

# God's Law Sustains

Psalms 19:7-14

SS Lesson for 10/10/2010

**Devotional Scripture:** Ps 3:3-6

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# Introduction

## **Overview and Approach to Lesson**

The concept of the outline of the lesson came from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator. This week's lesson teaches how **God's Law Sustains** us. The **study's aim** is to demonstrate that God's law was given to us by Him to sustain us. The **study's application** is to know that when we abide by the law of God, we will be revived.

## **Lesson Introduction and Background**

### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

#### *The Curse of Lawlessness*

The school experience involves more than learning how to read, write, and do math. It also involves learning to follow rules of the classroom. In an earlier generation, this included such basics as no gum-chewing, lining up correctly, and addressing teachers with respect. Teachers seem to have other battles to fight these days. Rules now include no text-messaging in class, no gang-related clothing, and no inappropriate touching. Recently I was waiting in line to be served by a clerk at a local drugstore photo counter. The person in front of me was confused and was demanding an accounting of his bill to the last penny. As I tried to wait politely for the young clerk to finish with this persistent customer, another man came up who was obviously impatient. He initially waited behind me. But as the first customer continued to fuss and linger, the second man was soon standing beside me. When my turn came, the clerk turned to me, but Mr. Impatient asserted himself and demanded to be waited upon, disregarding me. I chose not to make a scene, but thought, "This man never learned the basics. He doesn't even know the rule about lining up and waiting your turn. He needs to go back to kindergarten." Any ordered society needs rules that guide public behavior. Because we always have rule breakers among us, we need laws and police to enforce them. Enforcement requires judges and penalties, and so a legal system is born. The best societies, however, are ones in which the enforcement of laws is seen as a personal responsibility rather than a police task. The citizenry follows the law, even when there is no possibility of police detection or prosecution. In a lawless society, rules are spurned and disregarded by individuals. If this becomes too widespread, the result is either chaos or the imposition of a draconian police state. The answer is not really to have more laws and law enforcers. The ultimate and only answer is to have people with the integrity to strive to obey the laws without the threat of a watching police officer. A problem in all of this, however, is that human laws are always imperfect and may favor one citizen at the expense of another. A notorious example in the history of the United States is the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. It required people who abhorred slavery to assist in the tracking down and capturing of runaway slaves. This law perpetuated injustice on several levels and contributed to the societal breakdown of America's Civil War. In the Old Testament, Israel was privileged to be both the people of God and the people of God's laws. They had a legal code to regulate their religion and society, but it was more than the product of the best legal minds and traditions of their day. It was God's law, delivered to Israel through God's chosen representatives. It was perfect, for it gave humans guidance from the Creator on how humans should live. It has been referred to as an "owner's manual," written by the great designer. From this perspective, then, lawlessness is more than a penchant to break the rules of a society. It is a disregard for the expressed will of God in the realm of human behavior. This understanding of the relationship between God, God's laws, and human beings is at the heart of today's lesson.

#### *Lesson Background*

Hebrew poetry is unlike traditional English poetry. Whereas we are accustomed to poetry that uses rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and repetitive structure, the poetry we find in Psalms relies more on a balance of ideas and repetition of thoughts. We call this feature of Hebrew poetry parallelism. It is important to recognize this parallel arrangement when we read the Bible. If we do not, we may not recognize that two lines of poetry are saying the same thing. Instead, we may think there are two points being made and impose an incorrect interpretation on the text. Our lesson today looks at the last half of Psalm 19, which features

several good examples of parallelism. The superscription of Psalm 19 presents this work as a composition of David “for the director of music.” This could mean that the psalm was originally a private composition of King David that eventually became a resource to be used in public worship. It begins with the same theme as last week’s psalm (Psalm 8) in extolling the wonders of God’s creation. The theme of Psalm 19:1–6, just before today’s lesson text, is the witness that is given to God’s glory through the beauty of the heavens and the earth. Its sense of the verbal proclamation of creation reminds us of God speaking creation into existence as portrayed in Genesis 1. In the last half of the psalm (today’s text), this verbal aspect of God’s creative powers is directed toward the divine laws given to the people of God. As God’s creation is beautiful and perfect, so are his laws.

### **From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

People need a reliable voice of authority to which they listen and by which they live. When their lives get messed up and they wonder whether they are really getting anywhere successfully, is there a voice of authority to help correct the situation? When relationships turn sour and a person wonders whether there is any way to correct them, is there somewhere to find authoritative answers? Is there somewhere to turn in order to find out what a good marriage is supposed to look like? Are there answers for depression? Is there such a voice of authority in humanity? Can we believe, for example, everything that our government tells us? Are renowned scientists reliable sources of truth? As far as that goes, can we even trust one another in a work or school situation? In these various areas of life, there are always good and wise people who can give good guidance. We would not want to live in despair of ever being able to find direction when we need it. We are simply attempting to make the point that there is just one consistently reliable voice of authority that never fails, and that is the Word of God. Last week we looked at how God sustains us and nurtures us, seeing at the same time a glorious display of His majesty and His awesome power. This week we follow through on that theme and see how God’s law, His Word, sustains us. When we are divorced from the law of God, we are subject to eventual ruin. History has shown that to be true, but sometimes we are slow to learn those lessons. God gave us His Word so that we would be safe and He could protect us from harm. We live in a time when mention of God has been taken out of schools and our government. We have chosen secularism over God. In our private and public lives, we have often become so busy that we do not have any time to draw close to Him as our ancestors did. But it is still not too late to stem that secularizing tide. Our lesson shows us how to bring God’s Word back into focus and our lives back on track. As we begin this study, we must be reminded that David used different words to express the same idea of God’s law in this psalm. Some of these are “statutes,” “testimony,” “law,” “precepts,” “judgments,” and “commandments.” They all refer to the concept of God’s Holy Word.

## **Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Qualities of the Law (Ps 19:7-11)**

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;  
8 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.  
10 More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.

### **God's word is perfect and trustworthy (vs 7)**

*Perfect because God's word gives freedom and blessings (James 1:25)*

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

*Perfect because the Bible was written through the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21)*

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

*Trustworthy because God said it (Rev 21:5)*

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

*Trustworthy because God cannot lie (Heb 6:18)*

18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

*Trustworthy because God's testimony is the greatest (1 John 5:9)*

9 We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son.

*Trustworthy because God's word is holy and righteous (Rom 7:12)*

12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

*Trustworthy because God's word is good (1 Tim 1:8)*

8 We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

*Trustworthy because it endures (from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator)*

We have a comprehensive description of an entirely trustworthy revelation from God. First, it will never become outmoded or out-of-date. The phrase summarizing that is "enduring forever." Second, we never need to worry about trusting in it. The primary idea behind the Hebrew word translated "true" is that of stability, describing something that is certain, true, and trustworthy. The phrase "righteous altogether" indicates that God's Word is right in its entirety with no exceptions.

### **God's word brings joy and guidance (vs 8)**

*God's word brings joy in our inner being (Rom 7:22)*

22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law;

*God's word brings guidance because it provides insight (Ps 119:99-100)*

99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. 100 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

*God's word brings guidance because it is a light for our path (Ps 119:105)*

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

*God's word brings guidance because it provides understanding (Ps 119:130)*

130 The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

*God's word brings guidance because it provides wisdom (Prov 2:6)*

6 For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

*God's word brings guidance because it exposes sin (Rom 7:7)*

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

*God's word brings joy because the Holy Spirit gives joy when the word is welcomed (1 Thess 1:6)*

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

*God's word brings joy because it shows us that we will receive the goal of our faith (1 Peter 1:8-9)*

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

*God's word brings joy because that's why it was written (1 John 1:4)*

4 We write this to make our joy complete.

### **God's word is truth and it endures (vs 9)**

*God's word is truth because God is righteous (Ps 119:142)*

142 Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true.

*God's word is truth because Jesus is the word, and He was full of truth (John 1:14)*

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

*God's word is truth because Jesus' words brings knowledge of the truth (John 8:31-32)*

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

*God's word endures because it never spoils (John 6:27)*

27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

*God's word endures because God keeps His promises (Rev 3:10)*

10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

*God's word endures because His word stands forever (1 Peter 1:25)*

25 but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

*God's word endures because His word must be accomplished (Matt 5:18)*

18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

*God's word endures because it is imperishable (1 Peter 1:23)*

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

### **God's word has value (vs 10)**

*God's word is valuable because it is worth all that can be possessed (Matt 13:45-46)*

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

*God's word is valuable because godliness has value for all things (1 Tim 4:8)*

8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

*God's word is valuable because it is combined with faith (Heb 4:2)*

2 For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

*God's word is valuable because it brings wisdom (Prov 8:10-11)*

10 Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, 11 for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

### **God's word rewards (vs 11)**

*God's word brings rewards because it provides God's revelation (Prov 29:18)*

18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.

*God's word brings rewards because God rewards those who earnestly seek Him (Heb 11:6)*

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

*God's word brings rewards because it provides freedom if applied (James 1:25)*

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

*God's word brings rewards because it brings a blessing if read (Rev 1:3)*

3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

*God's word brings rewards because it brings a blessing if obeyed (Luke 11:28)*

28 He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

### **Application of the Law (Ps 19:12-14)**

12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.

13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

## **Gods' Word cleanses faults (12)**

*Cleanses faults through the washing with water through the word (Eph 5:26)*

26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,

*Cleanses faults through the spoken word of God (John 15:3)*

3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

*Cleanses faults through obedience to the word (1 Peter 1:22-23)*

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

*Cleanses faults through sanctification of the word (John 17:17)*

17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

## **Gods' Word frees from willful sin (13)**

*Gods' Word frees from willful sin through keeping it in our mind and spirit (Ps 119:11)*

11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

*Gods' Word frees from willful sin through living according to it (Ps 119:9)*

9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

*Gods' Word frees from willful sin because it is God breathed (2 Tim 3:16)*

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

*Gods' Word frees from willful sin through it living in us (1 John 2:14)*

14 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

## **Gods' Word teaches how to be acceptable to God (14)**

*Acceptable through being sanctified (Rom 15:16)*

16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

*Acceptable through giving to others (Phil 4:18)*

18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

*Acceptable through praying for others (1 Tim 2:1-3)*

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior

*Acceptable through helping those in need (1 Tim 5:3)*

3 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.

*Acceptable through being part of God's spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5)*

5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

*Acceptable through suffering for doing good (1 Peter 2:20)*

20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

What is the Christian to do with the Old Testament law? Moses Maimonides, the medieval Jewish rabbi, counted 613 separate commandments in the laws of Moses. Maimonides catalogued these laws in two divisions. One set consisted of the negative, "you shall not" directives. Maimonides listed 365 of these, significant for him because it is the number of days in a solar year. The other set consisted of the positive, "you shall" directives. Maimonides found 248 of these and linked them to the segments in the human body. Every commandment on Maimonides's list can be found in the Old Testament, but we certainly ignore a lot of them today. For example, #606 is the instruction to provide each soldier with a shovel in order to dig a latrine (Deuteronomy 23:13). Commandment #221 forbids those taking a Nazirite vow to eat raisins (Numbers 6:3). Commandment #69 forbids men to shave their beards (Leviticus 19:27). These and many others are seen as either irrelevant or nonbinding to the Christian. But we don't want to toss out the figurative baby with the bathwater! The church must work hard to understand the value of the Old Testament law and its application for us today. The gospel frees us from the tyranny of the law and its hopelessness (Romans 8:2; Colossians 2:14). No one in training is successful if the coach offers nothing but criticism. The law tends to highlight our flaws and weaknesses, whereas the gospel allows us to transcend sin and live for the Lord without dread. This does not mean we have no more rules. Paul described his own duty to the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21), meaning Paul still had high moral expectations for his own lifestyle. Freedom from the law is not a license to sin. It is a move from service motivated by dread to service motivated by love. The psalmist understands this when he exclaims "Oh, how I love your law!" (Psalm 119:97). Christianity, at its core, is not a religion of rule-keeping. In fact, the central message of the gospel is that keeping rules will never earn salvation. We just cannot obey all the rules all the time, whether there be 613 of them (per Maimonides), or 10 (Exodus 20:2-17), or just 2 (Matthew 22:36-40). Paul advises us to think about those things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable (Philippians 4:8). David's description of the law of the Lord in Psalm 19 meets all of these criteria. We would do well to ponder God's law in all of its beauty and glory.

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

The Scriptural text is about God's Word. We can be thankful that God has given us the Bible, for through it we know about Him and what He expects of us. There are many synonyms for God's Word in Ps 19:7-8. The phrases "the law of the Lord," "the testimony of the Lord," "the statutes of the Lord," and "the commandment of the Lord" all deal with God's Word. These four phrases give us just a small taste of how we can think of the Bible. We do the same thing in how we speak today. We talk about the Bible, the Book, and God's Word. First, God's Word is "perfect, converting the soul." The Bible is entirely without error; so it makes sense that it is called perfect. "Converting," or reviving, the soul means that the Bible will "bring us back to ourselves, to our God, to our duty; for it shows us our sinfulness and misery in our departures from God" (Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Hendrickson)! Every day we face the world, the flesh, and the devil and his minions. It is easy to get off track. When we read the Bible, it

revives us. It puts us back on track with Him. God's Word is also beneficial because it makes "wise the simple." The book of Proverbs reminds us that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (9:10). Compared to God, we are very simple creatures. He is wise beyond our imagination. Yet He deigns to share His wisdom with us if we but ask (James 1:5). It is also significant that the Hebrew word for "wisdom" can also be translated "skill," or "skillful." We need skill in life. God's wisdom is the source of all meaningful skills. God's Word is also "right." That may seem like a repeat of the last phrase, that God's Word is "perfect." There certainly is some overlap, but by "right" the psalmist was pointing out that it is upright; it is the measuring rod to hold everything else up to. Everything else is crooked compared to God's Word. Mankind's opinions are only slightly crooked at best; only God's Word is absolutely straight. The Bible is the only true source of right living on earth. Nothing else even comes close. "The commandment of the Lord is pure" speaks of clarity and perspicuity. So many people think that the Bible is hard to understand. There are difficult parts, to be sure, but as Mark Twain once said, "Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand." There is a lot we can understand right away, and those are the places we should start. These clear commands of God enlighten our eyes. Matthew Henry put it this way: "It brings us to a sight and sense of our sin and misery, and directs us in the way of duty." Yes, that is what we need. We need to be aware of our sin. That is why daily reading of God's Word is so important. If you are not reading the Word each day, make that a priority. You will not regret it!

### ***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

1. Wise living flows from our knowledge of and commitment to God's Word (Ps. 19:7)
2. Our joy in life is directly related to our exposure to God's Word (vs. 8)
3. Because God's Word endures forever, it is always completely dependable (vs. 9)
4. Earthly treasures bring temporary wealth; following God's Word brings eternal rewards (vs. 10-11)
5. To stray from Scripture is to abandon God's means of protecting us from sin (vs. 12-13)
6. Only when in humble submission to Him will our efforts be pleasing to God (vs. 14)

### ***Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

True heart religion is not event driven but a patient and consistent daily walk. The faithful, continual process is not possible by mere human effort. God has provided the means and power by which to honor Him with our daily thoughts and activities.

#### **The Word of God is truth (Ps. 19:7-8)**

So often we wish we knew someone who could tell us the truth about ourselves, our future, or our destiny. Human authorities can be slightly or completely wrong on matters of spiritual and moral judgment. We need to know what path to take to truth and sound judgment. If we do find out what to think and do, we may not have the power or ability to make the necessary changes, especially in ourselves. As we read and believe God's Word, we are changed. This results in our joy and enlightenment. How like God to not only fix our situation but also give us the wonderful benefits of wisdom and righteousness! It is impossible to exaggerate the value of the blessings that become ours by drinking in God's Word.

#### **Seeing God correctly (Ps. 19:9a)**

Some modern theologian-philosophers think it is wrong to fear God. They assume He is only love and forgiveness, forgetting that He is also truth and judgment. Fearing God is not negative when it involves reverential trust, love, and faith. Fear God, and you will fear nothing else. If you do not fear God, you will fear everything else.

#### **Spiritual riches in the Word of God (Ps. 19:9b-11)**

The judgments of God referred to here include all His expressed decisions concerning the Tightness of our lives and our activities or potential activities. As you meditate on His judgments, you will realize how

desirable and valuable they are. As His servant, you are directed toward and instructed in behavior that honors Him and blesses others. A fulfilling and rewarding life will be forged as you walk in the light of the Word.

**God's help (Ps. 19:12-13)**

You see here what you may have feared, that you may be going wrong and not even know about it. God has that covered too! The psalmist asked God (and you may ask) to be cleansed from sins that were hidden from him. No sin is hidden from God. When you have confessed to Him the sin you know about and are in a repentant and obedient attitude, you can ask Him to cleanse away anything you may have missed. God's plan for the way you live is complete and perfect. Rest in Him. It is also good to ask God to keep you from sin. You want to be free from sin, not dominated by it. You want to be upright and innocent in all your daily actions. The one indispensable source for success in this is God. It is appropriate to ask for and to expect to receive His help.

**Be acceptable to God (Ps. 19:14)**

Our great desire is to be increasingly free from sin. This would mean that more and more of our thoughts and actions are righteous and approved by God. That kind of life is a marvelous testimony to family and friends. You may not feel you can pray to be enabled to do great deeds and have an outstanding testimony. You might think that seems proud, even arrogant. But you can certainly pray, as a humble servant of God, that your life would be increasingly free from sin and acceptable to God.