

Series: "Psalms In the Summer"
Part 6: "Benefits From God's Laws"

What do you think of when you think of "the law"? You may think of the police! You see a town cop or a state trooper on the highway, what's your natural reaction? To take your foot off the accelerator? Glance down at the speedometer? (I once heard a detective with the local police force say he does the same thing!). I don't know about you, but I hate it when a police car is behind me! I get kind of nervous. So, the "law" is often related to guilty feelings and unhappy consequences!

If I change it just a bit and say, "The law of God", what comes to mind? How do most people react if they hear the term, "The law of God"? It's easy to envision something that confines, or inhibits, or threatens. Like every time you want to have some fun, God's law kicks in, and God says, "No, you can't do that! You're not going to have any fun around Me!" Sort of like the old adage, "Everything I enjoy is either illegal, immoral, or fattening". The whole idea of God's "law" doesn't produce very positive feelings for most people today, nor does it suggest something you'd really relish.

But the psalm writers viewed God's law in a radically different way! Turn to Psalm 19. If you read this psalm carefully, you might notice that it is divided into 2 different sections. In verses 1-6, the psalmist praises God for His glory in *nature* and *creation*. For instance, the psalm begins: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." But in verses 7-14, he talks about God's law. Some Bible scholars think this represents two separate psalms put together. But it could be one writer who first looks at God's glory in creation, then expounds on God's glory *as revealed in the law*.

This psalm says the wonder and glory of God is reflected in His law and commands. The psalmist says this about God's laws: "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb" (verse 10). Did you get that! Having God's laws are better than having a lot of money! God's laws are sweeter than a big ice cream sundae, with all the goo on it! Isn't *that* a far cry from how most people today feel about the "commands of the Lord"!

The writer of Psalm 119 is equally exuberant about the law of God! Psalm 119 is the longest psalm; it has 176 verses. Here are just a couple of samples of what this psalm says about the commands of God. "My soul is consumed with longing for your ordinances at all times" (verse 20). "I find my delight in your commandments, because I love them. I revere your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes" (verse 47-48). "Your statutes have been my songs where I make my home" (verse 54). "The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (verse 72). "With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments" (verse 131). Doesn't that sound weird to our ears? To actually *delight* in God's laws, and center our life around *meditating* on God's commandments? *How many of us do that today?*

Why were these psalm writers able to find joy in being preoccupied with God's laws? It might help if we understand the place the "law" held in for the Hebrew people of the Old Testament.

One of the misconceptions about the Bible is that the Old Testament is just a book of laws, and Israel's life with God was *solely* based on being good and keeping God's commandments. This is not quite true. Israel had a relationship with God because He *chose* them. He chose Abraham and his descendants to be His people, for a mission to the world. When they were slaves in Egypt, God set them free to serve Him and to tell the world about this God of theirs.

But how were they to conduct themselves as God's people? How were they to live so they would keep this special relationship with God alive and well? *God gave them the commandments as the answer.* The Ten Commandments, and other commandments, were a *gift and a blessing* - teaching and instruction that would bring *joyful life and meaning* to them!

God's laws and commands serve the same function today for a Christian believer. Nobody is saved or has a relationship with God by trying to keep the commandments. If our salvation depends on our keeping God's laws we would be dead ducks! For nobody can keep all of the commandments perfectly. We have a relationship with God only through *grace* – by trusting what God has done to save us through His Son Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection.

But once we become a Christian by trusting Christ, how do we know how to live in a way that pleases Lord and is in His will? God's laws and commandments, and the commandments of Jesus, serve as a guide to show us how to live as God's people. *They are a gift to us too,* that brings *life!* There is this overwhelming conviction in the psalms, and in the whole Bible, that when we obey God's laws and commands it brings life and joy and fulfillment. And, when we ignore or break God's commands, it leads to a kind of "death" or breakdown of life.

What are some of the benefits of following God's laws and commands? Let's turn again to Psalm 19.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul" (Psalm 19:7a). God's law is "perfect" – i.e. flawless, entirely sufficient to live by. Not bad advice! *And it revives our soul or inward being!* Is your soul dead? Often when we feel spiritually dead or dried up inside, it's because we've broken God's commands. Asking for God's forgiveness, asking for strength to obey His commands, can bring inward healing and new life to our soul!

"The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (verse 7b). God's laws and commands are reliable – we can trust them! *And they can make us wise!* The writer of Psalm 119 recognized this too. "Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts" (verses 98-100). There are a lot of very smart people who do stupid things – because they ignore the wisdom found in God's commands! And there are a lot of people with ordinary IQ's who are *wise* – because they've learned that it's smart to follow God's instructions for right living!

"The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart" (verse 8a). Following God's commandments brings *joy* to us! It's not a *drag* to obey God!

“The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes” (verse 8b). God’s commands shine like a light to bring us out of moral darkness. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path.” Ask yourself this: Is the world brighter and better when God’s commands are ignored or violated? Take the Ten Commandments, for example: Are families brighter and happier when husbands and wives commit adultery by cheating on each other, or when children refuse to honor their fathers and mothers? Are communities safer places when stealing is rampant? Is life more rich and fulfilling when lying is commonplace? Are we happier inside when we’re constantly coveting what someone else has, or when money or pleasure or our job is idolized, and becomes a false god? We stumble around in the dark when we disregard the commandments God has given us for our own good!

“The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever” (verse 9a). God’s commands are eternal and unchanging. Fearing God and keeping His commands can give us moral stability. Ravi Zacharias is a Christian intellectual who travels around the world lecturing in secular settings and defending the truth of the Christian faith. He tells of an experience in Columbus, Ohio. “A few weeks ago I did a lectureship at Ohio State University. As I was being driven to the lecture, we passed the new Wexner Art Center. The driver said, ‘This is a new art building for the university. It’s a fascinating building designed in the post-modernist view of reality.’ The building has no pattern. Staircases go nowhere. Pillars support nothing. The architect designed the building to reflect life. It went nowhere and was mindless and senseless.’ “I turned to the man describing it and asked, ‘Did they do the same thing with the foundation?’ He laughed. ‘You can’t do that with a foundation.’ Zacharius then comments, “You can get away with the infrastructure. You can get away with random thoughts that sound good in defense of a worldview that ultimately doesn’t make sense. Once you start tampering with the foundations, you begin to see the serious effects.” God’s laws and commands are a *foundation* upon which life rests.

It’s hard for me to read these Scriptures and not reflect on American society today, and how we treat God’s laws and commands. I try to be optimistic about the future. I try not to be one of these people who pine for “the good old days”, and act like 50 years ago, everything was rosy. But to be honest, I think we are living in a time when moral values and common decency is being eroded. We are moving further and further away from being a culture built on Judeo-Christian values. This is being replaced by a *moral relativism*, where each person chooses for himself or herself what is right and what is wrong. Or we are into “*Postmodernism*” – where there are no moral absolutes, and each *group* chooses for itself what’s right and what’s wrong.

Syndicated columnist Cal Thomas, in a newspaper column titled, “America Losing Its Moral Sense”, tells how, in his view, recent court decisions reflect a disregard for God’s commandments and biblical teaching. He writes: “There is more than one way to experience bankruptcy...a nation that loses its moral sense is a nation without any sense at all. Muslim fanatics who wish to destroy us are correct in their diagnoses of our moral rot: loss of a fear of God, immodesty...materialism, and much more. While their solution...is wrong, they are not wrong about what ails us. None of this should surprise anyone who takes the time to read and

understand what happens to people and nations that disregard God.” He then refers to several Scriptures. Proverbs 29:18 (the Living Bible) “When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild.” And, Judges 21:25, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”

The writer of Psalm 19 goes on: “***The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous***” (Psalm 19:9b). Then in verse 11: “***By them is your servant warned; in keeping them, there is great reward.***” God’s laws and commands can function as a *warning* to us – individually and as a society – a reality check to protect us from the consequences of foolish behavior.

The writers of Psalm 19 and Psalm 119 revel in the fact that God has given the incredible gift of His law and commandments! One final thought here: ***If following God’s commands lead to life, then it’s important to learn them!*** You have to know what God’s commands are if you’re going to follow them and get benefit from them!

Can you name me some of God’s laws and commandments? We can probably start with the Ten Commandments. Can you name some? But there are many other commands in the Old Testament. *Can we name some?* How about the *Book of Psalms*, where there are many commands regarding praising and worshiping the Lord. Or the *Book of Proverbs*, where we find many practical, common sense directives about how to live. The *Book of Deuteronomy* is a good place to look. Jesus quoted a lot from Deuteronomy. What about *some of Jesus’ commands?* Do not lay up treasures on earth...don’t worry about your life...love your enemies...bless those who curse you...forgive 70 times 7...give, and it will be given to you...let your light shine...seek first the kingdom of God.

There are many other commands in the New Testament; can you name some? e.g. Romans 12: live in harmony with one another...be constant in prayer...hate what is evil...be patient in tribulation. Or, Ephesians: be lowly and humble...let no evil talk come out of your mouth...be filled with the Spirit...be thankful in every circumstance. God’s life-giving commands are found in this Book – the Bible! Psalm 19:11 promises: “In keeping them (God’s commands), there is great reward.”

I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon how often, when we think of “law” we think of the police, with negative, unpleasant associations. A magazine article told how, in Berkeley, Calif., police were stopping drivers and giving them coupons good for free nonalcoholic beverages at a local café if they were caught *driving safely and courteously*. One officer pulled over a young woman for yielding at a crosswalk in a busy intersection. He said, “I’ve never seen anyone I’ve stopped look so happy.” This “Good Driver Recognition Program” started with 70 certificates bought with police officer donations, and then expanded when the city added \$5,000 to the fund! *There is great benefit in keeping not only traffic laws, but God’s commands also!*

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