

“How the Believer and the Unbeliever Differ”
(Psalm 119:153-160)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

This morning,
We saw that in the New Covenant
God gives His Holy Spirit
To form Christ in you.
He sets you free from sin,
By showing you the beauty of Jesus Christ –
By showing you His glory,
Which is the beauty of His holiness –
And as He fixes your eyes on Him,
He forms that same image in you.

That means there's going to be
A radical change in your life,
With regard to
How you view God –
You used to hate Him,
Now you will love Him –
His Son, Jesus Christ –
You used to side with the Jews

In denying Him,

Now you trust Him –

His church –

Perhaps you saw Christians

As backward, prudish,

Out of step with others,

Fanatics,

But now you want other believers

As your closest friends –

His worship –

You used to avoid it,

Now you love to gather

With His people on the Lord's Day,

To worship Him –

And obedience –

This whole psalm reflects

How your attitude will change towards this:

You used to hate His commands.

You used to resist them.

Even if you did agree that they were good,

You still couldn't bring yourself to do them,

And if you did,

It was only to benefit yourself in some way.

But now you love them,

Because now you see they're good –

What they require is good,

That this is what you really want to be like.

These changes, these new desires,

Are the work of the Spirit in your heart.

B. Preview.

This particular section of Psalm 119

Tells us something

Of how you will now

Relate and respond to God's Law

During difficult times

As compared to what you would have done

When you didn't believe:

To put it simply,

Before you would have hated it

And wouldn't have submitted to it –

Especially when faced with difficulties,

Except for the reason already mentioned,

To benefit yourself in some way –

But now you love it
And want to obey it
Particularly, when things get tough.

Sometimes it seems
As though what the psalmist expresses
Is more than we ever experience –
That there must be something wrong with us.
There is – it's called sin.
We're still far from perfect.
No true believer
Ever sees himself or herself
As having arrived –
Because God's truth is in them,
And the truth is they haven't arrived –
You and I haven't arrived.

But don't worry: You're in good company.
Paul told the Philippians
That he hadn't reached perfection (Phil. 3:12).
He wrote to Timothy
That he still viewed himself
As the greatest living sinner –
Because of his past, certainly,

But also because he was keenly aware
Of the sin of his heart in the present.

“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into
the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*” (1 Tim. 1:15).

But he wanted to be perfect,
And looked forward to the day
When he would be perfect –
When he would see
His Lord in heaven.

Maybe this will help us
As we look at this portion of the psalm
And again consider the heart of the psalmist
As he has to face his opponents.

Perhaps as we consider this,
The Lord will encourage us as well
Not to give up loving and serving Him
When we have to face the hatred of the world
For doing so –
Especially in bringing the Gospel to others.

What should you find yourself doing
When you are persecuted for serving the Lord?

II. Sermon.

A. First, like the psalmist, you will look to the Lord for His help.

“Look upon my affliction and rescue me, for I do not forget Your law. Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word” (vv. 153-154).

You will call on Him

To look at what you’re going through –

Not that He doesn’t already know –

But that He would take note of it,

Take up your cause,

And rescue you from your danger.

Isn’t that what Peter did

When he was in trouble –

When he asked Jesus

To command him to come to Him on the water –

When he began to sink?

He cried out, Lord, save me (Matt. 14:30)!

Look on my affliction and rescue me.

Jesus already knew the difficulty he was in –

He was the One who told him to come.

Peter was only asking Him

To do something about it.

And as soon as he did,

Jesus reached out His hand

And delivered him (v. 31).

Why did Jesus help him?

Because Peter was His –

He had His Spirit –

Christ was being formed in him,

And it showed in his trying to obey Jesus.

The psalmist says, “Look upon my affliction and rescue me, *for I do not forget
Your law*” (v. 153).

Obedience is the evidence

That you belong to Jesus.

Jesus said, “If you love Me,

You will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

If you obey,

You love Jesus.

If you love Him,

You belong to Him.

And if you belong to Him,

He will hear and answer you.

But you’ll do more than just pray for help/deliverance.

If your obedience ends

When the Lord answers,

That shows what’s really in your heart.

But if you pray

That along with His deliverance from danger
That He would also deliver you from sin,
That shows you really are His.
That's what the psalmist does.
He prays, "Revive me according to Your word" (v. 154).

Far from getting angry at God
Because of the opposition he has to face,
The psalmist prays
That God would strengthen him
To love and obey Him more –
He knew this was part of the price
He would have to pay,
For living for God's glory,
And he was willing to pay it.

Sometimes you might be tempted
To get angry at God
For putting you in difficult circumstances –
Especially when you're only trying
To do what He calls you to do.

But you need to remember two things:
This is what you signed up for –

The cost of following Jesus

Is that you will be hated as He was hated:

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you”
(John 15:18-19).

But you also need to remember

Why He allows this to happen:

Because He knows you need it.

Remember, trials are meant for your good –

They reveal your weaknesses

That the Lord might strengthen you in those areas.

If your weakness happens to be

A lack of patience with stop lights,

He'll make sure you hit a fair number of red lights.

If it's a bad temper,

He'll expose you to things

That will provoke it.

He will show you your weakness

That you might look to Him for strength.

The psalmist prayed

In the middle of this trial

That God would revive him –

That He would renew his resolve

To keep His commandments

By the power of His Spirit

Because that is why

The Lord sent it.

That's what you'll do

If you know Jesus.

B. Second, when faced with opposition, you will remind yourself of the mercy God has shown you in the past to renew your hope of mercy in the present.

“Great are Your mercies, O LORD; revive me according to Your ordinances” (v. 156).

The psalmist undoubtedly knew

What the Lord had done for His people in the past,

As well as what He had done for him personally.

He knew His mercies were far greater

That he deserved –

Because he didn't deserve any.

That's what mercy means,

Not giving you what you deserve –

And often, giving you something good

You don't deserve.

And so encouraging himself

In God's love and grace from the past,

He again looks to the Lord in faith,
And asks –
Not so much here for deliverance,
But for the refreshing influence
Of His Holy Spirit to revive him –
To help him obey:
He appears to have considered this
A greater blessing than
That God rescue him from his enemies.

Since you know Jesus,
This will be the burden of your heart as well.
Because He has delivered you
From your greatest enemy –
By His mercy –
Your sin/flesh,
As well as the devil and the world –
You'll be more concerned
To love and serve Him
In the face of your other enemies,
Than that you be delivered from them.

This is His greatest mercy –
To give you the strength

To glorify Him in the presence of your enemies,
 As I'm sure John Huss, William Tyndale,
 Nicolas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, Thomas Cranmer,
 And a host of others would all confess.

C. Third, you will resolve to obey Him no matter how many turn against you.

“Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, *yet* I do not turn aside from Your testimonies” (v. 157).

It didn't matter how many hated him
 For doing what God called him to do,
 He wouldn't turn from his devotion to the Lord.

I can see the Lord encouraging Athanasius
 Through passages like this
 As he seemingly stood alone
 Against the Arian heresy –
 That Jesus was a created Son
 And not the eternal Son.

Remember what's written
 On his tombstone:
 “Athanasius against the world.”

Sometimes it may seem
 Like you're the only one
 Taking a stand for the Lord.

Whether it seems that way,
 Or whether you really are,
 This should be your resolve:
 Never to turn away
 From your love and devotion to the Lord
 No matter how many turn against you –
 Even if it seems that the whole world
 Has turned against you.
 That's what Athanasius did,
 Because that's what Jesus did.
 That's also what you will do
 If you know Him.

D. Fourth, when faced with opposition, there will be a sense in which you will despise the unbeliever for his disobedience.

“I behold the treacherous and loathe *them*, because they do not keep Your word” (v. 158).

Again, we need to be reminded
 Of the two perspectives in Scripture
 From which you will view unbelievers.

 When you see them doing what God hates –
 What you also hate –
 When you see them dishonoring Him,

You can't help but hate what they're doing –

And since they're the ones doing it,

You can't help but hate them

As enemies of the One you love.

But when you consider

That they are fellow human beings

Capable of receiving God's mercy –

That you were once are they are,

But God had mercy on you –

That Jesus calls you to love your enemies (Matt. 5:44),

And showed you how

By praying for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34) –

You can't help but love them

And pray that the Lord

Might have mercy on their souls.

E. And fifth, when they oppose God – and you for following Him – it will provoke you to love God's Law all the more and your desire to keep it.

“Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness. The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting” (vv. 159-160).

As the psalmist,

Their hatred of God's Law

Will only strengthen your love for it

And your prayer that God will

Renew in you the desire to keep it –
Again, purely by His grace,
Because of His lovingkindness –
Because you know what He says is right,
And that what He says
Will stand forever.

F. Finally, what about the unbeliever?

We've seen the heart of the believer
Toward God's Law –
What your heart should be like –
How is the unbeliever different?

First, they don't want to know what God commands.
“They do not seek Your statutes” (v. 155).
They don't want to know
Because they don't want to keep them –
They don't want them to get in the way
Of what they really want to do: sin.

Remember what Paul says
About the heart of the unbeliever
Towards God's Law:

“The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8).

They hate God

And so they hate His Laws.

Second, because they hate Him

And will not obey Him,

When they get into trouble

And look to the Lord

He will not answer them:

“Salvation is far from the wicked” (v. 155).

Since they don’t listen to Him,

He won’t listen to them.

This is one of the dangers,

If you don’t know the Lord,

Of putting off repentance

And trusting Jesus Christ.

Does this mean God

Will never hear your prayers

If you’re not a believer?

He will if you turn from your sins

And look to His Son.

He may also

When He wants to –

Because He is gracious,

Because He is good –

But He hasn't bound Himself to do so

As He has to those who trust Him.

Just because He answered your prayer

Doesn't mean you're safe.

If that is your hope this evening,

Don't rest in that:

Rest only in Jesus Christ by faith,

And the evidence that you have believed:

Repentance/obedience.

But for those of you who do know Him,

Be encouraged:

When you set out to do His will/work

And meet with opposition and persecution,

You can call out to the Lord for His help,

And He will help you.

You can know He will:

Because He has in the past;

Because when you've been opposed in the past

You haven't turned away from Him;

Because you have a holy aversion

To those who break His commandments –

A holy jealousy for His honor –

And because their disobedience

Has only provoked in you a greater desire

That He would strengthen your resolve

To love and obey Him –

In other words,

You know He will help you,

Because Christ is being formed in you. Amen.

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