

The Law of the Lord is Perfect: Psalm 19 part 2

by Tami Jelinek

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. 12 Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. 13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

Previously we learned, through exploring the metaphor in verses 1-6 in light of New Testament references to it (see: [The Heavens Declare the Glory of God](#)), that the first part of this Psalm is clearly about Christ and the glory of His gospel declared by His people, and further revealed by His presence with them. Verse 6 is speaking of Christ:

Psalm 19:6 *His* going forth is from the end of the heaven, and *his* circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Immediately following this reference to Christ and His word, or the gospel, we read:

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

What is the "perfect law of the Lord?" According to the Psalmist it is that which "converts the soul." The Hebrew word translated "converting" in this passage is *shuwb*, and suggests a "turning back" or a "restoring." This same word is used in the following verses which all speak of Christ and His salvation:

Psalm 23:3 He [the Lord and my shepherd] *restoreth* [*shuwb*] my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Psalm 35:17 Lord, how long wilt thou look on? *rescue* [*shuwb*] my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions.

Psalm 53:6 Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth *back* [*shuwb*] the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

Psalm 69:4 They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then

I restored [shuwb] that which I took not away.

It is significant to note in all of the above passages, the One accomplishing the converting, rescuing and restoring is Christ. Yet in Psalm 19:7, it is the *law* of the Lord, rather than the Lord Himself, which is said to convert the soul. Compare this apparent personification of the *law of the Lord* to how the writer of Hebrews describes *the Word of God*:

Hebrews 4:12 For the word [*logos*] of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Notice the pronouns "his" and "him" in verse 13, and notice also their antecedent is *the word [logos] of God*. Further confirming the passage is entirely speaking of Christ, the writer continues:

Hebrews 4: 14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

The *Word of God* is *He* who discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that is how we *know* we have a *High Priest* who knows us intimately.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word [*logos*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude the *law* of the Lord in Psalm 19, just like the *word* of God in Hebrews 4, is speaking of the *person* Jesus Christ. This interpretation also brings congruence to the two seemingly separate sections of Psalm 19; whereas the alternative interpretation of the second part of the Psalm, namely that the "law of the Lord" refers to that which is contained in ordinances, specifically the Mosaic law, or the Old Covenant law, ignores the context established by the first part. But this alternative becomes even more problematic when we consider what is said of the Mosaic law, or the ordinances of the Old Covenant, in the New Testament.

We must remember the law of the Lord is *perfect, converting the soul*. Yet here is what is said of the Old Covenant law:

Hebrews 7:18 For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. 19 For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

Hebrews 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

Hebrews 10:1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. 4 For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins (RSV).

Romans 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

The *perfect* law of the Lord which converts the soul cannot be the equivalent of that which the New Testament defines as weak, unprofitable, and faulty. Not only is the Old Covenant law said to be imperfect, it is specified that it could not *make* anyone perfect: it could not take away sin. Indeed, it *could not* "convert the soul." And that is why it was done away:

Hebrews 8:13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

1 Corinthians 13: 9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

What is the "perfect" which was yet to come when Paul penned his letter to the Corinthians? It is the New Covenant established forever through the blood of Christ:

Hebrews 9:9.....According to this arrangement [OC system], gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, 10 but deal only with food and drink and various ablutions, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. 15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, (RSV)

While it was the once-and-for-all perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross which accomplished our redemption; the first century believers were waiting for the promised eternal inheritance, the "perfect", which would come at the parousia of Jesus Christ when he returned to signify the Old Covenant was abolished and the New Covenant was fully consummated, and their salvation was complete:

Hebrews 9: 24 For Christ has entered.....into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.....27 And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, 28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (RSV).

Nothing less than the perfect sacrifice of Christ could ever take away sin and perfect the conscience of the worshipper; and nothing less than the perfect "law of the Lord" could ever "convert the soul."

Psalm 19:8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

Compare the commandment of the Lord which brings light to the eyes with what is said of the Word of God:

John 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

Jesus said of Himself:

John 8:12.....I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Isaiah prophesied that Christ would be a light to the world, or Gentiles:

Isaiah 42: 6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;

Jesus said the same of His disciples:

Matthew 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

Now, compare what the Psalmist says of *the commandment of the Lord* "enlightening the eyes" to what the apostle Paul says of *the gospel of Christ*:

2 Corinthians 4: 3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

We see that the law, or commandment of the Lord, is synonymous with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and is embodied in Christ Himself, and displayed in us and through us who have been brought into His presence and changed into His image. In fact, this light shines through His people who bear that image, and who, as we recall from Psalm 19:1, "declare His glory." "*In Him was life and the life was the light of men.*" (John 1:4) His light is our life, our salvation, our glory.

Psalm 19:9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

What are the "righteous judgments of the Lord?" They cannot refer to judgments of the Mosaic law. Consider this New Covenant prophecy from Zephaniah:

Zephaniah 3:15 The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy.

Of course the "righteous judgments of the Lord" would not be described as our "enemy." However, the commandments and ordinances of the Old Covenant law are described as exactly that:

Colossians 2:14...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

Ephesians 2:15.....having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances

The judgments which have been removed, and the enmity which has been abolished, is that condemnation to which God's people were in bondage under the Old Covenant law; which again, could not convert, rescue or restore. The law could make no one perfect; "on the other hand, a better hope [was] introduced, through which we draw near to God." (Hebrews 7:19 RSV)

The judgments of the Old Covenant law were taken away, effectually casting out our "enemy." Indeed the law was our accuser, and our condemner. But now in the perfection of the *New Covenant*, the better, and the true, we are judged with "righteous judgments." Just like the *word of God*, and *the perfect law of the Lord*, these *righteous judgments* are manifested in the *person* of Jesus Christ:

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Since Christ has fulfilled the righteousness of the law in us, we are now "judged" accordingly:

Colossians 1:21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight:

We have been made the righteousness of God; therefore a "righteous judgment" will always view us this way:

2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

To practice righteous judgment is to acknowledge the righteousness God has accomplished in us through the righteous work of Christ:

Jeremiah 51:10 The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God.

The next verse in Psalm 19 refers to the law, testimony, statutes, commandment, fear and judgments of the Lord and proclaims them to be the Psalmist's ultimate desire and treasure:

Psalm 19:10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Compare the "treasure" found in righteous "judgments" and "statutes" with Solomon's characterization of "wisdom," which is also personified by Christ:

Proverbs 8:11f For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.....18 Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. 19 My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. 20 I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: 21 That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.

We know the promised "inheritance" is found only in Christ; therefore if "wisdom" is said to cause people to inherit that promise, that "wisdom" *is* Christ.

Paul says of Christ:

Colossians 2:3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

So we see the treasure the Psalmist most desired, even as characterized by words such as law and commandment, is realized *in Christ*. Indeed "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen," (2 Corinthians 1:20) and He has "fulfilled the righteousness of the law in us." (Romans 8:4)

The Psalmist continues referencing these treasures including the perfect law which converts the soul, and the pure commandment which enlightens the eyes, and states there is "great reward" in keeping them:

Psalm 19:11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

It is evident that "keeping the perfect law of the Lord" cannot be referring to the ordinances or commandments of the Old Covenant law, because that law was less than perfect. Furthermore, we know that in the New Covenant, we are made perfect and righteous (guilt-free and blameless) only through faith in Christ, who fulfilled the law on our behalf.

Paul confirms that no one could ever be justified by keeping the law, and that the

purpose of the law was to prove our guilt. Again, the law was powerless to convert, rescue or restore anyone:

Romans 3:19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

It is only in Christ, *without the law*, that we are justified and made the righteousness of God:

Romans 3:21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Therefore the "keeping of the perfect law of the Lord" of which David speaks is equated with being made righteous in Christ through faith in His perfect work.

But David, along with all of the believers under the Old Covenant, was not righteous and guilt-free; in fact he stated:

Psalms 44:15 My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me,

He looked forward to his redemption and forgiveness, in this prophetic prayer for salvation:

Psalm 19:12 Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. 13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

David prays that sin will not have "dominion" over him. Yet under the Old Covenant, all believers remained in bondage to sin:

Romans 8:20 For the creature [Old Covenant creation] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

David, through this prayer, prophesies that when sin no longer has "dominion" over him, he will be "innocent" of transgression. David, who stated he was continually full of shame and who went to the grave in that state, looked forward to the Day he would be made righteous, and resurrected to the presence of God:

Psalms 17:15 As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

The remainder of David's prayer is prophetic of the New Covenant as well:

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

In the New Heavens and New Earth, all are righteous in Christ; therefore all are pleasing to God and are never ashamed:

Isaiah 60:21 Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.

Isaiah 45:17 But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.

But under the Old Covenant, no one's heart was acceptable in God's sight and no one's deeds were righteous. David ends his prayer in Psalm 19 acknowledging the *Lord* as his strength and redeemer. Therefore he understood that the "law of the Lord" which would convert his soul was not to be found in ordinances he could perform of his own effort, but in Christ alone, the Perfect Law, the Righteous Judgment:

Isaiah 51:4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. 5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. 6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.