

Prayers

Opening prayer

Jesus Christ, Your teaching has affected me deeply over many years, yet for all the truth I find, there is never an end to what You would say to me through Your Word. Keep me alert to Your revelation and teaching every day of my life, so that I do not become mistakenly stuck in my ways. Teach me; this day and every day, Lord Jesus. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas_(Alternatives that can broaden the experience of prayer)

If it is not embarrassing to do so, stand up to pray. Then, whilst standing, lift your hands in praise, remembering that people from ancient times have lifted their hands in this way to worship and praise the living God

On-going prayers

- **Pray for Christian youth camps.** *Pray that these camps will meet their purpose, especially where they have been set up to give young people an opportunity to get to grips with the gospel, and consider the claims of Jesus Christ for themselves. Pray for the proper success of these camps.*
- *Give thanks to God for the sleep that you have had in recent days. Pray for those who do not sleep well because they are in distress, and pray that God will bless all His servants with the peace of proper rest and sleep*
- *Pray for the country of Syria, which continues to experience turmoil as many people are killed. Pray that the violence will come to an end soon, and that the rights of ordinary people will be respected.*

Meditation

Sing, my soul, a song of love
a love that never dies
Sing, my spirit, a joyful tune
and take me up to heaven
Sing, my heart a song to Christ
of everlasting praise
Sing, my voice, with all heavens host,
salvation's victory song

I sing this song for myself alone
so my spirit may be renewed
I sing this song to other people
so a witness may be shared
I sing this song before those I love
so the peace of Christ may come
I sing this song where work is done
so His love may be made known

But more, far more than this
I long to sing before my Lord
This song, my purest song of praise
to Him, in perfect company

Bible Study

Bible passage – Psalm 19: 7-14

- ⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
rescuing the soul.
The testimony of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the open-minded.
- ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are clear,
giving light to the eyes.
- ⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring for ever.
The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and all of them are righteous.
- ¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,
than a hoard of purest gold;
They are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.
- ¹¹ Your servant is taught by them,
and keeping them brings a great reward;
- ¹² who can detect their own errors?
Acquit me from my unknown sins,
- ¹³ and hold your servant back from wilful sins;
let them not control me.
Then will I be blameless,
and innocent of grave sin.
- ¹⁴ May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Review

The second half of Psalm 19 speaks of God's revelation in a quite different way to the first. The silent 'speech' testifying to the work of the Creator found in verses 1-6 now gives way to the revelation of God in powerful spoken words, '*the Law of the Lord is perfect, rescuing the soul ...*' (19:7). This is a classic Hebrew call for God's people to look into the 'Torah', the revealed law of God found in the first five books of the Bible, and summarised in the Ten Commandments. This, says Psalm 19, is where the devoted heart will find the evidence of God.

Our reading opens with a series of six couplets (pairs of lines) in verses 7, 8 and 9, each one describing some aspect of God's law. The six Hebrew words used are TORAH (law), EDUT (testimony, decree or statute), PIQQUDIM (precept or ordinance), MIZOTH (command), YIRATH (fear or promise) and MISHPATIM (judgement). We will use these for our study. The next three verses describe the value of God's law in teaching and revealing sin (19:10-13), and the last verse (19:14) is a blessing.

TORAH and EDUT (verse 7)

'TORAH' is the word for 'Law', but it means something more like the 'ground rules' of life rather than lists of rules. For the Jews, God's 'Torah' was the first five books of the Bible, containing not just laws like the Ten Commandments, but stories about how people can have a relationship with God (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses). Altogether, the stories, instructions, law codes and histories of the Torah reveal the truth about God, and they also describe God's intervention in human history to rescue His people. They show that God seeks to redeem fallen humanity, or as Psalm 19 puts it, His Law '*rescues the soul*' (19:7)!

In the second half of verse 7, the Lord's 'EDUT' is described as sure, and giving wisdom to the open minded. But what is 'EDUT'? The word is often translated as 'decrees' or 'statutes', but it is best translated as 'testimony', meaning a legal declaration of someone's intentions, such as an affidavit or a will. God's testimony ('EDUT') is His intention to save both His people and the whole world from its fallen-ness. As verse 7 says, those who are open to this have touched on supreme wisdom.

PIQQUDIM and MIZOTH (verse 8)

In verse 8, the precepts (PIQQUDIM) and commands (MIZOTH) are the subject of rejoicing and enlightenment, but what do they mean? We will look firstly at commandments (MIZOTH) and secondly at precepts (PIQQUDIM). MIZOTH are legal statements, such as the Ten Commandments and other laws in Exodus (20-33) and Leviticus; these establish the national identity of God's people, and are mostly designed to set out the rules for a compassionate and caring community.

PIQQUDIM however means 'something appointed', or 'past precedent', and the difference to 'MIZOTH' is subtle. Now in order for laws of the land (MIZOTH) to work, they must be applied to real circumstances of life and to 'normal practice'. Today, courts make judgements about how laws made by parliament might be applied, and this application of the law is the PIQQUDIM. A society that has a good system of both law (government) and interpretation (the courts), possesses something of great value, and this is God's intention.

YIRATH and MISHPATHIM (verse 9)

These two words in verse 9 are a fascinating pairing. The 'fear' of the Lord (YIRATH) is the beginning of wisdom, as it says in Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10. This is not fear in the sense of being afraid, rather, true awe which reduces the soul to utter admiration, wonder and respect. Psalm 19:9 describes 'YIRATH' as 'pure', which means 'ritually pure'. We think the Old Testament as saying that purity is found through the sacrificial system, but here, Psalm 19 says that a right attitude of heart is pure in God's eyes.

The 'fear' of the Lord ('YIRATH') is paired with the Lord's ordinances or judgements (MISHPATHIM). At first glance it is not clear what this word could add to our understanding of God's Law. But using the examples I have given above, judgements are best thought of as the general outcome of court cases, and in Scripture they are therefore God's decision. Practically, MISHPATHIM are God's judgements on things that affect us, and by definition, God is always 'right', and His decisions are 'righteous'.

Finally

Our study has been dominated rightly by the first three verses of this reading, because it is an important text in the Bible for understanding God's Word and the Law. Verses 10 to 13, confirm the importance of God's Law (19:10), and they offer a picture typical of wisdom literature, reminding us that God's law is something that must be taught. God's people will perish if they do not have God's Law taught and explained to them.

Verses 12 and 13 describe the value of God's Law as something that reveals sin, and the recognition of sin is an essential starting point for all who wish to approach God. The Old Testament sacrificial system was designed to deal with sin and the prerequisite for baptism today is also repentance from sin, so in both cases, God's people need His Law in order to get to know exactly what sin is, so they may repent! Some of this is obvious, but we need to learn! Certainly, the New Testament speaks of the Law as God's means of revealing sin (Romans 3:20), so all those who seek God will value Psalm 19.

The psalm ends with a famous verse, which is often used as a prayer by preachers when entering the pulpit.

'May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.'

This prayer is of great value to preachers, but it is also of great value to all who wish to speak in a manner that is pure and wholesome. It forms a wonderful conclusion to the Psalm that has indeed lead us to meditate on the creative wonders of God's world, and everything He has done to make Himself known within it.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. What are the differences between 'government' and the 'courts of justice'? What role does each one have within society? What does this teach us about 'commandments' and 'ordinances'?
2. Discuss in your group the value of God's law and revealing sin. How does the old Testament teach about sin? To what extent do we rejoice to know what sin is, or is this taking the matter too far?

3. Read Psalm 19:14 again. Discuss whether or not it is possible for our own words to measure up to the standards of this verse.

Discipleship challenges

- *Think back over your day, and consider all the words spoken, and whether they measure up to the standards of purity and righteousness suggested by Psalm 19. If you feel you have problems with anything that you have said, pray about this, and seek advice from someone else.*
- *Read through parts of the book of exodus, and identify what kind of Law is being written at any point. You will readily find Law in the form of narrative, in the form of commands, and in the form of God's judgement or precepts, at the very least.*

Final Prayer

All praise to You, Almighty Lord, for You have spoken to me today. I heard You in the silence when I drew aside to pray, I heard You in the scriptures that I read, and I heard You in the words of people that I met. It was You who opened my ears; so now open my mouth to praise Your holy Name! AMEN
