

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word” (Psalm 119:9)

This is the big question in light of the pedestrian’s benediction in verse 1.

If blessedness in this life is to be found by an undefiled way, by walking in the law of the Lord, how is a young man to cleanse his way? It should be immediately acknowledged that “man” is used in the gender-neutral sense, for young women have no less trouble with sin than young men. The qualification, “young”, however, is imminently valid. The question is especially critical for them for a number of reasons.

The young are at the beginning of their lives, at the head of the trail, the path that they shall walk throughout their lives. There is hardly a greater tragedy than that a person should walk a great portion of that path, or even come down to the end of it before he is brought to cleanse his way. Blessedness only begins in the undefiled walk. That means that such a person has squandered most of his years under the curse and misery of sin. What a lie it is to put off salvation until you have “had your fun and pleasure” in a full life of sin! The Christian cannot be found who would say “I wish I had lived in sin a little longer before coming to Christ. It just took the joy out of living”. Absurd! No such statement will ever be heard. On the contrary, the exclamation is, “Oh what a fool I have been! How I wish I could take back all those wasted years and live them in the joy of God’s loving kindness”.

Sin is particularly powerful, pernicious, and persistent in the young. It draws on all the powerful vitality of vigorous flesh. It does not have the checks of wisdom that comes out of experience found in the mature and aged. It is less inhibited by social responsibilities and conscience that shall be developed later.

If our way is not cleansed early in life, we are likely to fall into sins, commit deeds, and subject ourselves to evils that will hound and curse us all our lives. Some sins and ill-advised actions have horrible long-term consequences that exact a fearful price even after we become Christians.

The unconverted youth has a double problem. He indeed must seek to learn to walk an undefiled way, but before he does that, he must deal with the fact that he has already defiled his way. He must first clean that up. How shall he do it? Our text tells us, “By taking heed *according to your word*”. Note it is not “by taking heed to your word”, but by taking heed (to our way) according to your word. It is not the word of God, but *our way* that needs our first attention. Watch yourself! Have you taken notice of yourself, or are you too busy watching and criticizing others? We ought to scrutinize ourselves at least as critically as we do others. Does this make sense? What a fool it is who does not watch where he steps! What madness is this to fail to note the evil, foolishness, destruction, and injury we have already left in our paths, and to blunder on along oblivious to our ruinous ways!

How shall we evaluate and judge our way? Perhaps one will now say: “I have been noticing my way, and in my estimation, I am doing pretty good.” Ah, that is the problem. It is not according to our estimation” that we must take heed to our way. Not according to our values, convictions, tradition, culture (“these are the nineties”) or other people’s opinions. Not if our objective is

purity! Our ways must be measured according to nothing less than God's word. And what shall we find there? We shall find a standard so high and holy that we must join those trembling before a dark and thundering Mount Sinai, begging this Holy God to keep His

distance! Those who despised that law died under the testimony of two or three witnesses. We now have a Standard infinitely more high and holy than that Old Testament law. We have the Savior, Jesus Christ Himself, the Holy and sinless God in human flesh. We have the New Testament, purchased and sealed in His blood.

When we honestly take stock of our way, and then look at the Undefined Way Himself, we must then conclude that it is not within our power to cleanse our personal way. We must have that Holy One come to us, cleanse us from our sins, mortify our sinful flesh, and create in us a "new creature"....according to God, in righteousness and true holiness.

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