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## Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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# Sermon 161 on Psalm 119

By Thomas Manton

*The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.—Psalm 119:144.*

**I**N these words—

1. The excellency of the word is again acknowledged, *the righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting.*
2. A prayer is thereupon grounded, *give me understanding.*
3. The fruit and benefit of being heard in that prayer, *and I shall live.*

Because the righteousness of the word is everlasting, therefore we should beg understanding, and this sound understanding maketh way for life.

*First,* He beginneth with the praise of the word, ‘The righteousness of thy testimonies.’ The word of God is contemned by none but such as know not the excellency of it, both in its own nature and the fruits of it. The sum of the whole octonary [stanza of eight verses] is here repeated.

*Doct.* That the righteousness and everlasting righteousness of God’s testimonies should be deeply imprinted on our minds, and often thought of by us.

This stuck so in David’s mind that he could hardly get off from the meditation. Here I shall show you—

1. Wherein the everlasting righteousness of God’s testimonies consisteth.
2. What it is to have them deeply imprinted upon our minds, and when they are so.
3. Why they should be deeply imprinted upon our minds.

*First,* Wherein the everlasting righteousness of God’s testimonies consisteth.

*Ans.* In two things—in the tenor of them, and in the effects.

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1. In the tenor, and in that those terms which God dealeth with us are never repealed, but stand in force to all eternity. It is an everlasting truth that he that believeth in Christ shall be saved, and that without holiness no man shall see God. The moral part of the word is unchangeable, and shall never be altered; the same duties and the same privileges do always continue. Our Lord telleth us, Mat. 5:18, 'Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.' The truth of the doctrine of the law and prophets is more firm and stable than the frame of heaven and earth. Heaven and earth may be dissolved and made void, but his law shall never be made void; both in that part wherein he comforts us by his promises, and that part wherein he sets down our duty; we are eternally obliged to obedience, and God hath eternally obliged himself to reward and bless. There is an everlasting and unchangeable ordinance, by which we are bound to God, and he hath bound himself to us. We should not change, and God will not, having passed his word to us. The everlasting obligation on us dependeth on God's authority; the everlasting obligation on God's part dependeth on his own truth and veracity. And though we are poor changeable creatures, God hath interposed his authority: Mal. 3:6, 'I am the Lord; I change not;' James 1:17, 'In him there is no change or shadow of turning.' God would change if his truth was changed, but that is everlasting. It is not in the power of men to annihilate and change the law; they may break the law, but they cannot annihilate and change the law. Though it be not fulfilled by them, yet it shall be fulfilled in them and upon them. And God will not annihilate the law, for God cannot change or deny himself; in those things wherein he hath engaged his truth to the creature, he is immutable and infallible. Another expression is, Jer. 33:20,21, 'If you can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, that there shall not be day and night in their seasons, then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant.' The one shall not fail any more than the other. God compareth the firmness of his covenant with those things that are most unalterable, the standing of heaven and earth, the constant course of night and day. The ceremonial law was not abrogated till fulfilled in Christ. This is God's last will; the terms of life and salvation are still the same, other conditions are not to be expected.

2. In regard of the effects. These testimonies endure for ever, both in a way of grace and glory. In a way of grace, the word worketh in the heart an eternal principle, and carries us beyond temporal things, 2 Cor. 4:18; 1 Peter 1:23, 'Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.' The word worketh in us an eternal principle, which will abide with us as the root of everlasting blessedness. They that have served God faithfully shall not be deprived of eternal glory. Now, in glory the

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word abideth for ever, for though the souls of men are immortal, yet they have not in them a principle of blessed immortality. Sin is the root of eternal perdition, but grace of incorruption and eternal happiness. The wicked, though the substance of their soul and body shall not be annihilated, but upheld unto all eternity by the mighty power of God in the midst of eternal torments, yet all their glory and pleasure shall be consumed, and they themselves shall ever languish under the wrath of a highly provoked and then irreconcilable God: 1 John 2:17, 'He that doth the will of God abideth for ever.' The wicked shall endure by the word of God; it is a living death in regard of the execution of eternal wrath upon them that reject it, and the performance of everlasting blessings which are promised to them that receive and obey it; this will abide when other things fade. The word of God keepeth the godly and wicked alive in some sense.

Secondly, When is the word deeply imprinted upon our minds? That is discovered by two things—sound belief and serious consideration; when it is strongly believed, and often duly considered.

1. When it is strongly believed, or else it worketh not: for all things work according to the faith we exercise about them: 1 Thes. 2:13, 'The word of God, which worketh effectually also in you that believe.' Did we believe that our eternal condition depended upon the observance or non-observance of this rule, we would regard it more: Ps. 119:66, 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments.' Lord, I believe I must stand or fall by this rule, and therefore let me know all my duty. So Heb. 11:13, 'Being persuaded of these things, they embraced them.' We have not a thorough persuasion about these things; our persuasions about eternal things are very weak, when God's expressions about it are very clear and strong. Most men guess at a world to come, but are not thoroughly persuaded. They have a loose or general opinion that the scripture is the word of God, the rule by which they shall be tried; but do not soundly assent to it, and receive it as the word by which they shall be judged at the last day, John 12:48. Christ pronounceth as the word pronounceth. There is a non-contradiction, but not an active and lively faith; this and nothing but this bindeth the will and conscience to obedience.

2. Often considered. David still insists upon this, the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies. It is as if he had said, I have said it already, and I will repeat it again and again. It is constant thoughts are operative, and musing maketh the fire burn. Green wood is kindled not by a flash or spark, but by constant blowing. Deep, frequent, and ponderous thoughts leave some impression upon the heart; the greatest matters in the world will not work much upon him that will not think upon them; all the efficacy is lost for want of these ponderous thoughts. Why are all the offers and invitations of

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God's grace of so little effect? Mat. 22:5, *oideanelhsanteV* they made light of it, they would not take it into their care and thoughts. Why do all the injunctions and precepts of God work no more? Men will not consider in their hearts, Deut. 4:39,40, all the threatenings of judgement from God; and therefore he calls upon them, 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver,' Ps. 1. 22. It is for want of this that all the promises of God, of heaven and happiness work so little upon us: 2 Tim. 2:7. 'Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.' The truth lieth by, neglected, unimproved, till consideration take it up, and lay it in the view of conscience, and then it worketh. Till we take it into our thoughts, we have no use of any truth; therefore set your hearts seriously to consider of these things.

Thirdly, Why the everlasting righteousness of God's testimonies should be deeply imprinted in our minds.

1. It establisheth our judgments against vain fancies, and the humour of other gosselling. The apostle saith, Gal. 1:8, 'Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed; '1 Tim. 6:3, 'If any man teach otherwise, &c. There are some that expect *speculum spiritus sancti*, a greater measure of light beyond what the Spirit now affordeth, new nuncios from heaven, to refute the doubts of the perplexed world. No; the present rule leadeth a believer all along in his way to heaven; other and better institution shall not be, cannot be. Christ promised to bless this doctrine to the world's end: Mat. 28:20, 'I will be with you to the end of the world;' to guide and succour them. Christ prayed for no others but those that believe through their word, John 17:10; this word which the apostles have consigned to the use of the church. An angel is accursed if he should bring any other doctrine, Gal. 1:8. There is no other way of salvation given or to be given, Acts. 4:12. If an angel should hold out another way, believe it not. The apostle propounds an impossible case to show the certainty of this way; it is good to be sure of our rule; now this consideration helpeth that.

2. Because it bindeth and helpeth to obedience, partly as it showeth the absolute necessity of obedience, because the terms of salvation are indispensably fixed, and will everlastingly stand in force; therefore I must yield to God or perish. The soul cometh off most kindly to the ways of God when it is shut up unavoidably, without all hope of escape and evasion but by yielding to God's terms. The Lord will have the world know that there is no hope of a dispensation: Mark 16:16, 'He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.' The terms are peremptorily fixed; there is no relaxation in the gospel covenant. Now this doth bind the heart exceedingly to consider, ver. 152 of this psalm, 'Concerning thy testimonies, I have known them of old; thou hast founded

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them for ever.’ And partly as it urgeth to speediness of obedience. You will not get better terms, for the righteousness of God’s terms is everlasting; as good yield at first as at last. The laws of Christianity are always the same, and your heart is not likely to be better by delay. Your standing out were more justifiable in the account of reason if you could get better terms. Partly as it engageth to seriousness whilst it carrieth the mind off from the vanities of the world into the midst of the world to come. I am not to mind what will content me for the present, but what will profit me for ever holiness will abide when other things fade. My ways are to be scanned by an eternal rule. Some distinctions will not outlive time, as rich and poor, high and low; but the distinction of holy or unholy, sanctified or unsanctified, these abide: 1 Peter 1:24, ‘All flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.’ Nothing stirreth us up more to provide for a better life than to consider the uncertainty of the world’s glory, and the everlastingness of God’s approbation according to the rule of his word. When all things are dissolved, we are to be tried by a rule that will never fail. Our pomp, and honour, and credit, and all things that we hunt after in the world, are soon blasted, but the gospel tells us of things that are everlasting—everlasting torments and everlasting bliss; and therefore our thoughts should be more about them: Isa. Iv. 2, ‘Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?’ and John 6:27, ‘Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth to everlasting life.’ And partly as it engageth to constancy in obedience; for it must last as long as our rule lasteth. You are eternally bound to love God, and fear him and obey him. We must not only begin well, or serve him now and then in a good mood, but so love God as to love him for ever, so cleave to him as never to depart from him. For his law is an eternal obligation; you must never cease your work till you receive your wages, and that is when you enter into eternity. Yea, much of our work is wages, loving, praising God; all duties that do not imply weakness are a part of our happiness. Thus it hath a greater influence upon our obedience than we were at first aware of.

3. Because it conduceth much to our comfort. The apostle telleth us that the comfort of believers is built upon two immutable grounds, therefore it is so strong, Heb. 6:18. Now this everlasting righteousness of God’s testimonies is a comfort to us—

[1.] In all the changes of men’s affections towards us. Sometimes they smile and sometimes they frown, but the promises ever remain the same. There is Yea and Nay with men, but not with the promises; they are all Yea and Amen in

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Christ, 2 Cor. 1:20. Times alter and change, but the tenor of the covenant is always the same.

[2] It comforts us in the changes of God's dispensations to us—God may change his dispensations, yet his purposes of grace stand firm, and are carried on unalterably, by various and contrary means. We must interpret providence by the covenant, not the covenant by providence. We know the meaning of his works best by going into his sanctuary. The world misconstrueth his work and dealing to his children many times. If it be rightly interpreted, you will find God's righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. Sometimes God's providence is dark, but always just: Ps. 97:2, 'Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne;' Hab. 1:12, 'Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God?' That was the prophet's support in those sad times, when a treacherous people were exalted, when he was embrangled and lost about God's dispensations; this was his comfort and support, God's eternal immutability in the covenant. He is always the same, loveth his people as much as ever, as faithful and mindful of his covenant as ever; only a veil of sense covereth our eyes that we cannot see it.

[3] It comforts us against the difficulties of obedience, when it groweth irksome to us. The difficulty and trouble is but for a while, but we shall everlastingly have the comfort of it: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Then it will be no grief of heart to us to have watched, prayed, striven against sin, suffered, continued with him notwithstanding all temptations: Rom. 2:7, 'To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life.'

[4.] It is a comfort in death. We change and are changed, but God is always the same, the righteousness of Christ will bear weight for ever: Dan. 9:24, 'To bring in an everlasting righteousness.' The fruits of obedience last for ever: Ps. 112:7, 'His righteousness endureth for ever.' How comfortable is this to remember, that we may appear before God with this confidence, which he hath wrought in us, that the covenant of grace is an everlasting charter, that shall never be out of date nor wax old.

*Use.* Let it be thus with us; let it be so deeply imprinted upon our minds that it may leave an everlastingness there upon the frame of our spirits; for then we are transformed by the word, and cast into the mould of it. Now, who are they that have an everlasting righteous frame of heart?

1. Such as act out of an everlasting principle, or the new nature which worketh above the world. The word ingrafted is called an incorruptible seed,

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or the seed of God, 1 Peter 1:23, ‘that abideth in us,’ I John 3:9; when there is a divine principle in us, such a principle as is the seed and beginning of eternal life; when the word hath rooted itself in our hearts.

2. Such as by their constant progress towards an everlasting estate are going from strength to strength, serving God, and cleaving to him in a uniform constant course of holiness, not by fits and starts, but unchangeably: Acts 24:16, ‘To have always a conscience void of offence.’ Again, when you are in such an estate wherein you can bear the trial of those everlasting rules: Gal. 6:8, ‘He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting;’ Rom. 8:13, ‘If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.’ In short, if you have everlasting ends: 2 Cor. 4:18, ‘While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.’ Not making things temporal our scope and aim; that will not satisfy us: when we are deeply possessed with the thoughts of the other world: 1 Cor. 2:12, ‘We have not received the spirit of the world,’ and look upon all other things by the by, and use the world as if we used it not, 1 Cor. 7:29, 30.

*Secondly, I come now to the prayer, ‘Give me understanding, and I shall live.’*

1. Here is the benefit asked, *understanding*. 2. The person asking, David, *give me*.

3. The person from whom it is asked, from God.

First, The benefit asked, ‘Give me understanding;’ that is, the saving knowledge of God’s testimonies.

*Doct.* One great request that we have to put up to God should be for the saving knowledge of his testimonies.

The reasons why this should be our great request to God.

1. The necessity of understanding; that will appear—

[.] Because of our ignorance and folly, which is the cause of all our sin: Titus 3:3, ‘We ourselves were sometimes foolish and disobedient;’ therefore disobedient because foolish. Every natural man is a fool, blind in spiritual things; whatever understanding or quickness of judgment he hath in other things, in all things that relate to God and heaven, blind and foolish, and cannot see afar off: 2 Peter 19, ‘He that lacketh these things is blind.’ And you shall find that sinners are called fools: Prov. 1:22, ‘How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and scorners delight in scorning and fools hate knowledge?’ Ps.



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75:4, 'I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly; and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn.' They follow their own wit and will, to the ruin of bodies and souls, and all that they have. Their mirth is the mirth of fools, Eccles. 7:4,5; their service the sacrifice of fools, Eccles. 5:1; 2 Sam. 24:10, 'I have done very foolishly;' therefore give me understanding.

[2.] Knowledge is our cure. The state of grace is called a state of light: Eph. 5:8, 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.' So that the new estate is described by light, a directive and a persuasive light. It is very notable in Eph. 5:14, 'Arise from the dead, and God shall give thee light;' and Acts 26:18, 'To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.' In our natural estate we are all over darkness, slaves to the prince of darkness, doing the works of darkness, and posting on apace into utter darkness; and therefore it is light must cure us, and guide us into a better course: Col. 1:13, 'Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.'

2. Because of the excellency of understanding; therefore we should make it our request to God. Here are four considerations:—

[1.] Knowledge in the general is man's excellency. It is our privilege above the beasts; many of them excel us in beauty of colour, in strength, and nimbleness, and vivacity, and long life, and acuteness of sense; but we excel them in knowledge. And so God hath taught us more than the beasts of the field. Man is a rational creature, his life standeth in light: John 1:4, 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men.' Other creatures have life, but not such a life as is light, are not endowed with a reasonable soul and a faculty of understanding. The more of knowledge there is increased in us, the more of man there is in us.

[2] Divine knowledge is better than all other knowledge; to know God's nature and will, to know how God will be pleased, and how we may come to enjoy him; all other knowledge doth but please the fancy, this doth us good to the heart: Jer. 9:23, 24, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me;' as not in strength, so not in natural wisdom. Here I may take the argument of the text. Men do not properly live if they want the light of heavenly wisdom; without divine knowledge a man is little better than a beast. The endowment of reason was not given us merely to shift for ourselves, or provide for the animal life; other creatures do that better by instinct and natural sagacity, and are contented with less. No; man's life was given him for some other end, to know and serve his Maker.



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[3.] Of all the knowledge of God, practical knowledge is better than speculative; not so much subtlety to be able to discourse of his nature as to obey his will: Jer. 22:16, ‘He judged the cause of the poor and needy; was not this to know me? saith the Lord.’ The knowledge of God is not measured by sharpness of wit, but by serious ready practice; not strength of parts, but a good and honest heart; so to understand as to keep them: Ps. 111:10, ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.’ They understand best, not who can discourse most subtly, but who live most holily. When our faith is more strong, our reverence of God increased, our obedience more ready, then is our knowledge sound; when we follow those courses which we know God delighteth in, Jer. 9:24, and study to please him in all things: 1 John 2:4, ‘He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.’ He that doth not make conscience of his duty, he knoweth no such sovereign being as God is, that hath power to command, to save, and to destroy: Titus 1:16, ‘They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.’ So 1 John 3:6, ‘Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him nor known him.’ Well, then, in giving his word, God’s end was not to make trial of their wits, who could most sharply conceive; nor of their memories, who could most firmly retain; nor of their eloquence, who could most neatly discourse; but of their hearts, who would most obediently submit to him: that is knowledge indeed which tendeth to use and practice. Look, as *scire malum non est malum*—to know evil is not evil, for God knoweth evil, yet his knowledge is not evil; so *scire bonum, non est bonum*, to know that which is good doth not make a man good. This is the distinction between understanding and will; the understanding draweth the object to itself, but the will is drawn by the object to it. If I understand anything, I am not in a moral sense that which I understand; but if I will anything, or love anything, I am what I will and love. This is the difference between the two faculties.

[4] Transforming, regenerating, saving knowledge is the best part of practical knowledge. I add this because general knowledge may produce good life, or some outward conformity in the unregenerate 2 Peter 2:20, ‘For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’ Those that are destitute of the saving knowledge of Christ, they may cleanse their external conversation by that rational conviction, though not spiritual illumination, though strangers to inward mortification, and unrenewed in heart; yea, avoid gross sins, perform external duties. Oh I but the lively saving light, such as subdueth the heart to God, such as maketh a thorough change in us, that is the best 2 Cor. 3:18, ‘But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image,

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from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.’ When we so know Christ as to be like him, this is like heaven’s knowledge: 1 John 3:2, ‘And when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.’ Common truths have another efficacy, when they understand them by the lively light of the Spirit; when men know the torments of hell so as to flee from them: Mat. 3:7, ‘Flee from wrath to come;’ as a man would out of a ship that is sinking or a house falling. So when we see heaven so as it maketh us seek after it, Heb. 4:1, so to know Christ as to be made like him, this will do us good, and this is one of God’s best gifts.

*Use.* Oh! then, beg this gift of God. Lord, give me understanding eyes. Do not beg riches, and honours, and great things in the world, but beg for understanding; it is pleasing to God, 2 Chron. 1:12. This will bring other things with it. Be importunate, take no nay; Prov. 2:3, cry for knowledge, lift up thy voice for understanding. It will not come at the first call. Follow God as the blind man, Mark 10:5, ‘Lord, that my eyes may be opened, that I may receive my sight.’ So be earnest with God that the eyes of your understanding may be opened, that you may have such a sight of heaven as that your affections may be set upon things above; such a sight of hell as that ye may flee for refuge as if the avenger of blood were at your heels. Without this there can be no true piety: Ps. 14:3, ‘There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.’ Nay, there can be no salvation without this: Isa. 27:11, ‘It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will have no mercy upon them,’ &c. Ignorant people have a saying, He that made them will save them; but it is said they have no understanding; therefore he that made them will not save them; and therefore beg of God that he would break in upon your minds with the lively light of his Spirit.

Secondly, Here is the person asking this request, David, one well acquainted with God and his ways.

*Doct.* None know so much of God and his ways but they still need to know more. Petitions for understanding do not only become beginners, but grown Christians.

Three reasons of this point:—

1. That we may escape the deceits of a subtle devil, who lieth in wait for us, and assaults us on every hand, and maketh great advantage of the relics of our ignorance. The devils are called, Eph. 6:12, ‘Rulers of the darkness of this world.’ The dark part of the world is the devil’s territory; and so much of ignorance as is in the children of God, so much advantage hath Satan against us: 2 Cor. 2:11, ‘Lest Satan should get an advantage; for we are not ignorant of his devices.’ The

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more we know, the less advantage the devil hath of us; he layeth snares for us where we least suspect.

2. That we may serve a holy God with that exactness and diligence as will become his excellency. The fault of the heathen was that ‘when they knew God, they glorified him not as God,’ Rom. 1:21; because they knew so little, they did not improve the knowledge they had; and this is true in some degree of every Christian. God would be more loved, feared, trusted, served, did we know more of him. The clearer our sight, the warmer our hearts will be in his service: 1 Chron. 28:9, ‘Know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind.’ If we did know God, we would devote ourselves to his service.

3. That we may be prepared for our everlasting estate by degrees. Our everlasting estate is called the inheritance of the saints in light. Now we grow more meet for it by increasing in holiness: Prov. 4:18,19, ‘The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more to the perfect day; the way of the wicked is darkness, they know not at what they stumble.’ The just man is like the light that increaseth as the day groweth; the wicked are like the night that increaseth to thick darkness, till at last they fall into utter darkness.

*Use.* Well, then, let not only poor ignorant creatures, or young beginners, take up David’s prayer, but also grown Christians of longer standing. Go to God, and say, Give me understanding. Partly because practical knowledge is never at a stand; knowing of things as we ought to know them, it is possible for a man to see round about the compass of revealed truths. Though extensively no more truths are to be known, yet intensively we may know them better. The best are defective in their knowledge. And partly, too, because it is a very satisfactory thing to be sure we are in God’s way; in some nice debates it is hard to discern God’s interest, when all circumstances must be considered, and temptations hinder the sight of our duty. And partly that we may justify the ways of God against cavils, Mat. 24:24. We have to do with men that would even puzzle the very elect, if it were possible.

Thirdly, To whom is this petition made? To God.

*Doct.* If we would have the knowledge of divine things, we must seek to God.

I will give you some grounds of this. Partly because he is the fountain of knowledge, the first mind or intellect, called in scripture ‘the Father of lights,’ James 1:17. He is the sun that must not only shine on us, to make us see things, but shine through us to make us be enlightened ourselves. Ours is but a participation. Now, to show whence we receive all, God will be asked. And partly, too, because God gave the rule, and therefore he must interpret it, *ejus est*

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*interpretari cujus est condere.* He can best show his own meaning; and therefore in all doubtful cases repair to him, especially since he hath undertaken in necessary cases: Jer. 31:34, 'For they shall all know me from the least to the greatest;' and loveth to be employed by his people for that end and purpose. Once more, without his Spirit the clearest light we have hath no efficacy, Rom. 1:18. He will have it sought.

I come to the third and last thing, the fruit and benefit, 'And I shall live.' I shall explain the words in the prosecution of this point.

*Doct.* The saving knowledge of God's testimonies is the only way to live.

There is a threefold life

1. Life natural.
2. Life spiritual.
3. Life eternal.

In all these considerations may the point be made good.

First, Life is taken for the life of nature, or the life of the body, or life temporal, called 'this life' in scripture, 1 Cor. 15:19; 1 Tim. 4:8. Among outward things nothing is more precious than life; it maketh us capable of enjoying what the world can afford to us. We give all that we have to preserve it, Job 2:9. Indeed, in competition with worldly things, we do well to value it; but not in competition with our duty and love to Christ; so we must not count our life dear to us: Acts 20:24, 'I count not my life dear to me;' and Luke 14:26, 'Whosoever hateth not father and mother,' &c., 'and his own life.' Out of the conscience of our duty to Christ, we must be willing to expose it, for he can give us a better life, John 11:24; but otherwise so far as we can preserve it with our duty, it must be precious to us, and we must seek the interests of it. Well, then, in this sense it is no unbecoming thing for a Christian to say, 'Give me understanding, that I may live.' My life present, which mine enemies seek to take from me, this life is from God, both originally and in a way of constant preservation. God gave it at first: Gen. 2:7, 'God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul;' and still this life is at God's disposing, and he will sooner continue it to us in a way of obedience than in a way of sin: Job 10:12, 'Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit;' Acts 17:28, 'In him we live and move, and have our being.' The same power that giveth us being maintaineth it as long as he pleaseth. All is at the daily dispose of God.

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2. Life is better preserved in a way of obedience than by evil-doing; that provoketh God to cast us off, and exposes us to dangers. It is not in the power of the world to make us live or die a day sooner or longer than God pleaseth. If God will make us happy, they cannot make us miserable. Therefore ‘Give me understanding, and I shall live;’ that is, lead a comfortable and happy life for the present. Prevent sin, and you prevent danger. Obedience is the best way to preserve life temporal. As great a paradox as it seems to the world, it is

a scripture truth: Prov. 4:4, ‘Keep my commandments, and live and ver. 13, ‘Take hold of instruction; let her not go, keep her, for she is thy life;’ and Prov. 3:16, ‘Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left riches and honour;’ and ver. 18, ‘She is a tree of life.’ The knowledge and practice of the word is the only means to live comfortably and happily here, as well as for ever hereafter.

Secondly, Life spiritual; that is twofold—the life of justification and the life of sanctification.

1. The life of justification: Rom. 5:18, ‘The free gift came upon all men to justification of life.’ He is dead not only on whom the hangman hath done his work, but also he on whom the judge bath passed sentence, and the law pronounceth him dead. In this sense we were all dead, and justification is called justification to life; there is no living in this sense without knowledge: Isa. 53:11, ‘By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.’ We live by faith, and faith cometh by hearing, and hearing doth no good unless the Lord giveth understanding; as meats nourish not unless received and digested.

2. The life of sanctification: Eph. 2:1, ‘And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.’ And men live not properly till they live the life of grace; they live a false counterfeit life, not a blessed, happy, certain, and true life. Now this life is begun and carried on by saving knowledge: Col. 3:10, ‘The new man is renewed in knowledge.’ Again, men are said to be ‘alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them,’ Eph. 4:18. They that are ignorant are dead in sin. Life spiritual cometh by knowledge, hence beginneth the change of the inward man, and thenceforth we live. Give me understanding, *ut vere in te vivam*, that the true life begun in me may grow and increase daily, but never be quenched by sin.

Thirdly, Life everlasting, or our blessed estate in heaven. So it is said of the saints departed, they all live to God, Luke 20:38; and this is called water of life, the tree of life, the crown of life; properly this is life. What is the present life in comparison of everlasting life? The present life, it is *mors vitalis*, a living death, or *mortalis vita*, a dying life, a kind of death; it is always *in*

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*fluxu*, like a stream; it runneth from us as fast as it cometh to us: Job 14:2, 'He flieth as a shadow, and continueth not.' We die as fast as we live; it differeth but as the point from the line where it terminateth. It is not one and the same, no permanent thing; it is like the shadow of a star in a flowing stream; its contentments are base and low, Isa. 57:10, called 'the life of thy hands;' it is patched up, of several creatures, fain to ransack the storehouses of nature to support a ruinous fabric. And compare it with a life of grace here; it doth not exempt us from sin, nor miseries. Our capacities are narrow, we are full of fears and doubts and dangers; but in the life of glory we shall not sin or sorrow more. This is meant here, 'The righteousness of God's testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.' It is chiefly meant of the life of glory; this is the fruit of saving knowledge, John 17:3, when we so know God and Christ as to come to God by him.

*Use.* Let us seek the saving knowledge of God, that we may live, first spiritually here, and gloriously there. But few mind it; all desire sharpness of wit, and to be as knowing as others; no man would be a fool, but would own a wickedness in morals rather than a weakness in intellectuals; but who thinketh of being wiser for heaven, of being seasoned with the fear of God? Most men choke all the motions and inclinations they have in that kind with worldly delights and worldly businesses, being alive to the world and dead to God, thronging their hearts with carnal vanities, but leaving no room for higher and serious thoughts.

But at length be persuaded; what do men desire but life? If you know God and Christ with a saving knowledge, you shall have it. (1.) We were made for this end, to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved, 1 Tim. 2:4. We do not live merely to live, but to make provision for a better life; not to satisfy our bodies out of God's store-house, but to furnish our souls with grace, and exercise ourselves in his law day and night, that we may know his will concerning us, and provide for a better life, and live according to the directions of his word. (2.) No creature is so bad as man when he degenerateth from his end for which he was created: it is not so much for the Sea to break its bounds, or to have a defect in the course of nature, as the degeneration of man. (3.) You live not properly when destitute of the life of God and heavenly wisdom: he doth not live the life of a man, nor preserve the rectitude of his nature.

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