

Are You Ashamed?

“Let My Heart Be Sound in Thy Statutes”

David prayed one of the most important prayers a child of God can ever pray:

“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.” — Psalm 119:80

Think about those words for a moment. David did not merely ask God to give him more information. He did not simply pray for a greater knowledge of facts. He prayed that his heart would be sound in the statutes of God.

Why?

“That I be not ashamed.”

Every one of us understands something about shame. Most of us can remember being told as children, “You should be ashamed of yourself.” We knew what those words meant. We had done something wrong. We had acted in a way that was wicked, dishonest, disobedient, or foolish, and once it was brought to our attention, we were embarrassed by what we had done.

As adults, we can look back upon things in our own lives and say, “I wish I had never done that. I wish I had never said that. I wish I had never had that attitude.”

David understood that feeling. He prayed concerning the sins of his past. Like David, there are things in our lives that we would rather our family and friends never know. We may call them mistakes, failures, misdeeds, or sins, but the fact remains that we did them.

Years may pass, but sometimes the memory returns and we still hang our heads.

But Psalm 119:80 brings us to another kind of shame. It is the shame of discovering that we do not know the Word of God as we should, that we do not understand it as we should, and that we have not applied it to our lives as we should.

David prayed:

“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.”

What Does It Mean to Have a Sound Heart?

The word translated “sound” carries the idea of being whole, complete, upright, mature, and in agreement with truth.

The same basic idea appears when Scripture describes Noah:

“Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.” — Genesis 6:9

It also appears in the command:

“Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God.” — Deuteronomy 18:13

And Job is described in similar language:

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.” — Job 1:1

Now, when the Bible calls Noah or Job “perfect,” it is not teaching that they were sinless men.

They were not.

The only sinless man who has ever walked this earth is Jesus Christ.

Scripture makes our condition plain:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” — 1 John 1:8

And again:

“If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” — 1 John 1:10

So biblical perfection in passages such as these does not mean sinless perfection. It speaks of soundness, uprightness, maturity, and a life directed toward God.

Noah walked with God.

Job feared God and eschewed evil.

That is what a sound heart produces.

A Clean and Undivided Heart

David prayed elsewhere:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” — Psalm 51:10

David knew what an unsound heart could do. He had experienced the consequences of sin.

His desire was not merely for outward religious respectability. He wanted God to work inwardly.

He wanted a clean heart.

He wanted a right heart.

He wanted an undivided heart.

He wanted a sound heart.

The opposite is the condition James describes:

“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” — James 1:8

That is the person who wants God today and the world tomorrow. He believes one thing when it is convenient and another thing when pressure comes.

There is no stability there.

A sound heart is different. A sound heart is anchored in truth.

Sound Wisdom Requires a Sound Heart

The Bible says:

“For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous.” — Proverbs 2:6–7

We are also told:

“My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion.” — Proverbs 3:21

And wisdom declares:

“Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength.” — Proverbs 8:14

Now here is the question: How can an unsound heart receive sound wisdom?

It cannot.

God has not given His people a spirit of confusion and instability.

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” — 2 Timothy 1:7

There is a connection throughout Scripture between a sound heart, sound wisdom, sound doctrine, sound words, and sound conduct.

If the heart is wrong, sooner or later everything else becomes wrong.

Sound Doctrine Changes the Way We Live

Paul wrote that the law is good “if a man use it lawfully.” He then described lawlessness, disobedience, ungodliness, sin, murder, immorality, lying, perjury, and other wickedness, concluding with this statement:

“And if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.” — 1 Timothy 1:10

Notice that.

Sin is contrary to sound doctrine.

Sound doctrine is not merely something we place in a statement of faith. Sound doctrine is truth that governs conduct.

A man may claim to believe the Bible, but if his heart continually rejects the commands of God, there is something wrong.

The Scripture gives us a simple principle:

“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” — Job 28:28

The fear of God and the departure from evil belong together.

“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil.” — Proverbs 8:13

And:

“By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.” — Proverbs 16:6

If I truly fear God, that fear will affect what I do.

Why do I refuse to murder?

God said not to murder.

Why do I refuse to steal?

God said not to steal.

Why do I refuse to bear false witness?

God has forbidden it.

The fear of God puts boundaries around our conduct.

When men lose the fear of God, those boundaries disappear.

That is why Scripture, after describing the wickedness of men, says:

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.” — Romans 3:18

A sound heart produces sound wisdom. Sound wisdom produces sound doctrine. Sound doctrine teaches us to depart from evil.

Our conduct ultimately reveals the condition of our hearts.

God’s Statutes Are His Boundary Markers

David did not merely pray, “Let my heart be sound.”

He prayed:

“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes.”

God’s statutes are His decrees, ordinances, commands, and boundaries.

They tell us what is right and what is wrong.

They tell us where we may walk and where we must not walk.

Modern man often looks upon God’s law as a restriction upon freedom. David looked upon God’s law as protection.

He understood that God establishes boundaries for our good.

When my heart is sound in God’s statutes, I want to know those boundaries.

I want to know what pleases God.

I want to know what displeases Him.

I want to know what I may do.

I want to know what I must not do.

That is not bondage. That is wisdom.

The Word of God Gives Light

David said:

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” — Psalm 119:105

Every one of us has tried to walk through a dark room and hit something we could not see. We stumble because we do not have light.

Spiritually, the same principle applies.

God's Word shows us where to walk.

Psalm 1 says:

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.”

Notice the progression.

First comes counsel. You begin listening to the advice of the ungodly.

Then comes association:

“Nor standeth in the way of sinners.”

And eventually comes agreement:

“Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”

Advice leads to association, and association can eventually lead to agreement.

What protects the righteous man?

“But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”
— Psalm 1:2

He fills his mind with something better.

He fills it with the Word of God.

David repeatedly said in Psalm 119 that he would meditate upon God's precepts, statutes, commandments, and testimonies.

That is how a sound heart is developed.

We Should Be Ashamed of Our Neglect of Scripture

Now we come to the practical question.

How can Christians be ashamed because their hearts are not sound in God's statutes?

First, we should be ashamed of our neglect of the Word of God.

Many professing Christians have never read the entire Bible even once.

Others read it but never meditate upon it.

Some read Scripture merely because they feel guilty if they do not.

They read a chapter, close the Bible, check the duty off their list, and five minutes later cannot remember what they read.

That is not what David meant by meditation.

I would rather read one verse, understand what it means, and apply it to my life than rush through forty chapters and understand none of them.

We make time for the things we truly value.

Every one of us has twenty-four hours in a day. We arrange those hours according to our priorities.

The uncomfortable truth is that sometimes Scripture simply is not one of our highest priorities.

After years of hearing sermons, attending church, and owning several Bibles, should we not know more of God's Word than we presently know?

Should we not understand it better?

Should we not be more capable of applying it?

“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.”

We Should Know How to Face Trials

Second, we should be ashamed when trials come and we do not know how to respond.

Peter wrote about believers being “in heaviness through manifold temptations,” and about the trial of faith being more precious than gold.

Trials are part of life.

Every one of us faces them.

The question is not whether we will be tried. The question is whether we understand God's purpose and God's Word well enough to walk through those trials faithfully.

Peter wrote:

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him.” — 2 Peter 1:3

God has not left His people without instruction.

He has given us what we need.

Yet how can we claim a promise we do not know?

How can we follow biblical instruction we have never learned?

How can we understand what God is teaching us when we remain ignorant of His Word?

Scripture promises:

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful.” — 1 Corinthians 10:13

God provides a way through temptation and trial.

But we need to know His Word well enough to recognize that way.

We Should Be Able to Minister to Others

Third, we should be ashamed when someone needs spiritual help and we do not know what to say.

God told His people:

“Ye are my witnesses.” — Isaiah 43:10

But what kind of witnesses can we be if we do not know the God about whom we are witnessing?

How can we speak of His character if we do not know His character?

How can we tell others of His promises if we do not know His promises?

How can we warn someone biblically if we do not know the warnings of Scripture?

How can we comfort the brokenhearted when we know nothing beyond the familiar phrases everybody else uses?

Many people can come when sorrow arrives.

Far fewer know how to bring biblical comfort.

A Christian who knows the Word of God ought to be able to bring truth into a hospital room, a funeral home, a troubled marriage, a family crisis, or the life of someone battling temptation.

God has called us to be witnesses.

We need to know what He has said.

We Should Be Ashamed Before God in Prayer

Fourth, we should be ashamed when we come before God with an unsound heart.

John wrote:

“And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.”

Then he said:

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” — 1 John 3:19, 21

There is confidence in prayer when we are walking in truth.

But think of how often we come before God asking for His help while knowing that we have neglected His Word.

We have had time for entertainment.

Time for conversation.

Time for our interests.

Time for everything else.

Then suddenly trouble comes and we say, “Lord, help me.”

Perhaps there are times when we ought first to say:

“Lord, I am ashamed. You have given me Your Word, and I have neglected it. I have not learned Your doctrine. I have not studied Your statutes. I have not understood Your boundaries. Forgive me, and teach me.”

That is an honest prayer.

One Day We Will Stand Before Christ

Finally, we should remember that we will appear before our Lord.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” — 2 Corinthians 5:10

For the believer, this is not a judgment to determine whether Christ has saved us. It concerns our service.

How have we lived?

How have we used what God placed in our hands?

How faithfully have we served Him?

Every true child of God ought to desire to hear:

“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

When that day comes, I do not want to look back and realize how much of my life I wasted while the Word of God sat unopened.

I do not want to discover that I knew more about the world than I knew about Scripture.

I do not want to have to admit that God gave me His truth, His commandments, His wisdom, His warnings, and His promises, but I never took the time to learn them.

Lord, Let My Heart Be Sound

David's prayer goes straight to the heart of the Christian life:

“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.”

That should be our prayer.

Lord, give me a heart that loves Your truth.

Give me a heart that receives Your wisdom.

Give me a heart that fears You and hates evil.

Give me a heart that knows Your commandments and respects Your boundaries.

Give me understanding when I face trials.

Give me Scripture when another person needs encouragement.

Give me confidence when I come before You in prayer.

Give me a life that will not bring shame when I stand before Christ.

We have God's Word.

We are not without light.

We are not without instruction.

We are not without wisdom.

The question is whether we will read it, meditate upon it, believe it, and obey it.

David knew that everything began in the heart.

So should we.

“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.”

May that become not merely a verse we quote, but a prayer we sincerely pray and a life we earnestly seek to live.