

## Modern Longings – Ancient Words: Are God’s Ways Good?

### Psalm 19

I have one question today that I want you to think carefully about: **Are God’s ways good?**

This is the sermon part of a worship service at Lake Avenue Church so I’m pretty sure you know the answer I want you to give to that question is, “Yes! God’s ways are always good.” But, I don’t want you to answer yes too quickly. Why? Because I think that each day of your life, you face decisions in which you must decide between God’s way or your own way. In fact, the Bible often asks you to envision yourself standing before a decision and making a choice between your way and God’s: <https://img.wikinut.com/img/1z0vqs3c1ibvmwvt/peg/700x1000/God-s-way-is-best.jpeg>

This starts when we’re young – as is often portrayed in the temptation a boy makes about whether to steal cookies from the cookie jar just after his Mom said not to. <https://storybookstorage.s3.amazonaws.com/items/images/000/803/662/original/20170314-6-1tp9o2q.jpg?1489457984> He knows stealing is wrong – but it’s hard to believe that doing what is right is better than getting the cookie. And, when he’s caught, he knows he shouldn’t lie – but he often finds it hard to imagine that telling the truth and getting punished is better than lying and maybe getting by with it.

I believe that we all are faced constantly with decisions like that – a few of them big, life-directing decisions and many more that seem small. We often are called to choose between living as God’s Word says we should live or living another way that might seem, at the time, to be more appealing than what God would have us do.

This question of whether God’s ways are good takes us all the way back to the very beginning of creation and to the time when God and the first two human beings were walking in close relationship together. God gave them only one command, i.e., “*The LORD God commanded them, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... (Gen 2:16-17).”*

In Gen 2, Adam and Eve had every good thing imaginable: They had purpose to their lives. Their relationships with God, with one another and with the rest of creation were good. They were in paradise! But, when tempted to disobey the one command God had given, they gave in quickly. Why? A wily, talking serpent told them they didn’t just have to be made in the image of God. No, he said they could be like God! It was hard for them to imagine that being in the image of God was as good as being God. Bottom line: They doubted the goodness of God and went their own way. The result? Cosmic devastation. We’re still suffering the effects of that choice.

### Psalm 19, Genesis 1-3 and the Goodness of God

The superscription above Psalm 19 tells us it is a Psalm of David. Both Jewish and Christian Bible scholars have long viewed Psalm 19 as David’s personal reflection on the creation account in Genesis 1-3 and how it applied to his own life. David was a man who believed in God but who often had faced decisions between God’s ways and his own desires – just as I think we all do. And, as I imagine you know, David had sometimes said no to God’s commands and had gone his own way – sometimes acting out of angry impulses; at other times out of lust-filled desires.

In at least one of those decision-making times, David experienced deep inner conflict as he knew what God had commanded but wanted so badly to do something different from God’s command. In that episode, recorded in 1 Sam 25, David was angry because he had been slighted by a wealthy man named Nabal (whose name meant “Fool”). David was going to take vengeance into his own hands even though God had commanded, “*Vengeance is mine. I will repay.*” In his anger, David declared, “*May I be dealt with ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to that man (1 Sam 25:22)!*” But, Nabal’s intelligent and beautiful wife, Abigail, heard of this and went to David and reminded him of God’s command.

And, David repented. When he was angry, he couldn’t imagine anything good coming out of refraining from punishing Nabal. But, later, David said to Abigail, “*Praise be to the LORD, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for keeping me from breaking God’s by from avenging myself with my own hands (1 Sam 25:32-33).*” And, you can read the rest of the story in 1 Samuel: David did what was right. God personally dealt with Nabal. David got the girl. It was all a bit like a modern romance movie.

In Psalm 19, I believe that David reflected on the goodness of the ways of God in contrast to his repeated temptations to doubt God’s goodness and to go his own ways. **Psalm 19 is David’s answer to my question, “Are God’s ways good?”** He tells us, 1. God’s creation says yes (19:1-6). 2. God’s commands say yes (19:7-11). And then he says, 3. I too will say yes – by the way I live my life (19:12-14).

## #1: **Creation Says Yes** – through its beauty and majesty -- *The heavens declare the glory of God...* (19:1-6).

David opened this Psalm by telling us that everything that exists declares to us that there is a God who made it. The majesty and order of creation points to a majestic and orderly Creator. David makes two main points about that:

1. **The magnificence of creation makes God known to all people (1:2-4b)**. Anyone who looks carefully at our world should know that all this did not happen on its own. David says that the same God who spoke everything into existence now uses that creation to speak to us about him.
2. **The functioning of creation brings God's blessing to all people (1:4c-6)**. David picked out the sun as a part of creation in vv. 4-5 to tell us that the sun is a part of every human being's experience. The sun, he says, it brings warmth to all creatures. So, he wrote, "*The sun rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other. Nothing is deprived of its warmth.*"

I know of few people who should appreciate what we read in Ps 19:1-6 more than we who live right here in the San Gabriel Valley of Southern CA. God has placed us in one of the most majestic and magnificent parts of his majestic and magnificent world. I'll let a few pictures speak as David says they speak:

The first is a view of our Colorado Street Bridge and out into our city: <https://www.gatewayticketing.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/PasadenaBridge-e1492521803934.jpg>

In the second, we pull up our perspective a bit and see across our bridge and up into our beautiful and sometimes snow-capped mountains: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/9e/41/f0/9e41f0530294c52c431df7c3c54f37be.png>

In the third, we pull our perspective up a bit more to see our beautiful city of Pasadena and how it is settled right up into the mountains: [https://www.cardcow.com/images/set373/card00097\\_fr.jpg](https://www.cardcow.com/images/set373/card00097_fr.jpg)

In the fourth, we see the earth God has made for us in this shot from the international space station: <https://ourplnt.com/top-10-most-beautiful-earth-images-taken-from-the-international-space-station-in-2016/space-station-flyover-of-the-mediterranean-january-2016/>

And, finally, through the help of LAC member Tom Reynoso, an engineer at JPL, let's pull up our perspective even higher to consider the universe our Father in heaven has made: [https://thumbs-prod.si-cdn.com/miJUBa-03ieRqBECNvHOCWYz9E=fit-in/1072x0/https://public-media.si-cdn.com/filer/4a/45/4a458c3d-442d-49ed-a307-8fa8dc5f0f21/hs-2010-13-a-large\\_web.jpg](https://thumbs-prod.si-cdn.com/miJUBa-03ieRqBECNvHOCWYz9E=fit-in/1072x0/https://public-media.si-cdn.com/filer/4a/45/4a458c3d-442d-49ed-a307-8fa8dc5f0f21/hs-2010-13-a-large_web.jpg)

I see these things and can only stand in awe and say, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge (19:1-2)*" – knowledge that there is a God; knowledge that he is a God of power, of order and design, of majesty and glory. Creation is good because God is good. Psalm 19 says that creation itself shouts out at us that the ways of God are good!

## #2: **The Commands of God Say Yes** – through the flourishing life they bring about -- *The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul...* (19:7-11).

I think a significant percentage of Southern Californians might accept my first point, i.e., that the beauty and wonder of creation says that there is something good about its creator. But, I think it would be a much lower percentage who would accept that the commands of God found in the Bible point to his goodness too. But, let me try to make the case that the Bible makes in this Psalm.

David uses a lot of words to describe the ways God tells us to live in vv. 7-9: law (or Torah), statutes, precepts, commands, ordinances and decrees. In using those words, he was describing a way of life our Creator calls all of us to live, a way of life rooted in the 10 Commandments. There were two main tables or parts of those 10 Commandments; the first teaching people how to love and honor God, the second teaching us how to love people. As I imagine you know, Jesus would speak about God's laws that way. He said they can all be boiled down to two, i.e., the first is to love God (the first part of the 10 Commandments) and the second is to love people.

There were, of course, many other commands in the Old Testament – all of which, in my view, were rooted in the 10 Commands and were specific applications of how those commands were applied to the people of Israel in the time and culture in which they lived. Some of the rules were only for that people and their time. But, the core moral foundation of God grounded in the 10 Commandments has never changed. Its mandates to put God first, to have no other gods, to honor parents, not to steal, kill, commit adultery or covet, etc. are rooted in the character of God. Those commands have never changed.

What I want you to see is the setting of God giving these commands. In **Dt 5:6**, in the last statement before giving the 10 Commandments, God said, “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of slavery. Therefore...*”. Then he declared his commandments. What I’m saying is that **God is a loving God who rescues people not to live poorly but to live well.** God was saying, “*You no longer should live as slaves. No, this is how I have made you to live!*”

God says this straightforwardly after giving the 10 Commandments. In **Dt 5:29,33**, God said, “*Oh, that your hearts would... keep all my commands always – Why? -- so that it might go well with you and your children forever... -- so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days.*”

In other words, God rescued his people not so that they would live lives of enslavement but lives that flourish. And, of course, we know now that Jesus gave his life so that we might be set free to live life as God created us to live, lives that Jesus called “abundant” (**Jn 10:10**). Yes, there are commands involved in living abundant lives: commands that call you to honest behavior, to truthful speech, to sexual faithfulness, to strong marriages and families, etc. Often, God’s commands call you to live life different from the way the world lives – and different from the way of life your passions might make you inclined to live. It’s then that you must ask, “Are God’s ways good?” and make the choice, “Your way or God’s way.”

David wrote about this powerfully in Psalm 19. He told us **what God’s commands are and what they do:**

- **They are perfect – they revive your soul (v.7a).** Do you ever feel drained and depleted? He calls you to turn back to God and to surrender afresh to God’s ways. He says that when you seek to live life in keeping with God’s commands, you will please God your inner being will begin to live again.
- **They are trustworthy – they make you wise (7b).** “Wise” means life as it is meant to be lived. God’s statutes are like highway signs guiding you through the winding, treacherous road of life. As David wrote in **Ps 23**, they will even bring you through “*valleys of the shadow of death.*”
- **They are right – they give you joy (v.8a).** The word for “right” in v.8 means that they lead straight to the goal. They won’t lead you astray. It’s as Jesus said in **Jn 10:10** -- “*Other things in this world promise so much but only kill and steal and destroy. I am the one who gives you life to the full.*”
- **They are radiant – they give light to your eyes (v.8b).** The decisions of life are often so complex, aren’t they? If you live your life by being driven by your own cravings or by trying to please everyone in the world, you will be torn apart – blown here and there with every wind that blows. But, if your single focus is to know God’s ways and to please him, God will give you light for your path.

I know that we often think that having our lives lived within the commands of God’s Word and ways will be boring rather than reviving, lead to failure rather than to wisdom, and rob you of joy rather than be the source of it. Do you believe that? Or, do you believe that the ways of God are good?

In our student ministries, when we have the sessions about the sexual morality called for in the Bible, they use the illustration of a fishbowl. [https://jassdie.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/kitty\\_watching\\_goldfish\\_in\\_fishbowl\\_0515-0910-1217-0517\\_smu.jpg?w=584](https://jassdie.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/kitty_watching_goldfish_in_fishbowl_0515-0910-1217-0517_smu.jpg?w=584)

A fish in a fishbowl might think that it could really live if it got out of the water and out of that fishbowl. But, the opposite is the case. For a fish, life in the water is the way to live. And for a human being made in God’s image, life in keeping with God’s commands is the way to live. David had learned at great cost that going his own way ruined his life. But then, he returned to God. And, listen to his words about his life when he followed God: *The precepts of the LORD are more precious than gold, than much pure gold... By them your servant is warned; and in keeping them, there is great reward* (**19:10-11**).

So, again, I ask you: Are God’s ways good?

**#3: Your Life Can Say Yes – through a commitment to God’s ways -- *May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD* (19:12-14).**

At the end of Ps 19, David came to the place that God’s Word always should take you, i.e., to evaluating your own life in light what God has said. In vv. 1-6, David said everything God has made in creation can speak about God’s glory. God made you. Does your life make known to the world the ways and glory of God?

In vv. 7-11, David said God’s commands are good. Those who live life in obedience to them will find joy. So today, are there thoughts, attitudes or actions in your life out of sync with God’s commands?

In the last three verses of Ps 19, David expressed a deep desire to align his life with God's law rather than his own cravings or the world's ways. So, David showed us **two ways to respond**: confession and commitment.

1. **Confession** -- *Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins (19:12-13).*

Times like this of looking inside your mind, heart and life are so important if you will experience God remaking you into a person who will glorify him. I resonate fully with David's opening line to his confession in **Ps 19:12a**, i.e., "*Who can discern all his own errors?*" Do you see what he's saying? He's saying, "Lord, when I look at you and your perfection and then I look at myself, I know I am not even aware of all the things that still have to be changed about me." Do you agree with that?

And, I think that, if you are honest, you also will agree with what he said in **Ps 19:12b** about knowing that you have hidden faults inside, i.e., faults that you're trying to hide from others – and even from God. This was certainly true when David tried to hide what he had done when he stole another man's wife in 2 Samuel 12 and tried to hide it. His thoughts and actions were hidden from people – but not from God. David confessed that.

And, he also owned up to and confessed those sins that were out in the open – what he called "willful sins" in **Ps 19:13**. Those may have been his uncontrolled anger or willful dishonesty. He confessed and turned from those sins. Is there anything you are hiding or that is out in the open that you need to confess to God today?

2. **Commitment** -- *May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight... (19:14).*

*May the words of my mouth* – David wanted not only God's creation and commands to speak forth the goodness of God. No, he wanted his own mouth to join them. David realized that his life – indeed, all our human lives -- have the potential of making known the goodness of God to the world. He prayed – and I am calling you to pray – that, just like creation, all that you are and all that you do will show those around you the goodness and glory of the God whose Spirit dwells within you.

David prayed – and I am asking you to pray – that your words will point others to God and to his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that people will see your life and hear your words and say, "God is. God is good. I want to glorify him too."

To that end, I want you to pull out your kneeler as we have a time of confession and commitment...

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

Psalm 19:14