

Psalm 119:57-64 (CHETH)
God's Word – Not an End in Itself
Thou art my portion, O LORD... v. 57

Bible-believing Christians throughout the years have been accused of many things, not the least of which is a form of idolatry that is known as bibliolatry. A Bible-answer web-site defines bibliolatry this way: “The term *bibliolatry* comes from combining the Greek words for *bible* and *worship*. Simply stated, bibliolatry is the worship of the Bible. Typically the accusation of bibliolatry is used as an attack on those who hold to the inerrancy, infallibility, and supremacy of Scripture. It is often employed as an inflammatory and derogatory attack on believers who hold to “sola-scriptura” and/or a literal interpretation of the Bible.” Most often the accusation comes from those who fancy themselves to possess a level of scholarship that is above Christ and above the Bible. They see, so they think, the historical errors, and the scientific errors, even, I suppose, the theological errors of the Bible.

This same article goes on to make an interesting point when it says: “It is important to note that the charge of bibliolatry does not claim that Christians literally bow down to the Bible and worship it as if it were an idol. While there may be some strange cult that literally worships the Bible, that is not what bibliolatry is referring to. The accusation of bibliolatry is that some Christians elevate the Bible to the point that it is equal with God, or to the point that studying the Bible is more important than developing a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.”

It's sad to think that there are actually those that would profess to be followers of Christ that think they can cultivate a deeper and more intimate relationship with Christ apart from the Bible. In contrast to the Bible-critics that pride themselves in their worldly scholarship, there are others that would excuse themselves from the discipline we considered in our last study which was the discipline of remembering the Scriptures. And by remembering the Scriptures, recall that what we considered was calling to mind the Scriptures in order to think upon them and draw the applications from them that pertain to our lives – meditating, in other words.

Meditating is a discipline that calls for effort – even strenuous effort. I can remember a Bible-professor in one of my college courses that lamented the fact that Christians by and large were so unwilling to make their minds sweat the way those that are devoted to physical exercise make their bodies sweat. It's a good analogy and it is true that some of the hardest effort to exert is mental effort.

And so it's worth pointing out here that Christianity was never meant to accommodate mental laziness. It is true that our religion is a religion of the heart. We are not merely fervent religious academicians. But it's also true that the Holy Spirit does not by-pass our minds in order to reach our hearts. There are those, I think, that wish that were the case because it would excuse them from mental effort. But the ministry of the Spirit is to bring

the truth of Christ and the truth of God's word to our minds that we may contemplate all the ramifications of God's truth.

The reason that I bring this matter of bibliolatry to your attention this morning, however, is because there is something in this definition of bibliolatry that is worthy to note and is very true. We don't deny the inspiration or the infallibility or inerrancy of Scripture and if such a view of Scripture leads others to call us bibliolaters, then it's a reproach we'll gladly bear. We're affirming no more than Christ himself affirmed about Scripture when he said in John's gospel in debating the Pharisees that *the scriptures cannot be broken* (Jn.10:35). But by the same token, the thing that we must ever keep in mind is that the Bible is not an end in itself, the Bible, rather, is a means to an end.

The Bible, you see, serves a number of purposes in the Christian's life. And it is those purposes that come into clear focus in the section of the Psalm that is before us this morning. And so I want you to consider with me that the Bible is not an end itself. It is a means to an end and the question, then, that I want to raise and answer is simply this:

Where Does The Bible Lead Us?

If it's not an end in itself but a means to an end then that means that the Bible leads us somewhere. And when you know where the Bible is designed to lead you then you'll also, I hope, see the need and rise to the challenge of utilizing your Bibles the way you should. Where, then, does the Bible lead us? Consider with me first of all that:

I. The Bible Leads Us to Fellowship

Look at the words of our text in v. 57 where the Psalmist writes *Thou art my portion, O LORD*: This statement captures for us the very essence of where the word of God is designed to lead us. It's designed to lead us to God himself.

We know, of course, that the Bible teaches us about God. Our theology comes to us through the Bible. But the Bible is given to us by God not merely to teach us about God but to lead us God. And nothing short of the Bible can do this.

We considered in our early studies of this Psalm that the Bible is not the only revelation of God. There is such a thing as natural revelation. *The heavens declare the glory of God* the Psalmist writes in Ps. 19. *God is known by the things that are made* Paul tells us in Romans 1. But while natural revelation declares God's glory it does not declare God's salvation. One might argue that it declares the need for salvation for it is not hard to see by looking into the world that God's creation is marred. But natural revelation does not declare God's salvation. We are dependent on the Scriptures for that.

The Scriptures, you see, not only teach us the way of salvation but they lead us to salvation. We hear the Holy Spirit himself say to us through Paul in 2Cor. 5:20 *Now then... as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God*. We are not merely taught the way of reconciliation, you see, we are implored to utilize the means to reconciliation the God has revealed. We are taught, in

other words, to have faith in Christ. *These are written* John says in Jn. 20:31 *that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

So it is that the Bible leads us to God through Christ. And when that happens – when the sinner is reconciled to God through Christ then he is able to confess, as the Psalmist confesses, *Thou art my portion, O LORD.* Or to use the words of Isaiah that express the same sentiment in Isa. 12:1-3: *I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.*

The pearl of great price, you see, that Christ speaks of in the parable, is not just the gospel of salvation. It is that – but it's more than that. Arguably the pearl of great price is Christ himself. He becomes our portion. He becomes our all in all. He certainly becomes or should become our most prized possession.

For if we have Christ as our portion, then we have everything. It is with this notion in mind that Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1Cor. 3:21-23 *Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.* He belongs to us and we belong to him and as a result all things are ours.

We unfortunately sadly know that we're prone to wander. But in our wanderings we do not lose our portion in God. We may for a time become as beasts but we eventually return. So the Psalmist says in Ps. 73:22-26 *So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.* And then listen to the Psalmist's words as he expresses the value of God to his soul when he asks: *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

So the word of God leads us to God himself in the person of his Son. And when God's word leads us to be reconciled to God through Christ it then continues to lead us to worship Christ and to bask in the favor of God's grace. Note the words of v. 58 *I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.* We intreat God for his favor and God never fails to bless us with his favor. We can be confident in his mercies because his mercies are according to his word.

Do you begin to see, then, that God's word is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end. It is the means of leading us to God himself where we enjoy communion or fellowship with God. But not only does the Bible lead us into fellowship with God but it also leads us into fellowship with those of like precious faith.

Note the words of v. 63 *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.* Such companionship comes about very naturally to the true child of

God. He gains a heart for other believers. He feels his need for other believers. He appreciates the wisdom that Solomon speaks of when he writes in Pr 13:20 *He that walketh with wise [men] shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

One of the marks of a true Christian and a means of assurance for a Christian can be found by contemplating a simple question – *who do you like to be around?* Do you like to be around those that fear the Lord and that have a desire to worship and serve the Lord? Or do you prefer the company of those run headlong into the ways of the world and have no interest in Christ? Let each one examine his own heart this morning.

So the Bible leads us into fellowship. It leads us into fellowship with God. It leads us into fellowship with each other. The Bible is not an end in itself. It leads us. Consider with me in the second place, that not only does the Bible lead us into fellowship but:

II. The Bible Leads Us into Fervency

Perhaps I could express this heading more plainly by saying that the Bible strengthens your soul and inspires your zeal. This is what I mean when I say the Bible leads you to fervency. Look at the words of v. 58. This is a point of emphasis throughout the 119th Psalm when the Psalmist says *I intreated thy favour with my whole heart.* This is fervency – whole-hearted seeking after God and seeking after God’s favor. Verse 58 marks the 4th time we have come across that phrase the *whole heart.*

Ps 119:2 *Blessed [are] they that keep his testimonies, [and that] seek him with the whole heart.*

Ps 119:10 *With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.*

Ps 119:34 *Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with [my] whole heart.*

We’ll see that phrase two more times before we’re through the Psalm. And don’t we find here in v. 58 an ongoing affirmation that Christianity is not just a religion of the heart, as I said earlier, but it’s a religion of the whole heart. We are to love the Lord with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. This is the meaning of fervency. It stands in contrast to lukewarmness or half-heartedness or a divided heart.

The commandment to love Christ with all our heart, which is the first and greatest commandment and summarizes the entire law – such a commandment places a very high standard before us. It’s a standard that I’m afraid we fall woefully short of but it’s a standard that we should strive for, nevertheless.

And if we would strive for such a standard then our striving must be applied to God’s word. *Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God* Paul writes to the Romans. *Give me understanding* the Psalmist cries out in v. 34 *and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.* The zeal of whole-hearted obedience, then, will come as a result of increased understanding. And perhaps the thing that we need most to understand is that very thing that at times we think we understand when really we don’t. I’m making

reference to the love of God and to the grace and mercy of God. I'm making reference to those things that come under the heading of the favor of God.

I intreated thy favour with my whole heart, the Psalmist says. I've said this many times and it continues to be true that the thing that the people of God need to be most convinced of is that they truly are blessed. They truly are the recipients of God's favor and all that his favor encompasses. It is, you see, as we believe that we're blessed and the recipients of God's favor that we'll apply ourselves with greater zeal to the obedience of faith.

It is true, you know, that the Bible not only leads us to deeper understanding and appreciation of Christ and all that he has done for us, but it also leads us to a deeper and more thorough understanding of ourselves. Look at the words of v. 59 where the Psalmist says *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies*. It would seem, wouldn't it, that the Psalmist came under conviction when he thought on his ways so that his feet needed to be turned. And in v. 61 he adds *The bands of the wicked have robbed me*.

It would seem, wouldn't it, that when the Psalmist thought on his own ways and thought on the ways of the wicked that he reached the conclusion that the ways of sin are a rip-off – they rob you. And when you come to realize the blessing of God's ways and the rip-off of sin it should so inspire your zeal that you will not only turn to God and to Christ, you will not merely repent and have faith in the gospel, but note the zeal behind this turning and repentance found in v. 60 where the Psalmist says *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments*. Here is where fervency is demonstrated – in immediate and complete obedience of faith.

There are two manifestations of zeal or fervency found, then, in this section of the Psalm. There is the zeal of intreating God's favor and there is the zeal, the avoiding delay, as it were, in turning back to God in the obedience of faith. May the Lord increase our fervency in both realms. May we be so earnest in seeking God's favor that we will not rest until our hearts gain the assurance that we are in the realm of his favor. And may our repentance from sin be the kind of repentance that is characterized as immediate – not delayed repentance, but immediate and complete repentance.

The thing that will contribute to igniting and maintaining such fervency is God's word. As one preacher put it: *Nothing sets the heart on fire like truth*. Heart fervency, you could say, is fueled by the truth of the gospel. Show me a Christian that is zealous and fervent in his service to Christ and I'll show you a Christian that is spending time in God's word. The great Puritan, Thomas Watson said *Zeal is as needful for a Christian as salt for the sacrifice or fire on the altar*.

It is the truth of God's word, then, that will lead you into fervency. The Bible is not an end itself. It leads you somewhere. It leads you to God and to Christ and in so leading you there it also leads you into increased fervency or zeal.

Would you consider with me, finally, that the Bible not only leads you to fellowship and to fervency, but:

III. The Bible Leads You to Fulness

Note the words of v. 64. They reveal the perception of the Psalmist when he writes: *the earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.*

When we think of fulness under this heading, there's a sense in which I could tie it back into what we've already considered in the first point of our study. Certainly the Christian that is able to confess and know the blessing of having the Lord as his portion can be said to be full. There's a verse that I passed over in our first heading that I'll bring to your attention now that exemplifies such fulness.

Look at what the Psalmist says in v. 62. *At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.* Usually when we find ourselves waking up in the middle of the night it's because of something that has filled us with anxiety. You may be facing a difficult challenge the next day that keeps you from sleeping and so you find yourself getting up and you may pray over the matter that has filled your soul with worry.

What a contrast is that scenario to v. 62. Here the Psalmist anticipates rising in the night because his heart is full and so he must arise to give thanks. Have you ever had such an experience? I think I can safely surmise that such experiences are rare. And perhaps the fact that they are rare is a sure indication that we're not as conscious as we should be that the Lord is our portion and that we bask in God's favor.

But there's another kind of fulness that is revealed in v. 64 that I want to draw your attention to. You could call it the fulness of the Psalmist's vision. He saw the Lord's mercy as not merely resting on him but he had the vision to see that the earth was full of God's mercy.

We find a similar statement in Ps. 33:4,5 *For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.* And again in Ps. 145:9 *The LORD [is] good to all: and his tender mercies [are] over all his works.*

Here is the mark of a man, then, that is full. He sees the Lord's mercies everywhere – in every place and in every circumstance. Jeremiah provides for us a vivid example of this perception when he's able to say those words that we all know from Lam. 3:22,23 *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*

The thing that makes this statement amazing is the setting in which they're uttered. Jerusalem had just been destroyed. Jeremiah is making his way through the charred ruins of the city. And yet, even in the midst of a very harsh providence he was able to recognize the Lord's mercy. There was mercy in the fact that the true remnant of believers had been spared. They had the wit to give themselves over to the Babylonians. There was mercy in the truth that the captivity had a time limit assigned to it. There was mercy in the truth that the Jews would return to the land which meant that God's ultimate purpose in mercy of sending the Messiah was still on track.

What a blessing to be able to read the providence of God in keeping with his ultimate purposes. This can only be done by understanding the Bible. We understand from God's word that God does have an ultimate purpose of grace and mercy and nothing will thwart that purpose. And what holds true on a broad scale also holds true on an individual level – *Being confident of this very thing*, Paul writes in Phil. 1:6 *that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

This means that where ever you go and whatever you do and whatever life deals to you, you are able to confess that the earth is full of God's mercy and that God's faithfulness is great. I like the words of a preacher who said that *pessimistic views are against the whole tenor of Scripture.*

I wonder this morning how full is your vision? There are those that seem, no matter where they look, to only find occasion to moan and groan and gripe and complain. I'm afraid I can't deny that there's a sense in which some Christians can't be happy unless they're miserable, or unless they're worried and anxious. And I'm not now denying that we should be oblivious to things around us, especially those things that seem to advance the ways of ungodliness. But on the other hand – the only thing I know of, in Scripture, that provides occasion for God to laugh are the conspiracies that are concocted by the rulers of the world against Christ.

And so we need our vision to be filled and we need our hearts to be dominated by the truth that the earth is full of God's mercy. It's a little bit like saying what Paul says at the end of Romans 8 in vv. 38,39 *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Isn't that little bit like saying *The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy.* There is no place we can go in this world that would enable us to escape the realm of God's mercy. And so the word of God leads us, if we read and understand it aright, into the fulness of a proper vision of the world.

And what this means is that you and I have our place is seeking to promote this vision. This is, after all, nothing short of the vision of the triumph of the gospel. And so you see, I trust, that the Bible is not an end in itself. It leads us. It serves the purpose of leading us into fellowship with God and fellowship with each other. It serves the purpose of leading us into greater fervency for the cause of the gospel. And we'll gain that fervency if we gain the vision – the vision that enables us to say *the earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy.* May we so devote ourselves, then, to the Bible, that we will indeed be led by its truth into those realms that it is designed to bring us.