the staggering rewards of sacrifice, then it makes sense to obey the command of the Lord to deny yourself for his sake. It is the path of wisdom.

And where is the light of reality shining? Where do we go to get out of the kingdom of darkness? We go to the Word of God. All day long unreality is being preached to you by the secular voices of the land.

God is the Essential Reality. Everything disconnected from God is unreal in the way it was meant to function. Therefore a world without God (our world!) is mainly an unreal world. Dazzling darkness. Dazzling, dizzying, deadly darkness. How do you escape? The commandment of the Lord gives light to the eyes. The testimony of the Lord makes wise the simple. Wisdom is a life that makes sense in the light of reality. And the light of reality shines from the Bible, not from the God-ignoring world.

The Benefit of Joy

The Word of God is the best source of deepest and lasting joy. This comes out in two places. Verse 8: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." Verse 10 at the end: "[The ordinances of the Lord are] sweeter than honey and drippings of the honeycomb." The Word of God rejoices the heart and has an effect in our lives that compares to eating the most enjoyable thing David could think of—fresh honey straight from the comb.

This is the experience God offers to us as a church this year as we read through the Bible together.

May he increase your confidence that this book is the very Word of God. And may that persuade you that in meditation on it and following it there is great reward—greater than much fine gold. And may you discover every day the benefits of life and wisdom and joy! Then you will prevail in prayer because you will be alive. And you will prevail for the right things because you will be wise. And you will prevail in the right spirit because you will be happy in God.

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