

God's Custom

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References: Psalm 119, Psalm 119:132; Psalm 119:89; Psalm 119:90-92; Psalm 119:96; Psalm 119:103; Psalm 119:105; Psalm 119:111; Psalm 119:114; Psalm 119:129; Psalm 119:130; Psalm 119:140; Psalm 119:142; Psalm 119:160; Psalm 119:149; Psalm 119:162; Psalm 119:164; Psalm 119:165; Psalm 119:64; Psalm 119:124; Psalm 103:10; Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 10:25; James 2:10; Romans 6:23; Isaiah 64:6

Goodness Versus Holiness

Very good to be here with you again this evening. In your prayers, you have been praying for your loved ones and those who are in China, who have gone back to China or are going to China, and they would like to share the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ with their family and relatives. We have the same. Many in our gathering, our small gathering, they are Chinese, they are from mainland China and got saved.

One time we were having a Wednesday night Bible study talking about—I can't remember which passage we were studying. And Sylvia was actually our first Chinese convert in our meeting, going back five years now. And she said this, because she goes back to Guangzhou every six months; she would go back for three months or so and then come back. And she said it's very hard to speak to family, especially your own family, about God because they think that they are good people. And they are good people. Many of them are good people, good people family members. So it's very difficult to speak to them about Christ.

Then she went on to say this, to say this, and what truth it is! She said, "But they confuse goodness for holiness. They confuse goodness for holiness. God is looking for holiness. God is not looking for goodness. Because all our goodness, all our good works is as filthy rags in the sand. And God is looking for holiness, and the only way to have holiness is that it is imparted to us from the Lord Jesus by His death on the cross." He is the one that makes us holy.

And I thought I would share this because maybe this is one way that when we speak to our loved ones who have been good, and who have been very good to us, as to remind them that God is looking for holiness and not just goodness in our lives.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You. We thank You for this evening. We thank You for the opportunity to be here again and to share the Word of God. It's always a joy to come here, to be with the saints here, those who love You and love Your name. Father, we thank You that forever Your Word is settled in heaven. We want to thank You that the entrance of Your Word gives light. So we pray, Lord, as we open up the Word of God, that we might be filled more and more with Your light. You have said that we are light; we are the sons of light. The Lord Jesus is the light of the world. So, Father, we pray that as we consider Your Word this evening, may Your Holy Spirit lead us in the way that You would have us consider the things that really matter in Your Word. We thank You in Christ Jesus' precious name. Amen.

There is translation going on, right? Is there? Right? There is? Okay, so I must be conscious of that.

The Longest Chapter

Who knows—also a little bit of trivia, a little bit of a quiz, okay? Who knows what is the middle chapter in the Bible? Anybody? Even on the screen, at home, on Zoom? There will be a Psalm, but which Psalm? 130? The answer is Psalm 117. What was it? Psalm 117. It's right in the middle; that's the middle chapter of the Bible.

Who knows what is the long—this one is an easy one. Who knows what is the longest chapter in the Bible? Psalm 119. Psalm 119. Psalm 119. In fact, it is made up of 176 verses. 176, yes. And it is longer than the book of Ruth. It is longer than the Epistle of the Philippians, the letter that Paul wrote to Philippi. And it is longer than the pastoral letter of James.

And so on our midweek Bible study, we have been looking at Psalm 119. And in Psalm 119, if you turn with me to Psalm 119...

The Meaning of "Custom"

This evening I'd like to speak on a word. And the word that I'd like us to consider is the word custom. Custom. C-U-S-T-O-M. Custom.

Now, custom has two meanings. Those of you who are ESL teachers will be able to explain better than me. One custom is when you go through the border, when you come and land in Canada from your airplane, or your train, or your car and you cross the border, there is a customs officer. That's custom, one word, custom. But another meaning of the word custom

is the word practice, tradition that we practice. Right? Right? Who is an ESL teacher here? Eric Peterson, no? Yeah? Yeah, some of you, yes?

The tradition that we practice, that is also the word custom. And I'd like to speak on this word custom. And as we were reading through Psalm 119, it caught my eye. And so that word custom in Psalm 119 is found in verse 132, verse 132. Psalm 119, verse 132. And in the New King James Version, this is how it reads:

[Psalm 119:132 NKJV]

Look upon me and be merciful to me,

As Your custom is toward those who love Your name.

Did you know that God has a custom? God has a practice, and the practice is that He is merciful to those who love His name. It is His practice; He always does it, and that's what He will do and continue to do: to show mercy to those who love His name.

What does it mean to love His name? A name is not just a name, but a name is something that would define normally the person. If I were just to tell you, "Hey, remember A. Zawadzki?" Who? Who? A. Zawadzki? Who on earth is that? It's Zawadzki. The name is a name; it sounds nice, but has no meaning. Who is A. Zawadzki? It's blank. But if I were to say, "Hey, remember Eric Peterson?" straight away your mind—shh! "Hey, remember Sam Chu?" Straight away you go to him. The name brings out the character. You know, ah, that's Sam Chu. That is what he does; this is what he does. Eric Peterson, Harold Summers, this is what he does. Immediately the name brings out the character, the attribute, the quality, the behavior of the person.

When the Psalmist here says, "Your custom is to show mercy towards those who love Your name," he's talking about the person of God. To those who love Your name, to those who love You, O God. And what does it mean to love God? What does it mean to love His name, His character, His person?

A God Admirer

And I was thinking, as I read Psalm 119 again, thinking about this loving His name. It struck me that the writer of Psalm 119 is a God admirer. He is a God admirer. We never think of it this way, right? I've never thought of it this way. And it strikes me that you cannot worship God if you are not a God admirer. If you don't admire Him.

Why do I say he's a God admirer? Because as you read these verses here in Psalm 119, you will see that he just loves the Lord and everything the Lord does, and everything about Him and His Word. Let me read to you just a few, just going through randomly. Verse 89, we are talking about Psalm 119 now:

[Psalm 119:89 NKJV]

Forever, O LORD,

Your word is settled in heaven.

He is in love with the Word of God!

[Psalm 119:90-92 NKJV]

⁹⁰ Your faithfulness endures to all generations;

You established the earth, and it abides.

⁹¹ They continue this day according to Your ordinances,

For all are Your servants.

⁹² Unless Your law had been my delight,

I would then have perished in my affliction.

He just loves the Lord. He loves the faithfulness of God. He loves the Word of God. And then in verse 96, it says:

[Psalm 119:96 NKJV]

I have seen the consummation of all perfection,

But Your commandment is exceedingly broad.

What is he saying? He's saying this very simply: I have seen that every perfection has its limits, but Your command, Your Word, Your commandments has no limits, right?

And then verse 103, it says:

[Psalm 119:103 NKJV]

How sweet are Your words to my taste,
Sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Psalm 119, verse 105:

[Psalm 119:105 NKJV]

Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.

Verse 111:

[Psalm 119:111 NKJV]

Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever,
For they are the rejoicing of my heart.

Verse 114:

[Psalm 119:114 NKJV]

You are my hiding place and my shield;
I hope in Your word.

Verse 129:

[Psalm 119:129 NKJV]

Your testimonies are wonderful;
Therefore my soul keeps them.

Verse 130:

[Psalm 119:130 NKJV]

The entrance of Your words gives light;
It gives understanding to the simple.

Verse 140:

[Psalm 119:140 NKJV]

Your word is very pure;
Therefore Your servant loves it.

Verse 142:

[Psalm 119:142 NKJV]

Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,
And Your law is truth.

Verse 160:

[Psalm 119:160 NKJV]

The entirety of Your word is truth,
And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

Verse 149:

[Psalm 119:149 NKJV]

Hear my voice according to Your lovingkindness;
O LORD, revive me according to Your justice.

Verse 162:

[Psalm 119:162 NKJV]

I rejoice at Your word

As one who finds great treasure.

Verse 164:

[Psalm 119:164 NKJV]

Seven times a day I praise You,

Because of Your righteous judgments.

Verse 165:

[Psalm 119:165 NKJV]

Great peace have those who love Your law,

And nothing causes them to stumble.

And there are quite a few more that I can read to you. In fact, the whole of Psalm 119, you will see that this Psalmist here is a God admirer. He admires the Lord. He loves the Lord. He loves the name of the Lord.

That now challenges me, and I ask the question: am I a God admirer? Do I admire God so much that just like this Psalmist, it now just brings out in me praise and prayer? How did this Psalmist become like this? How did he become such a God worshiper, a God admirer? Because a God admirer is a God worshiper. It must be because he spent time with God and His Word. And so he has learned that the Word of God is a treasure, and God Himself—His lovingkindness, His faithfulness, His mercy—"This is my comfort in my affliction."

"Look upon me and be merciful to me." God's mercy, God's Word. He just spends time and he dwells on that. He meditates on it. Am I a God admirer? I ask myself. Are you a God admirer? It must be that the Psalmist just sits there, does nothing, but just ponders about God. They dream about God, about what heaven is like, about how God does this, saying, "Let there be light," and there was light. And his mind goes back to Genesis 1; it goes to all over the Scripture, Revelation 20, 21, 22; it goes all over the Scripture. And he just pondered. Do I

take time to ponder? Do I take time to admire in the day, in my day, in my 24-hour day? Time to ponder, admire the Lord.

God's Custom: Mercy

So the Psalmist says in verse 132, "Look upon me and be merciful to me." One of the things that this Psalmist, this writer is consumed with, is taken up with, is God's mercy. You will read the word mercy and merciful and "be merciful to me" many times in the Scripture. In fact, if you turn to verse 64, he says:

[Psalm 119:64 NKJV]

The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy;
Teach me Your statutes.

The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy. And then in verse 124—I underlined this verse long, long ago in my Scripture, in my Bible, red, red color—and it says this:

[Psalm 119:124 NKJV]

Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy,
And teach me Your statutes.

Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy. In fact, this is the only way, when you think about it, God can deal with humanity, with people. This is the only way God can deal with me and you. Because if God dealt with us according to His holiness, we would have been separated from Him long, long ago. We would have no communication because your sins would have separated you and your God. That's what the Scripture says. So if God dealt with me according to His holiness, I would have been separated from Him. I would have no communication with Him at all.

And if God dealt with me according to His righteousness, I would have been condemned. Because I've broken many, if not all, the laws of the commandments, of His commandments. Because James said—what did James say? James said:

[James 2:10 NKJV] - For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

So if God were to deal with me with His righteousness according to the law, I would have been condemned. The wages of sin is death. If God were to deal with me according to His judgment, I would have been sent to the burning fires of hell long, long ago. Because God's judgment is always right. So the only way that God can deal with me, and you, and humanity is through His mercy.

What is the meaning of mercy? What does mercy mean? Mercy means this: God not giving to us what we deserve. That's mercy. God withholding, holding back from us what we deserve, what humans deserve. And what do humans deserve? His wrath, His judgment, the wages of sin. That's what I deserve; that's what you deserve. We are all sinners. The wages of sin is death. That's what we deserve, but God holds that back. In Psalm 103, the Psalmist wrote:

[Psalm 103:10 NKJV]

He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

So God withholds, God holds back what we deserve, what I rightfully deserve. That's mercy, God's mercy.

And instead, God gives us His grace. Mercy and grace, these two words are all over the Scripture, in the New Testament especially. What's the meaning of grace? Grace is God giving to us what we do not deserve. Mercy is God holding back what we deserve, which is punishment, but grace is God giving to us what we do not deserve. What do we not deserve? We do not deserve His kindness. We do not deserve His mercy. We do not deserve—

[Romans 6:23 NKJV] - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's what we do not deserve: God's grace, God's love, God's mercy, God's kindness, God's goodness, God's gentleness, God's faithfulness. And as we dwell more and more into this, we will become more and more of a God admirer as we ponder the goodness of God. So God has a custom: His custom is to show mercy to those who love His name.

The Lord's Custom

Who else has a custom? Well, if we return to Luke chapter 4, Luke chapter 4 and verse 16, it says this:

[Luke 4:16 NKJV] - So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.

The Lord Jesus had a custom too. Every Sabbath day you will find Him going to the synagogue, and He would participate, and He would stand up. In this case, He stood up to read. That's His practice.

Just like the Chinese practice: every Chinese New Year, you give the red packet, hongbao, angbao, right? That's a custom. For Eric Peterson, maybe, and some of us here, maybe every Thanksgiving you have to have turkey, right? Do you, Eric? If you have to, yes. It's rather dry. Okay, okay, just eat the dark meat! But we eat it; it's a custom. Right?

So the Lord Jesus has a practice, has a custom. His custom is to be at the synagogue every Sabbath day. So you ask me, what's my custom? Do I have a custom of doing that? What do I do on Sundays, the Lord's Day? Is it my custom to come to church every Sunday? Or the slightest excuse will find me driving my daughter to a piano class, or my wife needs me to buy vegetables for lunch? What's our custom? Are we always here? Do we make it a point to come as our custom?

You know, I have a good friend, a very, very good friend. I respect him a lot. He's older than me, and he had told me when he was working in his very active working life—he calls me K.L. or Kok Leung; at that time I had no name called Kevin. And Jim was very successful in his work, in his business. He started a company which is very successful in employee benefits. And he would travel on business travel and all that. But he says this: "You know, K.L., I've made it a pillar in my life. I've made it a custom, a pillar, a practice that on every Lord's Day, on every Sunday, wherever I might be traveling to, I will make it to come back to the assembly and be at my seat every Sunday." If he was traveling to Houston, or to San Francisco, or wherever it might be out of town, on Sunday he will make sure that he's back in his home in the assembly, seated for the Lord's Supper. That's his custom. What a good custom! He must have learned it from the Lord Jesus.

Paul's Custom

Look at Acts chapter 17. Turn with me to Acts chapter 17. Who else has a custom? Acts 17:2:

[Acts 17:2 NKJV] - Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

Hey, Paul had the same custom! He must have learned it from the Lord Jesus. Because it says:

[1 Corinthians 11:1 NKJV] - Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

What's our custom? Hebrews tells us this in Hebrews 10:25:

[Hebrews 10:25 NKJV] - not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Especially when you see the Day approaching. The Lord Jesus is coming; He'll be here very soon, looking at what is going on in the world today. Paul had a custom. I think it would be good for us to have this custom too. If it is your custom to be here at the prayer meeting, make it work to be a custom.

In Malaysia we had this Sunday—you know, Mr. Curtin, who planted the church when I was young, a teenager, he started the assembly morning worship, the Lord's Supper. You know what time? What time do you start your worship and remembrance? 9:30. That's early. In Malaysia, you know what time we started? 8:00. 8:00 a.m., that's the time. Because Mr. Curtin said, "You should not be washing your car before you come to church and worship the Lord. You should not be doing your laundry and taking your dog for a walk, and all kinds of things you do before you come and worship the Lord."

So our custom was to wake up early in the morning, drive like crazy down the one way to church in a small little town. Every Sunday morning you see the Christians like the Indianapolis 500, race car Formula One, rushing down to be there at 8:00. Because Mr. Curtin also said this: "If you are not here ten minutes early, consider yourself late." Good

practice! If you're not here ten minutes early, consider yourself late, because the Lord is waiting.

Developing Godly Customs

Remember this. These are some of the lessons, some of the customs that stick with us, stick with me when I was growing up. And by the grace of God, we continue these good customs.

God has a custom to show mercy to those who love His name, to those who love Him. And if you want to be a God admirer, a God worshiper, the Lord Jesus had a custom. One of His customs too is that He would go up to the Mount of Olives when everyone went back to their homes after a long day.

May we have godly customs in our lives.

Let's pray.

Father, we want to thank You for this evening, for the opportunity to consider Your Word and to be blessed by Your Word. The entrance of Your Word gives light. Your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. You sanctify us through Your Word; Your Word is truth. Father, we thank You for loving us, for giving us Your Word, that You might be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path on this pathway of life. We thank You in our Savior's precious name. Amen.