

"Seeing it God's Way, Part 1"
(Psalm 119:113-120)
Pastor Peter Yi
August 20, 2017

(Psalm 119:113-120)

¹¹³ I hate double-minded people,
but I love your law.
¹¹⁴ You are my refuge and my shield;
I have put my hope in your word.
¹¹⁵ Away from me, you evildoers,
that I may keep the commands of my God!
¹¹⁶ Sustain me, my God, according to your promise, and I will live;
do not let my hopes be dashed.
¹¹⁷ Uphold me, and I will be delivered;
I will always have regard for your decrees.
¹¹⁸ You reject all who stray from your decrees,
for their delusions come to nothing.
¹¹⁹ All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross;
therefore I love your statutes.
¹²⁰ My flesh trembles in fear of you;
I stand in awe of your laws.

Today's passage can be considered to be one of those difficult passages. Parts of this passage may not sit well with you. If you've read the Bible for any amount of time, you're going to encounter passages that will challenge you because at first glance, they seem, well...that they don't belong in the Bible. They go against our instincts. They may not appear to be very Christian. We have to do a double-take and see if it's saying what we think it is saying. Entire books have been written to address these hard-sayings; titles like *Hard Sayings of Jesus*. *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*. *Hard Saying of Paul*. *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. So you're not alone. Even scholars have discussed these passages for many centuries.

Here are a few hard sayings that you might be familiar with:

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die.
(Proverbs 23:13)

Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; **(Job 13:15)**

When they came to the threshing floor of Naxon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 7 The LORD'S anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God. **(2 Samuel 6:6-7)**

If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. **(Luke 14:26)**

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. **(Matthew 10:34)**

Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” **(Mark 10:21)**

For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head. **(1 Corinthians 11:6)**

Those are indeed ‘hard sayings’. Well, what are we to make of them? What should we do when we encounter difficult teachings in the Bible?

1. Expect them. This is so important. We should not look at Christianity and say, “I like Christianity because it agrees with everything I believe.” That’s nothing more than the religion of self. That’s the same as looking at the mirror every morning and telling yourself how perfect and great you are. “Don’t change!” (wink wink) The Bible teaches us about God and what he requires of us, what his standards of morality are, then shouldn’t we expect to come to a head, not just once or twice, but over and over again? Shouldn’t we expect the Bible to disagree with us on some of our most fundamental beliefs?
2. Don’t ignore them. Don’t just gloss over them. Sometimes we can be lazy readers and think that it’s too much work, that it’s not worth the trouble. For a new Christian who’s just getting into reading the Bible, I think it could be very daunting and frustrating if you were to stop at every verse or section you didn’t understand. You’d never finish. I would suggest that you keep reading, but if there are some issues that are really bothering you, then jot down the question and ask a friend or pastor. But for those of us who have been Christians longer, don’t be a lazy reader. Find the answers to the difficult sections of the Bible. It’ll help your faith and you’ll be able to help others understand those difficult teachings.
3. Don’t jump to conclusions. Bible readers, both Christian and non-Christian, can have the tendency to impose their personal standards of morality or justice upon the Bible. So if the Bible seems to disagree with what I believe about sexual ethics or money, then our first reaction is to think that the Bible is wrong, that God is wrong. And that is something we must never do.
4. Don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. Some people have that one pet issue, an issue they are so passionate about, and it seems that their stance on the issue goes against what the Bible says on the issue. And because they can’t seem to reconcile their position and the Bible’s position, they throw the whole thing away. They say, “Ugghh, I could never be a Christian because of this one particular issue.” I would say, please don’t do that. Take a step back, and try to understand the entire Christian worldview. Ask, why God would have this position on this particular issue?

5. Look at the immediate biblical or textual context. Don't just grab a verse out of a passage. Read it in its context. Context is king. See what the whole story or teaching is and about and nine times out of ten what you at first thought confusing, will start making sense.
6. Now, this one's a bit tricky: Look at the cultural context. The Bible is a 2000-4000 year old book, written in an ancient culture, and while some things are timeless, like the value of marriage, or not to murder; but other things can only be understood in their own historical context. Take the passage we read about women wearing head coverings. Why is it that the vast majority of churches around the globe do not abide by this injunction? Was there something about head coverings in first century Greek/Jewish culture? Is it still applicable today? Understanding the historical context can help us find an answer.
7. Understand that one of the ways to properly interpret the Bible is by this principle. "Scripture interprets Scripture." The premise of this principle comes from the nature of God. God is truth; he is consistent; he is clear; he doesn't say one thing one day, and the opposite the next day. So we believe that the Bible as a whole, all 66 books, written across 2 millennia, has a unified message, and taken as a whole, it'll give us a comprehensive understanding on any given issue. So when we look at the entire Bible, we can get an understanding of what we are to think and do regarding caring for the planet, or our views on war, or our belief about racism, or gender, or whatever the issue might be.

As an example, consider the passage that we read where Jesus says, unless you hate your mother and father....you cannot be my disciple. That's a really difficult passage. On face value, it seems to be saying something that not only goes against your instincts and nature, but also goes against other teachings of the Bible. So what do you do? You would then have to consider the rest of the Bible's teaching on how we should act toward our parents and family. In particular the fifth command in the Ten Commandments, which says, "Honor your father and your mother" as well as other passages. Then we ask ourselves. Could Jesus really have meant that we are to hate our parents? Didn't he himself care for his mother while he was being crucified? If not, then what did he mean by such strong language? Perhaps he meant that our love and devotion for God should be so superior that when compared to our love for parents and family, that love looks like hate.

8. Buy and use a Study Bible, like the NIV study Bible. It will save you a lot of time and will really help you better understand not only the difficult passages, but the entire Bible.

So, those are some helps that we can begin using right away.

Now, let's look at today's difficult passage. What makes this passage difficult at first glance is the psalmist's attitude toward people who are not living according to the same worldview as himself. The passage is difficult because he even uses the word 'hate'.

Here are his exact words:

119:113 I hate double-minded people,
but I love your law.
In addition he adds these lines.
115 Away from me, you evildoers,
that I may keep the commands of my God!
118 You reject all who stray from your decrees,
for their delusions come to nothing.
119 All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross;
therefore I love your statutes.

Let's first deal with the easier verses and then we'll look more closely at the harder verse. Verses 115, 118, and 119 are really not that hard to understand and accept.

Verse 115 says, "Away from me, you evildoers." Now I don't know if he's saying it to their face, or if he's saying it to himself. But that's something we all would say. Poema students, when you go off to school, and your friends have determined that they want to get you drunk, and every weekend, they are inviting you to come out to this bar or club, so you can join them in getting hammered, what do you say to yourself? "Oh, when will they grow up?" As you consider the strength of this temptation what do you do? You buckle down, and speak truth to yourself. You quote this verse.

And then for verses 118 and 119, it's pretty easy. We know what happens to those who reject God. God rejects them. God judges them. We can say more, but let's stop there and go to the verse that may give us the most trouble, verse 113.

"I hate double-minded people, but I love your law."

What does it mean to be double-minded?

Double-minded means to be divided. The only other time this word appear is in...

Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing. (**1 Kings 18:21**)

So, in this situation, it's pretty clear. Double-mindedness has to do with lordship, with obedience, with being a God-follower or worshiping idols.

For the psalmist, in saying that he hates double-minded people in the first line and then confessing that he loves God's law in the second line, implies that double-minded people hate the law of God. When we look at the rest of the section we see that double-minded people do not love the law of God, nor do they put their hope in it, nor do they regard it, and certainly they don't keep it. The single-minded person on the other hand, loves the law, hopes in it, regards it as very important, and keeps it.

Here's what James says about double-minded people:

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. (**James 1:5-8**)

A double-minded person is one who half-believes. He believes, but at the same time doubts. He offers half-hearted prayers. He clings to God's promises half-heartedly. He is only half-convinced.

Later James writes,

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (**James 4:6-10**)

In this section James ties together double-mindedness with pride. The double-minded he says, is a prideful sinner, but in what way are prideful sinners double-minded? It's a person who knows that God opposes the proud and shows favor to the humble. Thus he should submit himself to God. He should come near to God. He shouldn't mess around with the devil. He should repent and wash his hands. He knows that only good and blessing can come from doing those things, but because of his pride, he doesn't. That's a double-minded person. He knows what he should do, what is best to do, what will result in the greatest outcome for his life, but still doesn't do it. That's why he's considered double-minded.

Alright then, let's come back to the psalmist. "I hate double-minded people." I hope the statement is beginning to make more sense. What if he said, "God, I hate it when I'm double-minded"? No one would criticize him for thinking like that or saying that. Or even if he said, "God, I hate it when people are double-minded." I don't think we'd give him too much flack for saying that. Or would you? Let me try to help some more.

How do you feel about liars? People who constantly lie to you. How do you feel about betrayers? People who won't think twice about betraying their friends, their family, even their own country. How do you feel about them? How do you feel about terrorists? People who care less about the normal rules of warfare, use human shields, have no regard for civilians, have no problem employing women and children and human bombs. How do you feel about them? How do you feel about people who never keep their promises? People that you need to rely on but are utterly unreliable. They never do what they say. How do you feel about these kinds of people? Do you love them? Are you neutral? How do you think God feels toward people like that? How does God feel toward the Cains and Ahabs and Jezebels and the prophets of Baal and the Judas's of the world? Is God neutral toward them? I know how God feels toward them. It's clear from the Scriptures. He hates them. And yet he loves them. He hates them for they are his enemies. They are against everything he is for. They hate his people. They reject his authority. They even reject his love. Yet he loves them still. God loves rebels. God loves haters. Look at the racists in Charlottesville. He hates them. And yet he loves them and wants them to repent of their racism. He sent Jesus to them.

Friends, as Christians, neutrality is not an option. Indifference is not an option. Consider for a moment the Apostle Paul when he entered Athens in Acts 17.

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. **(Acts 17:16 NIV11-GK)**

He didn't say, oh what a beautiful culture. All cultures are equal and valid. No one culture is better than another. No one religion is better than another. When you travel to Thailand and you see on almost every corner a Buddhist temple or shrine, but strain to look for a steeple or a cross, even until your eyes pop out, how do you feel? How should you feel? Or if you're driving through the Kyrgyz countryside and you see a mosque in every village, but not a single church, are you neutral? You see our culture has duped us into this convictionless neutrality. We've been sucked into relativism. So, we too, as Christian people, are beginning to call evil good and good evil.

There are several reasons why we struggle with passages like this, and they can all be summed up under the heading of improper doctrine, or misunderstanding the Bible, or having a skewed Christian worldview. What are some of those errors?

1. A misunderstanding of the sinful nature of humankind. Romans 3:23 that says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Isaiah 59:2 "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." Ephesians 2:3 "Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath." If we believe that human beings are generally good, you can never have the strong convictions that the psalmist had. We will not hate sin, in our own lives or in others.
2. A misunderstanding that to God, there are only two kinds of people, those that are for God and those that are against God. There is no third category. To God, there are his people and then there are those who are not his people. There are forgiven sinners and unforgiven sinners. If you are not for God, you are against God. There is no neutrality. There are Christians and there are non-Christians. There are children of God and there are children of the devil. There are people going to heaven and there are people going to hell. To many people, including Christians, those statements are highly offensive. They may be offensive, but their offense doesn't make them untrue. And Christians or anyone else for that matter, should never apologize for the truth. Let me push this a bit farther. If you didn't believe this, you are making Jesus out to be a liar, because he said these very words. And if you don't believe this, then you cannot believe the Gospel. And if you do not believe the Gospel, then you will not care about evangelism and missions. And if you do not believe in the Gospel, then you yourself are not saved.
3. A misunderstanding of the nature of God. The fact that God is love doesn't negate his hatred for sin and sinners. God is love. He is the epitome of love. He is the source, the standard, the very definition of love. And not merely in concept or theory, but in reality. The three persons of the Trinity exist in perfect love toward each other. But God also demonstrates his love, because he loves sinners, and he allowed Christ to die for us. "God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we still sinners, Christ died for us." God is love. God is just. As theologian R.C. Sproul says, "God always acts justly toward sinners. God acts mercifully to sinners. God never acts unjustly."
4. A misunderstanding of some of the attributes of God such as his holiness.

Now, let me conclude by saying this. For Christians we never cease to believe that the Gospel can reach even the worst of sinners. We never write people off. We never stop praying for sinners to repent and receive Christ. We never stop loving even our enemies and praying for those who persecute us. Never. Why? Because that's what Jesus did. Jesus reached me and he reached you, the worst of sinners. Jesus didn't write you off. He didn't give up on you. As Christians, we are called to be imitators of God. That means we are to have strong convictions that are Bible-based, God-imitating attitudes and positions and feelings toward sin and sinners. We are to think God's thoughts after him. We are to take every idea and thought captive and submit it to Christ. We are continue developing a Christian world-view and live by it.

Let's pray.