

## What Makes God's Word So Wonderful (Ps 119:129-136)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on February 22, 2009

[www.goldcountrybaptist.org](http://www.goldcountrybaptist.org)

What makes God's Word wonderful is the ultimate Author who inspired the human writers, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is called the Word (John 1) and His name is "**Wonderful**, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). His Word is also wonderful, and our counselor, and so much more.

Someone has described the wonders of this book this way:

The Bible is God's wonderful library ... To the weary pilgrim, The Bible is a good strong staff. To the one who sits in gloom, The Bible is a glorious light. To those who stoop beneath heavy burden, The Bible is sweet rest. To him who has lost his way, The Bible is a safe guide. To those who have been hurt by sin, The Bible is healing balm. To the discouraged, it whispers glad messages of hope. To those who are distressed by the storms of life, The Bible is an anchor. To those who suffer in lonely solitude, The Bible is a cool, soft hand resting on a fevered brow ... to best defend it, just use it! If you have not yet discovered [and become lost in wonder, love and praise for] the Bible, it's time you did.<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 119:129-136 (NASB95) <sup>129</sup>Your testimonies are **wonderful**; Therefore my soul observes them. <sup>130</sup>The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple. <sup>131</sup>I opened my mouth wide and panted, For I longed for Your commandments. <sup>132</sup>Turn to me and be gracious to me, After Your manner with those who love Your name. <sup>133</sup>Establish my footsteps in Your word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me. <sup>134</sup>Redeem me from the oppression of man, That I may keep Your precepts. <sup>135</sup>Make Your face shine upon Your servant, And teach me Your statutes. <sup>136</sup>My eyes shed streams of water, Because they do not keep Your law.

Verse 129 is the summary sentence that the rest of the verses really expand and expound: *Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul observes them* (other translations have "keep" or "obey.") If we truly believe deep within us that God's Word is as wonderful as this Psalm says it is, there is no other response imaginable. If you do not find your heart resonating with this text about how wondrous and desirous the Scriptures are to your soul, it's not because of anything wrong with the Bible, there's something wrong with you, with your spiritual eyesight and affections. If you have any spiritual life or desire at all, pray the prayer of v. 18: *Open my eyes that I may see the wondrous things from Your law.*

We need eyes to see and ears to hear and appreciate the wonders of God's Word, and we must pray for God's help to do so, as v. 27 also does: *Make me understand the way of Your precepts, So shall I meditate on Your wonderful works* (NKJV), or *wonders* (NASB).

Psalm 139:6 speaks of the teaching of God's Word about God's attributes, and David says there "*Such knowledge is **too wonderful for me**; It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it.*"

Exodus 15 is a song written by the Israelites after God delivered them from the Egyptians through the Red Sea by signs and wonders and miracle-working power, true "shock and awe":

<sup>11</sup> "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, **working wonders?** ...

Psalm 77 (NASB95) <sup>11</sup> I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember **Your wonders of old** ... <sup>14</sup> You are **the God who works wonders**; You have made known Your strength among the peoples.

This is the word for “wonderful” we see in v. 129 which speaks of the wonderful Word of our God of Wonders beyond our galaxy.

Spurgeon said on this verse that God’s testimonies and truths are ‘wonderful in their effects, as instructing, elevating, strengthening, and comforting the soul ... Those who know them best wonder at them most. It is wonderful that God should have borne testimony at all to sinful men, and more wonderful still that his testimony should be of so heavenly a character, so clear, so full, so gracious, so mighty.’<sup>2</sup>

*What Makes God’s Word So Wonderful? What It Makes in Us*

5 Wonderful Blessings the Word Produces:

### **1. More Light to the Soul (v. 130, 135)**

<sup>130</sup> The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

The translation “unfolding of Your Word” brings to mind the image of the unfolding of the scroll of Scripture in OT times, as they would do in the Synagogue services. As the scroll unfolded, the idea was light of God’s truth would go forth. Like when drapes are folded back in a home or blinds are pulled open, the light of the Sun comes in. In the same way, the light of Scripture comes in as the Word is unfolded and opened up, which I trust will take place even this morning as I seek to unfold and open this passage to you, with the illuminating light-giving help of God.

That is really a good picture of what biblical preaching is, opening up God’s Word to make it clear to the hearer, as the second half of this verse says “it gives understanding.” The goal of a sermon should not be to entertain sinners, or impress scholars, but to give understanding to the simple as this verse says by opening up the Scriptures so that young and old can understand, all who recognize themselves as simple and who in childlike faith depend on and look to the Word of their Father. But those who are proud and think themselves wise and not in great need of it will have its truths concealed to them as Jesus said.

This beginning of this verse is also translated “the entrance” or perhaps better, “the *opening* of Your words gives light,” like light that comes through an entry way of a house, which in ancient Israel was often the main or only place light came into a home. As you would open a scroll in the middle, or in our day open your Bible with both hands to the middle to Psalm 119, the image is like opening 2 swinging doors to let light in, opening the Bible shines light to us. This psalm already said a similar thing in verse 105: “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” How foolish it is to put that light under a bushel, or let Satan or anyone blow it out, we need to let it shine! God’s Word is the light that shows us where to go, either by direct command or by principles.

How does the Bible give light and guidance for our decisions where the Scripture does not explicitly tell us what to do, Steve Lawson asked (ex: what college to attend or job to take)? His answer: ‘What we do find [in God’s Word] is God’s will, first revealed to us regarding what kind of person we ought to be, and then second, we find in the Scriptures, the priorities I am to have in my life ... God is more interested in who you are than in what you do.

God is more concerned about your character than about your career. He is more concerned about where your heart is than about where your job is. He is more concerned about your spiritual growth and your spiritual maturity than anything else in your life ... Who should you marry? Someone who loves the Bible ... Where should you work? You need to find a town in which to work where there is an expository pulpit and where there is the preaching of the Word of God ... [Lawson says to his own] children, “let’s talk about where to go to college, but here’s qualification # 1: In whatever town or whatever city it is this college is in that we will be discussing, there needs to be a pulpit with an open Bible and a pastor who is passionate with a high view of God and will preach verse-by-verse through the Word of God, that is God’s will for your life where to go to college.”<sup>3</sup>

This type of light-giving Scripture-opening teaching is what Jesus modeled after His resurrection on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:

- He opened up the OT to them it says, explaining, expounding and enlightening them to its message
- it was an expository message not just of one text but of how beginning in Moses and through the prophets and psalms (where we are today), Jesus brought light to the text as He explained to them the things concerning the Messiah in all the Scriptures, declaring how the whole counsel of God is Christ-centered
- Their spiritual eyes were opened to truths of the Word they had read but never really seen before
- Then later their physical eyes were also opened to recognize they were talking to Christ, the Word who became flesh, the ultimate Author of all Scripture.
- Afterwards, the disciples said to one another “Did not our hearts burn within us while He ... opened the Scriptures to us?”
- Explaining or expounding the Scriptures (expository preaching) is the pattern we see also in the Apostles

Acts 17:2-3 (NKJV)<sup>2</sup> Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,<sup>3</sup> explaining [lit. *opening*] and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”

That was the custom or manner of the Apostles, not to reason from man’s culture or man’s cleverness or man’s consumer preferences or man’s carnal worldliness, but to reason from the Scriptures, to open the Scriptures and explain what *they say* – that’s what is truly relevant and powerful and life-changing and light-giving.

Paul knew this as well as anyone from his own conversion experience. The man once known as Saul of Tarsus had his eyes closed to Christ because of his self-righteous self-religion practices like many today (probably some in this room). While he was yet a sinner and in spiritual darkness, at midday a light from heaven far brighter than the sun shone in his face as God’s Word came audibly from heaven, as if to illustrate this truth indelibly on his eyeballs that the coming of God’s Word is with light. And then God chose to blind Saul for three days after that light and audible Word he heard, and Acts 26:18 explains that God was sending him to the Gentiles “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God ...”

That was the mission of the man who would change his name to Paul and become the human instrument to write almost half of the books in the New Testament, bringing the Word with much light to the dark world of our ethnic ancestors. This image of light from darkness became a favorite image of Paul, an unforgettable metaphor for a man blind for 3 days, whose eyes were opened again to light as Ananias spoke the Word of God to him, and light again flooded into his eyes. The same can happen today as we open and explain this book and I pray it might even cause the scales to fall off your eyes today to behold its wonders.

Robinson Crusoe was able to salvage a Bible from the wreckage he had dragged ashore. But he did not open it till he fell ill. Then he read from it, and it suddenly took on meaning. Or, could we say, the Holy Spirit “unfolded” its meaning to him? ... for the first time since he had put foot on the island he knelt down and prayed.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Make Your face shine upon Your servant, And teach me Your statutes.

This is a personalized prayer of the classic OT benediction:

Numbers 6:22-26 (NASB95) <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>23</sup> “Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: <sup>24</sup> The LORD bless you, and keep you; <sup>25</sup> The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.’

Notice the light of God’s face or favor, His blessing, is paralleled in v. 135 with the light of the teaching we receive. If we want to pray for God’s blessing, notice it is directly tied to the teaching of God’s Word. If we want God to bless us more, we need to hear His Word more. We can sing “God bless America” all we want, but God blesses those who allow God’s truth to be taught. We can wish God’s blessing on others (“God bless you”), but if we wish to receive His blessings, v. 135 says we must receive His teaching.

Ps 67: God be gracious to us and bless us, *And* cause His face to shine upon us. **That Your way may be known** on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.

When God’s ways are known on the earth, and His gospel has been taught and embraced in a nation, that’s the truest and greatest blessing. What a great way to pray, and not be centered on our nation, but be praying for all nations as that psalm goes on to say:

<sup>3</sup> Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. <sup>4</sup> Let the nations be glad and sing for joy ... <sup>5</sup> Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. <sup>6</sup> The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. <sup>7</sup> **God blesses us, That all the ends of the earth may fear Him.**

If God blesses us, it’s so His gospel will bless others through us.

## 2. More Longing for the Word (v. 131)

<sup>131</sup> I opened my mouth wide and panted, For I longed for Your commandments.

God’s Wonderful Word blesses us by producing more longing for it, more hunger for it, as Peter says, like a newborn baby longs for his milk with great craving and mouth open when he’s about to eat! We are to long for the Bible like a baby longs for a bottle.

When this verse says “I opened my mouth wide,” most writers believe he’s moving beyond the human realm to the animal kingdom. Like in Psalm 22:13, where David writes “*They open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and roaring lion.*” Or like hungry lions in the lion’s den with mouths open looking for the next meal to be dropped down from above. The word is also used in Scripture of baby birds opening their little mouths, their beaks in the nest (Isaiah 10:14), a picturesque image of how we frail helpless creatures must be similarly dependent on God feeding and filling us spiritually. God promises to bless those with open mouths to Him

Psalm 81:10 (NASB95) “... **Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.**”

Verse 131 says that not only was his mouth open, he was panting for his desire. This type of hunger reminds me of a summer I spent in Clovis, CA, outside of Fresno with my friend John, while I was in college. I remember one time his dog hadn’t eaten for a day or two or more because we were out of dog food, and as we poured the new food into his bowl, his mouth was wide and panting and his tail was wagging and whole body engaged and he was actually eating the food before it hit the bowl he was so hungry! That’s a picture of the spiritual hunger in this verse! Like Job said, he loved or treasured God’s Word more than his necessary food even (Job 23:12). The language of verse 131 is not only the language of hunger, but thirst as well. Job also spoke of those who “opened their mouth as for the spring rain.” (Job 29:23)

Psalm 42:1-2 (NASB95) **As the deer pants** for the water brooks, **So my soul pants** for You, O God. **My soul thirsts** for God, for the living God ...

Psalm 63:1-5 (NASB95) <sup>1</sup> A Psalm of David, **when he was in the wilderness** of Judah. O God, You are my God; I shall seek You **earnestly**; My soul **thirsts** for You, my flesh **yearns** for You, In a dry and weary land where there is **no water** ... <sup>3</sup> Because Your lovingkindness is **better than life**, My lips will praise You

Psalm 84:1-2 (NIV) How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul **yearns, even faints**, for the courts of the LORD; **my heart and my flesh cry out** for the living God.

... <sup>6</sup> As they pass through the Valley of Baca [a dry place], they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.

... <sup>10</sup> Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

The truth of God sustained them as they travelled to the house of God through a dry and weary land; they were spiritually refreshed by the truth of God in its spiritual living water and pools while they looked forward to their souls being bathed by God’s presence.

Is that how you view God’s house, as a place where you come to be washed and refreshed and bathed in the Word from your dry and dirty journeys during the week? Does your soul yearn to be at God’s house each Lord’s Day as v. 2 says, even fainting, your heart and flesh crying out for the living God and longing for the fellowship of the people of God? Is the Lord’s Day even a priority for you for your soul – or are you just putting in your hour in the morning because that’s what good people are supposed to do? Does your heart say “better is one day in your house than thousands elsewhere” or is your desire to get out after the service as quick as possible and not talk to people and certainly not think of staying for Sunday School or coming back for the evening service and no desire to be involved during the week?

I'm glad you're here for this service, but let me ask you even for this service; did you, do you come hungry and thirsty spiritually? Are you satisfied with just one meal from God's Word when there are others being served up here that your soul needs? Why not increase your intake of teaching ... as well as fellowship? It's not just about the food we need, but also who's around the table – we need to take in as much teaching as we can for our soul, I know I need to, and I also need fellowship with God's people during the week. And it's not just about what we're taking in, we need to be giving out, serving others if we will be spiritually healthy. The spiritually healthy are spiritually hungry. Are we satisfied with doing our duty without delight or desire? Do you crave and long for the Word? If not, let's pray earnestly to be more like the psalms.

Warren Wiersbe summarized verse 131 this way: 'As a suffocating person pants for air or a thirsty person for water, so the child of God pants for the Word of God, and nothing else will satisfy ... When we lose our desire for God's Word, then we are vulnerable to the substitutes the world has to offer (Isa. 55:1–2).'<sup>5</sup> And I would add to that, the more we indulge in the cheap and trivial substitutes and junk food of the world, the more we lose our appetite for the Word.

One of my favorite Puritan writers Thomas Boston said we need:

*'A high esteem of the treasure to be found in the book of the Lord,* Matt 13:44. People will not be at the pains to seek into what they do not value. If men did not prize gold, they would not rip up the bowels of the earth for it. It is the undervaluing of the scriptures that makes people so little to study and seek into them.

*A design of spiritual profit by the scripture.* No wise man will be at pains but to gain thereby. And he that would aright study the holy scriptures, must design his soul's advantage thereby. **We should come to the reading of the book of the Lord, as to a soul-feast, Ps 119:131 ...**

*Painfulness in the study.* Silver and gold are not to be gathered up by every lazy passenger from the surface of the earth, as stones are, but must with labour be digged out of the bowels of it, Prov 2:4 ... This is the gate of heaven; and there must be striving to get in at it. It is not easy to overcome a dark, carnal, hard heart, which unfits us for the study of the scriptures. And indeed many get but little advantage by their reading it; for dig they cannot, and beg they will not; and therefore they go empty from these wells of salvation.<sup>6</sup>

If we do not see God's Word as wonderful as we should, we need to pray v. 18 again: *Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from Your law.*

### **3. More Love in the Gracious God (v. 132)**

<sup>132</sup> Turn to me [or "look upon me"] and be gracious to me, After Your manner with those who love Your name.

What is wonderful about this book, and unlike other books, is it causes us receive more love from its Author (Christ) and to be more in love with Christ. The love and longing is not just for the printed page, it's for and from a personal relationship that is deepened through it. This Psalm is not just focused on the Word of God, but ultimately the God of the Word, inseparably joined to it. In verse 132 he is asking God to turn and look upon him with mercy, as God's Word records is God's manner or custom, how he has treated those who love Him in the past. What this writer knows about God from His Word informs and drives how he prays, asking God for favor not because man's character deserves it, but because God's character and nature is merciful and wonderfully gracious.

When the end of the verse says *Those who love Your name*, it's a way of saying "those who love You," because the *name* represents the character, the very essence, the person behind the name. That type of phrase is equated in Scripture with those who are saved – believers love the Lord (ex: Romans 8:28 "God works all things together for good **for those who love God, those who are called** according to His purpose"). From the divine side, they are elect or called by God's purpose, but on the human side the evidence we have is that they love God. You can't just believe mentally the gospel and not love the Lord, as Paul said elsewhere, "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed" (1 Cor. 16:22).

To those who love the Lord, we say with Peter, "where else can we go, Lord, you have the words of life?

*Sing them over again to me—wonderful words of life;  
let me more of their beauty see—wonderful words of life.  
Words of life and beauty, teach me faith and duty:  
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life*

J. C. Philpot, a godly man from past centuries, said it wonderfully:

What wonderful things does God sometimes shew us in his word! How our eyes sometimes seem to be anointed with eyesalve "to behold wondrous things out of God's law!" (Ps 119:18.) Sometimes in reading a chapter we see such beauty, such fulness, such sweetness, such glory in it, that it seems, as it were, to fill our very hearts ... when my heart is brought to lie at the footstool of mercy, this seems to be **the panting and breathing of my soul**—to know experimentally and spiritually the blessed truths that my eyes see in the word of God, to have them **opened up to my understanding**, brought into my heart, grafted into my soul, applied to my conscience, and revealed with such supernatural and heavenly power that the truth as it is in Jesus may be in me a solemn and saving reality, that it may bring with it such a divine blessing as to fill me with grace, enlarge my heart into the enjoyment of the gospel, gird up my loins with spiritual strength, give and increase faith, communicate and encourage hope, shed abroad and draw forth love, and fill me with joy and peace in believing.<sup>7</sup>

We read, or we should read the Bible, not to merely do a duty, or to merely fill our heads with more information, or to be able to say we read through the whole Bible (although it is our duty, it does give us information, and it is good to read through the whole Bible). The reason Jesus told the Jews to search the Scriptures is because *they speak of Jesus*. We are to study God's Word so we can know and love Christ more and please and glorify Him more. And the blessing is that God's wonderful Word gives us blessings, including more light to our soul, more longing for the Word, more love in our gracious God, and it also blesses us with:

#### **4. More Liberation from Sin and Sinners (v. 133-134)**

<sup>133</sup> Establish my footsteps in Your word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.

In other words, guide and stabilize me, steady my steps in Your Word, which is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. This would be a great way to pray to start each day: "Direct / order each step I do today by Your truth so I can walk in obedience. Let Your Word rule where I go and what I think today, and don't let sin rule my thoughts or actions, as I'm prone to wander, Lord I feel it.

We don't believe sinless perfection can be reached in this life, as some Wesleyan-Arminian theologians teach. Believers are not free from the presence of sin within while on earth, but salvation does free us from the penalty and power of sin. Regeneration by God breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoners free.

1 John 1:8 *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves ...*

Sin remains for believers, but it must not reign like in unbelievers

Romans 6:12-14 (NASB95) <sup>12</sup> *Therefore **do not let sin reign in your mortal body** so that you obey its lusts, <sup>13</sup> and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. <sup>14</sup> For **sin shall not be master over you** ...*

As we saw in our evening Genesis studies, when God speaks to Cain (4:7) He said "sin's desire is for you but you must master it." Apart from God's grace, we are enslaved to sin, it masters us, but if we receive God's grace, we are enabled by God's Word to get control of our sin rather than our sin controlling our life.

Psalm 19:7-14 (NASB95) <sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring [transforming] the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, **making wise the simple.** <sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, **enlightening the eyes** ... <sup>11</sup> Moreover, **by them Your servant is warned**; In keeping them there is **great reward** [negative warning and positive reward]. <sup>12</sup> Who can discern *his* errors? Acquit me of hidden *faults*. <sup>13</sup> Also keep back Your servant from **presumptuous sins**; **Let them not rule over me**; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. <sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

Believers cannot be completely *sinless*, but they can be *blameless*, which v. 13 clarifies as one who does not presumptuously sin, who is not ruled by sin or guilty of great transgression. What a great prayer to pray in Psalm 19, as well as in Psalm 119:133. A mature believer doesn't think sin is no big deal, he wants no sin to blemish his character, no ruling sin to control him. He knows one leak can sink a boat, one wound can kill a man if it's not tended to, one sin, if left untended, can disable or disqualify him from service and usefulness, one sinful area can destroy his marriage. One spark can set ablaze sinful passions, so he doesn't get close to the sparks.

<sup>134</sup> Redeem me from the oppression of man, That I may keep Your precepts.

He wants deliverance from both sin on the inside of him and sinners on the outside of him, so that he can keep God's Word. And as he keeps God's Word, conversely, he is kept from sin.

Many of us can identify with the first half of this verse; we want to be free from oppression and difficulty, but we need to also pray the second half of this verse: "that I may keep Your Word." His motive was not merely comfort, it was greater commitment and application of God's Word. He is praying, "God please remove whatever is in my life keeping me from knowing and obeying the Bible." His hope of deliverance from *external* difficulty (v. 134) is founded on his deliverance from the *internal* "dominion of sin" (v. 133). Look at verse 45 of this psalm: "I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts." It's through the continual seeking, following the truth of the Word that were liberated Jesus said in John 8: "If you continue in my Word, then you are my true disciples. And you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free.**" (v. 31-32)

*God's Wonderful Word blesses us by producing:*

1. *More light to the soul*
2. *More longing for the Word*
3. *More love in our Gracious God*
4. *More liberation from sin and sinners*

**#5. More Love of the Lost (v. 136)**

<sup>136</sup> My eyes shed streams of water, Because they do not keep Your law.

The emotion runs off the page at this verse, just as his tears are figuratively compared to rivers running off his face for sinners. Jonathan Edwards in his classic book *Religious Affections*, summarizes the godly affections and emotions of the psalmist:

‘the Psalmist speaks of his love, as if it were unspeakable; Ps. 119:97, “O how love I thy law!” So he expresses a great degree of hatred of sin ... He also expresses a high degree of sorrow for sin: he speaks of his sins “going over his head as a heavy burden that was too heavy for him: and of his roaring all the day, and his moisture being turned into the drought of summer,” and his bones being as it were broken with sorrow. So he often expresses great degrees of spiritual desires, in a multitude of the strongest expressions which can be conceived of; such as “his longing, his soul’s thirsting as a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, his panting, his flesh and heart crying out, his soul’s breaking for the longing it hath,” etc. He expresses the exercises of great and extreme grief for the sins of others, Ps. 119:136<sup>8</sup>

When this psalm prays to be free from the persecution of the ungodly in verse 135, it’s clear in verse 136 to see he had no personal animosity toward the ungodly. He in fact had great compassion for them as lost sinners. It was not bitterness in his heart for personal wrongs done to him, there was brokenness in his heart over wrongs they had done to the Lord he loved, who taught “Blessed are they who mourn” – (i.e., mourn over sin), probably primarily in his own heart first, and here he also mourns over the sins of the others, perhaps thinking of their awaiting punishment. I am not overly emotional by nature but there are times when I can’t help but weep as I work with or hear of someone who is not keeping God’s law. But as compassionate as I try to be, I know I fall far short from this verse. I do not have the love for the lost that I see in biblical writers.

J. C. Ryle writes of what Acts 17 says about Paul visiting Athens:

‘He was stirred with holy compassion. It moved his heart to see so many myriads perishing for lack of knowledge, without God, without Christ, having no hope, travelling in the broad road which leadeth to destruction. He was stirred with holy sorrow. It moved his heart to see so much talent misapplied. Here were hands capable of excellent works, and minds capable of noble conceptions. And yet the God who gave life and breath and power was not glorified. He was stirred with holy indignation against sin and the devil. He saw the god of this world blinding the eyes of multitudes of his fellow-men, and leading them captive at his will. He saw the natural corruption of man infecting the population of a vast city like one common disease, and an utter absence of any spiritual medicine, antidote, or remedy. He was stirred with holy zeal for His Master's glory ... He saw his Divine Master unknown and unrecognised by His own creatures, and idols receiving the homage due to the King of kings.

Reader, these feelings which stirred the Apostle are a leading characteristic of a man born of the Spirit. Do you know anything of them? Where there is true grace, there will always be tender concern for the souls of others. Where there is true sonship to God, there will always be zeal for the Father's glory ... Ezekiel [said of the godly]: "They sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst of the land"<sup>9</sup>

Paul wrote to the Philippians warnings of enemies of the cross of Christ, but he says in Philippians 3:18 he wept as he wrote. Believers cannot remain indifferent to sin in themselves or others.

Paul told the Romans "I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart" as he thought of his unsaved Jewish countrymen, he would do anything to see them saved, even give up his own life.

He could tell the Ephesians as he bid farewell to their elders in Acts 20:31 "that night and day for a period of three years, I did not cease to admonish each one of you **with tears**"

When Jesus was dealing with the false religionists and legalists of His day, Mark 3:5 says Jesus was "looking around at them **with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.**" God is angry at sinners, but we need to also balance that picture with God's grief, and God's genuine deep compassion even for those He will never save. Jesus Himself wept for Jerusalem for their sin and the many there who were unwilling to come to His open arms and seek shelter in Him, in His wings, if they would see themselves as frail feeble, needy little chicks open-mouthed, empty-handed, in need of protection under the shadow of the Almighty's care and warmth. Jesus was God, He was the omniscient sovereign Savior Himself, and yet also being God He had great pain in His heart for their sin and rejection of salvation. Even as they are murdering Him, He cries out "Father, forgive them."

In Genesis 6, as we'll see next Sunday night, God punishes the sinful world, but not before verse 6 says God was grieved in his heart at the sin in man's heart. The fact that God knows all things and is in sovereign control of all things, and could have chosen not to have created those sinners – that fact does not negate God's genuine emotions and regret in bringing punishment. Lamentations say the affliction God brings is not from His heart. God has ordained it, but He does not take pleasure in it when sinners perish (Ezekiel 18, etc.).

God Himself tells Jeremiah to represent Him this way to sinful Israel (Jeremiah 14:17):  
"Let my eyes flow down with tears night and day, And let them not cease"

Jeremiah 13:17 "if you will not listen to [God's Word and repent], **My soul will sob in secret for such pride; And my eyes will bitterly weep And flow down with tears, Because the flock of the LORD has been taken captive.**

Jeremiah 9:1 "Oh that my head were waters And my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night ...<sup>18</sup>  
wailing for us, That our eyes may shed tears And our eyelids flow with water.

George Whitefield was a modern day Jeremiah, who preached in colonial America and England with great blessing and great brokenness. He was arguably the greatest preaching evangelist since the Apostle Paul, and like Paul he not only believed that salvation is ultimately God's sovereign work, but like Paul and his Lord he also had a great heart for the lost and would weep for them and plead with them to come to Christ.

When I read this verse about rivers or “streams of water from the eyes” I can’t help but think of a story of where Whitefield was preaching the gospel in the open air to a group of hard men, coal-miners, construction men. He was known as a very emotional man and passionate powerful preacher, and as he poured out his soul to their souls, it was said that on the soot-darkened faces of these working men, you could begin to see some with streams running down their cheeks under their eyes, from tears washing through their faces that were dark with coal, with a white stream as they came to the living water of Jesus and had their sins made white as snow. What a picture! What a Savior! How can we not tell lost people of this Savior? How can we not have a heart for them to know and hear His gospel?

*Everyday they pass me by, I can see it in their eyes  
Empty people filled with care, headed who knows where?  
On they go through private pain, Living fear to fear.  
Laughter hides their silent cries, Only Jesus hears.*

*We are called to take His light  
To a world where wrong seems right.  
What could be too great a cost  
For sharing Life with one who's lost?*

*Through His love our hearts can feel All the grief they bear.  
They must hear the Words of Life Only we can share.*

*People need the Lord, people need the Lord  
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door.  
People need the Lord, people need the Lord.  
When will we realize that we must give our lives,  
For people need the Lord.*

They need the Lord, but how will they hear if we don’t tell them? Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ. People you know and see this week need the wonderful Words of life. Will you tell them?

---

<sup>1</sup> *AMG Bible Illustrations*. Bible Illustrations Series. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 137.

<sup>3</sup> [www.cfbcmobile.org](http://www.cfbcmobile.org)

<sup>4</sup> G. A. F. Knight (1982). *Psalms : Volume 2*. The Daily study Bible series. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 253.

<sup>5</sup> Warren Wiersbe (2004). *Be exultant* (1st ed.) Colorado Springs, Colo.: Cook Communications Ministries, p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> *Works of Thomas Boston*, Vol. 1, p. 63-64.

<sup>7</sup> J. C. Philpot, *Ears from Harvested Sheaves, or Daily Portions*, p. 108-109.

<sup>8</sup> *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1, p. 245. *Religious Affections*.

<sup>9</sup> J. C. Ryle. *The Upper Room*, chapter 9.