

“The Sweet Taste of God’s Law?”—Psalm 119:97,103-104

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Sweet Taste of God’s Law?”, is Psalm 119:97,103-104 → *Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day . . . How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

When I was a little child I remember my father telling me he liked candy because he had a “sweet tooth.” In my little brain I was trying to figure out which one of his teeth was the “sweet” one. Running my tongue across my teeth I couldn’t seem to find my “sweet tooth,” that is, one which tasted sweet. Did he have a special tooth which made him want to eat candy? As I tried so hard to figure it all out I was really confused when he took his teeth out of his mouth and sprinkled some powder on the gums.

However, there was one regular activity of my father’s which did not confuse me. The picture of him reading his Bible is imbedded in my brain because he did it so often and continued to do so until his eyesight

failed. Even then, he listened to his pastor's sermons everyday with two little speakers on each shoulder next to his ears while lying in his nursing home bed. Why? Maybe it had something to do with his . . . "sweet tooth?"

The Holy Spirit has given a similar picture by inspiring the psalmist to exclaim in verse 103 of our text: *How sweet are Your words to my taste, O LORD, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* How can God's Word be *sweeter than honey* to your *taste* in your *mouth*? During Ezekiel's call by Yahweh to be His prophet to speak His Word to His people, God gave him a *scroll to eat*, telling him to *fill his stomach with it*. When Ezekiel *ate it*, he described it *as sweet as honey in his mouth* (cf. Ezekiel 2:9-3:3). It was a picture of Yahweh giving Ezekiel the words to speak to His Church, both words of judgment upon and condemnation of their sin, as well as words of grace and forgiveness.

This picture of God's Word tasting sweet is a way of saying that the longing for gracious words of forgiveness in the midst of guilt over sin, the need for comfort in the midst sorrow and the desire for reassurance in the midst of turmoil, has been satisfied by God's written Word. For the people of that day honey was probably the sweetest of all table foods they encountered daily. The soul, soured by sin, longs for the sweetness of God's Word of love and grace. Thus, the psalmist exclaims in verse 97 of our text: *Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.*

God's law has a sweet, desirable taste? Dealing with the presence of your sinful nature and the devil this side of heaven can reveal a different perspective of God's law (or any law for that matter). How often does a law or command seem to work as a catalyst to produce thoughts, or even actions of rebellion in you? It may trigger thoughts like: "Don't tell me what to do!" "Kindda bossy, ain't ya?" "What's wrong with you? Can't you do it yourself?" While such thoughts or statements may be commonplace as reactions to law statements in your daily affairs, they become more serious when it comes to hearing God's law statements.

When it comes to hearing God's law proclaimed the sin-soured soul may find one rebelling against it, refusing to listen to His Word proclaimed and choosing the way of disobedience. In fact, Romans 7 says that upon hearing God's law, sin seizes *an opportunity through the commandment* to produce *all kinds of* rebelliousness, killing one spiritually (cf. Romans 7:8-10). Sin brings death in the form of eternal separation from God in hell. God's law, functioning as a mirror to show you your sin, may not be received with gratitude and may even place a bitter rather than sweet taste in your soul.

God's *law* referred to in our text is much broader than simply God's condemnation of your sin. While it denotes the commands and prohibitions of God's legal code, it also embraces all instruction expressing God's will for your joy and salvation, set forth in His covenant

of grace. That bitter taste of God's law is placed there by the Holy Spirit so that you can experience the sweetness of the Gospel as expressed in the Person & Work of God's Son, Jesus. He lived in perfect obedience to God's Law, offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to atone for your sins and rose from the dead, defeating the power of sin, death and the devil, **all for you**. When the bitterness of the Holy Spirit's conviction of your sins is tasted, making you feel like a *wretched man* in your inability to obey God's law, wondering *who will deliver you from this body of death*, you can confess with the apostle Paul: *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (cf. Romans 7:24-25) To live in and by this law in God's love in Christ is a delight, not a hated burden, not a hindrance to enjoyment of life.

It is by faith in Christ that we desire to obey God's *precepts*. According to verse 104 of our text, they give us *understanding*, serving as a guide for living the sanctified life in obedience to our Lord. Through the Gospel of Jesus the Holy Spirit creates a *love* of God's law in a relationship with Him as our Father. 1 John 5:3 says: *For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*

Through the written Word of God the Holy Spirit also creates in us a *hate* of every false way, giving us a discernment so that we strive to avoid those false ways placed before us in temptations. He gives you

the ability to *not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect* (cf. Romans 12:2). Through the written Word of God the Holy Spirit also moves you to bring the sweetness of the Gospel into those many situations filled with so much sinful turmoil, despair, pain and other spiritual unrest.

In verse 97 of our text, the psalmist mentions meditating on God's law (i.e. His written Word). The word "meditate" may bring pictures to one's mind of sitting on the floor with legs crossed, arms outstretched, eyes closed and chanting, "Ummm. Ummm." Personally, I would find it difficult to meditate on anything other than how I would release myself from such a position to stand upright again. Biblically, meditation had more to do with reading God's written Word, usually out loud in an effort to pay closer attention to the words and meaning. In the worship life of the temple it also had to do with chanting or singing His Word, much as we do in our liturgy today. But how could the psalmist say he meditated on it all day long?

While reading God's Word out loud, thinking about it's meaning, memorizing it and even studying it's theological significance are all involved with meditating on God's written Word, meditation of God's law is done as it is lived out in the daily vocations, relationships and conversations of everyday life. It is meditated upon when we . . .

- . . . confess our sins daily to God, trusting in the atoning work of Jesus for forgiveness given anew. 1 Peter 2:2-3 says: *Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord* (NASB).
- . . . practice confession and absolution with one another, proclaiming that same sweet forgiveness in Christ to each other. James 5:16 says to *confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*
- . . . pray for one another because *the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working* (cf. James 5:16).
- . . . strive to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in every vocation, activity and task in life.

When it comes to God's written Word, meditation flows into the lives of others with whom we come into contact everyday. It is the flow of the first table of the Law (i.e. commandments 1-3) which express love for the LORD into the second table of the Law (i.e. commandments 4-10) by expressing love for our neighbor.

Do you have a "sweet tooth" for the taste of God's law? In the midst of the difficult struggles which the prophet Jeremiah experienced he still confessed to God in Jeremiah 15:16 → *Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my*

heart, for I am called by Your name, O LORD, God of hosts. As one who has been called by God's name as His child in your baptism, may this prayer be your prayer everyday:

“Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen”

(LSB #148, p. 308)

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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