

Written Copy: Psalm 119:97-104 “AI Christianity vs. Real Christianity”

2nd Sunday @ Christmas

Sunday, January 5th, 2024

Text: Psalm 119:97-104

⁹⁷ Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. ⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. ⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. ¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. ¹⁰¹ I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. ¹⁰² I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. ¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! ¹⁰⁴ Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

The text's intent

Lift up the devotional meditative study of God's Word which is the expression of His will and plan for us and the means by which we grow in a loving faith relationship with Him. He speaks to us and we chew on it in application to our lives. We pray back what He has said to us and confess those things it reveals in our hearts that are wrong according to Him who holds all authority. In it I find His witness as to who He is and the unfathomable love He has for me. It is His means for supervising our lives and through the Spirit's work keep us from paths of evil. When I turn away from what He judges is wrong I turn away from Him, but when I turn toward His word I am led to repentance and forgiveness. I find the consequences for sin and the promises of grace and mercy now and for eternity. These promises applied to my repentant heart are sweeter than honey. I can trust His Word will lead me away from falsehood and evil and lead me to live with Him now and forever.

Focus Statement:

The LORD chose us before the foundation of the world to be His precious children. And so that we might know who He is what His will and plans are He gave us His word. In it we see how miserable we are without Him and how His Son is the greatest gift of love through who came to redeem and forgive us for all the times we turn away from His Word. Through His Spirit working in His words of Gospel promise we are turned back to Him and led in a repentant faith relationship, kept safe until eternal life to come.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

No matter how faithful and knowledgeable a Christian you are, when you separate yourself from the wisdom God's Word you stand the chance of falling away from Him by listening to and judging by the world's standards and your own sinful heart.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Remain connected to Christ through regular worship and study of His word in a daily devotional setting as well as group Bible Study where you meditate on His Word and grow in your faith relationship with Him.

Subject Sentence: Devotional Meditation Keeps us in Repentant Faith

Introduction: Does AI have real wisdom?

No doubt, somewhere along the line, you've encountered some kind of application of 'AI': Artificial Intelligence. If you have a smartphone that uses facial recognition or has a virtual assistant like the I-Phone's Siri, or Amazon's Alexa, you have encountered and used an AI application. When you search something on Google, the first result that pops up is an AI Overview. It's being used in the healthcare industry to help with diagnosis, in smart home appliances, in smart thermostats, manufacturing systems, and security systems. What makes it so useful is that it is seemingly able to learn new things.

But how "smart" or intelligent is it really? Is it something that we can give a "blank check" kind of trust to? First of all, let's remember what AI stands for: "Artificial" Intelligence. It can gain wisdom in a sense, but not use that knowledge and wisdom in the same way a human being can. As was explained to the pastors at one of our Tri-Circuit meetings last year, AI learns by trolling the internet looking for examples of different kinds of problems and the solutions posted there. It gathers and stores them. It is sophisticated enough that it can differentiate amongst the nuances of similar events and problem-solving situations in order to apply the correct answer to many situations. For instance, a doctor can enter all the symptoms a patient may be experiencing, and AI can help diagnose if it is a stomach issue, pancreas issue, colon issue, or some other problem.

Sounds great, right? But what about when it comes time to make moral value judgements. For instance, what about when a decision must be made whether or not to end life support on a patient. The AI bot can search the internet and find similar situations according to the age of the patient, and the symptoms and problems the patient is experiencing. It can look at thousands of past experiences and take into consideration a large variety of variables and offer a solution concerning the likelihood of recovery.

But where the problem and the danger comes is in factoring in the value and quality of life. How can it be taught what quality of life is? It "learns" by searching and storing data according to the parameters it is programmed with. And who decides these parameters? Human beings. Some believe that a person who will never walk again or is in constant pain would be better off to end their life, judging there is no quality of life. But others who believe that there is a God see life as a precious gift from Him. Since life began by His hand, life should end by His hand too because any and all life is precious as His gift. But AI has no real consciousness, and therefore has no faith knowledge of God. The value AI assigns to each case regarding quality of life comes from where it has been programmed to look. And there are plenty of places on the web that we, as Christians, would not like it to look to judge quality of life for us. It doesn't take long to see how giving AI a blank check endorsement to make decisions for us could become disastrous.

What makes for true wisdom, not just in AI but in human beings? Is it simply the amassing of knowledge and facts, or is it something more? What makes for wise Christians with a mature faith? Is it simply the amassing of Bible passages and catechetical training? Or is it something more. Where does true wisdom come from? What is the difference between Artificial Christianity and Real Christianity?

Solomon's Gift of Wisdom

Let's look at the wisest man that ever lived: King Solomon. We see from our Old Testament Lesson that he wasn't born with wisdom, it came as a gift from God. It came to him as one who had a faith relationship with the LORD God. In fact, He was worshiping the One True God when the blessing of wisdom came. It was after Solomon had shown his faithful devotion to the LORD with a thousand burnt offerings that the LORD came to him in a dream. And the LORD offered what at first seems like a blank check to Solomon, **"Ask what I shall give you"** Except the LORD God, who is truly wise and is the source of all wisdom knew Solomon's heart. He knew Solomon saw and took seriously the vocation of King of Israel that had been given to him by the LORD through His promise to his father David.

What Solomon expressed back to the LORD was no surprise to God Himself. Solomon desired to fulfill the task given by the LORD to faithfully lead and govern God's people. And He realized and confessed before God that He lacked what it took for such great a task. In doing so Solomon expressed his humble faith before the LORD. And the LORD honored his desire to serve Him obediently and faithfully by giving him what he asked for, which was not for selfish gain, but for the good of the kingdom of God. **1 Kings 3:11-13 ¹¹ And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. ¹³ I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days.**

How great was the wisdom Solomon was given? How useful was it for him as the king of Israel? If we were to read on past our text in 1 Kings, we would read about a case that was brought before Solomon because the lesser judges of the land couldn't figure out how to solve it. 2 prostitutes came before him, each claiming that a certain child belonged to them. They both gave birth to sons within days of one another. One night, one of the prostitutes rolled over on to her child and smothered it to death. The mother replaced her dead son with the baby that belonged to the other prostitute. The problem was both of these women were claiming that the living child was theirs and the dead one belonged to the other woman. There were no other witnesses in the house that night to corroborate either woman's story.

In an amazing demonstration of wisdom Solomon called for a sword to be brought to him. Then he commanded that the living child be cut into two pieces and each woman receive half. Solomon knew that the woman who was really the mother would rather give up her claim to the child than see it die. And that is exactly what happened. True wisdom from God in action.

While Solomon went on to make other wise decisions, and even wrote down many wise sayings which fill the Biblical Book of Proverbs, his life was not always guided by godly wisdom. Solomon did not observe the wisdom of God stated in the first book of the Bible that marriage is to be between one man and one woman. As one of the most powerful and popular kings, Solomon could and did take many wives. And not all of them worshiped the One true God. He married foreign women who worshiped false gods. And to please them Solomon allowed temples to be built to these false gods. And then further, to please them, he even began to worship these false gods with them, leaving behind for a time his faith and worship in the One True LORD God.

Thankfully for him and for us the LORD did not leave him in unbelief but called him back to faith. And Solomon shared the wisdom he gained from that experience in the book of Ecclesiastes. He describes what life was like for the wisest richest man who ever lived when he fell from a faith relationship with the LORD God. He describes it in **Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.** “Under the sun” is a poetic way of describing life lived without the One True God who is above and over the sun, who created the sun and all that the sun shines on. Even for the one with the greatest knowledge and wisdom and riches, a life lived apart from God is vanity, or another way to translate that is “vapor” or “smoke”, it’s insubstantial and doesn’t really mean anything. All that one strives after is like chasing after the wind, which no one can ever catch and hang on to, a fruitless and wasteful endeavor.

True Wisdom is a Faith Relationship With the LORD

Psalms 119:97-99 ⁹⁷ Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. ⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. ⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.

The Psalmist states that he loves the law of the LORD. Now you might be wondering about that. When we think of God’s law our first reaction is not usually love. We might admit the commandments are necessary, but love them? After all they show us how messed up we are and how messed up our life is. But remember what the heart of Solomon was like when the LORD came to him. He was humbled by the word of the Lord. He knew who he really was before the LORD, unworthy and unable to fulfill the vocation and plan that the LORD had for him. And that is exactly what God’s commandments do within us too. They make us look outside ourselves for the answer to living life in this world. God’s word in the hands of the Holy Spirit turns us to Him.

It's important to know that the word translated here as "law" is actually the Hebrew word "Torah", which is what Israel called the first 5 books of the Old Testament that Moses wrote. It was also often a general name for all of the books of the Old Testament. The psalmist says, "**your testimonies are my meditation**". God's Word to us in the hands of the Holy Spirit is a testimony to us of who God is, what He has done for us, and His promises to us. And from the very first book of the Bible God promised to send a Savior to defeat the work Satan had done in the Fall to turn mankind away from God.

Our Epistle Lesson is God's testimony concerning how He did all that was necessary to reestablish our relationship to Him that was broken by sin. Paul speaking by the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit testifies in **Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace**. Our forefathers all the way back to Adam and Eve fell into sinful disobedience that rendered them unfit for a life lived with their Holy Creator God now and for eternity. None of us had the power to redeem ourselves, buy ourselves back from eternal damnation. So, God the Father sent His Only Son who could and did pay the price necessary to redeem any and all men, and that price was His blood shed on the cross to forgive all of our trespasses. He did this as God's free gift of grace. You do nothing and you gain everything. He gives this to you in His words of testimony that are the Gospel, through which the Holy Spirit creates and maintains faith.

Ephesians 1:4-5 ⁴he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.

Spend a moment meditating on this: the reason why you are sitting here today, believing in and trusting in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior is for no other reason than God chose you. He chose you before you were worthy, before you were holy and blameless. He chose you when you were no better than any other unbeliever in the world. In your sin you were as unworthy as even the worst criminal that has ever lived, because in the eyes of the Holy God any and all sin makes you unworthy of life with Him now and eternal life to come. He chose you, not because you were better, but simply because He loves you so much and wanted to adopt you into His family. And He made it happen through your faith in Christ.

Why We Need to Be in the Father's House Connected to Him

Solomon may have had great worldly wisdom, but it meant nothing when He walked away from His faith relationship with God. How much truer is that for you and me? If Solomon who was given such wonderful gifts as great wisdom, a kingdom, riches, and honor, knowing they came from God, and yet was able to walk away from his faith relationship with Him, how much more should you and I be wary of falling into the same fate?

Psalms 119:97 Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

When you are in a faith relationship with the God who chose you, redeemed you, and has given you through the indwelling Spirit the sure and certain promise of life lived with Him now and eternal life to come, you will love to hear and study what He has to say to you, because it all comes from the greatest love for you and for your greatest good. True wisdom comes from God's Word to those who are in a repentant faith relationship with Him. His Spirit creates the desire to hear, study, and meditate on God's Word, not just on Sunday morning for an hour and a half, but every morning through a devotional thought like those found in Portals of Prayer. Through plans that help you read through the Bible in a year. Through the meditation that is group Bible Study, and of course through regular worship which is not only meditation but a dialog between our Creator Savior God and us, He speaks to us, and we respond back to Him. And it is here in Corporate Worship that He pours out His gracious gifts that bring us to faith and keep us in faith.

Conclusion

AI: Artificial Intelligence will never be real wisdom and intelligence because it lacks the human component of being able to make value judgments based on faith in a Creating and Saving God. When we separate ourselves from God as He speaks to us in His Word, we can fall into an Artificial Christianity that is a lot like Solomon's life lived under the sun, meaningless like vapor, as useless as chasing after the wind. Real Christianity is lived out in a repentant faith relationship with Jesus Christ where through our meditation on His Word He blesses us with life lived with Him now, forgiven and restored, and eternal life to come. May you be blessed by your meditation in His word this week, and in the year to come. Amen.