

*The Sustained Heart*  
 Psalm 119:113-120  
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We are in the *samekh* stanza, vv. 113-120. The Hebrew letter *samekh* means pillar or support. It means *to hold up or sustain*. In vv. 116-117, the psalmists directly asked Yahweh to *uphold him or sustain him*.

The *samekh* stanza perfectly follows the *nun* stanza. In the *nun* stanza *the man watched his feet in order to diligently follow Jesus* and now in the *samekh* stanza *the psalmist watches his heart*. When you put the *nun* stanza and the *samekh* together we hear echoes of Proverbs 4:23, “*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*”

There is strong language in the *samekh* stanza. It is directed toward the double-minded people who were tempting the psalmist to leave his faith in God. He identifies them as wicked and evil people.

You will not only hear this kind of language in these verses but you will hear this language in many Psalms. These kinds of Psalms are called *imprecatory* Psalms. The language flows from a heart motivated by the fiery zeal for God’s glory. In *imprecatory* Psalms, the writers cry out for God to vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked because of His steadfast covenant love for His people.

*Imprecatory* Psalms are challenging. Christians often ask: *How do we hold together Jesus’ words to love our enemies and yet some Psalms call for God to punish the wicked by showing them no mercy?*

We need to understand the context from which the psalmists are writing. *Imprecatory* Psalms are crying out to God to apply covenant blessings and curses from Deuteronomy 27-28. In them, the psalmists beg God to keep His covenant promise to punish the sins of wicked with curses and honor the obedience of the righteous with blessing.

Listen to what God says to His people through Moses in Deuteronomy 28:58-59, “*If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God,* <sup>59</sup> *then the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting.*” What the psalmists do is call on God to apply the blessing and curses of Deuteronomy 27-28 by punishing the wicked and blessing the righteous.

Psalmists, in *imprecatory Psalms*, essentially call on God to be the Sovereign Judge. They know that only Yahweh is able to judge in righteousness and judge the wicked correctly.

So, with this as our background-context, let’s consider the *samekh* stanza. Here is the main point of this stanza: *In the face of temptation to abandon our faith in God, we must flee to Christ and His word to be sustained*. This stanza unfolds in *four movements* so let’s walk through these eight verses.

I. We are sustained by remembering we are weak (vv. 113-115)

This sounds counter intuitive but the fact is, we are sustained by Jesus when we remember that we are not strong but weak. We need Jesus to be strong for us but the first step in being supported by Jesus is to remember we are weak. We must abandon our efforts to be strong.

Verses 113-115 remind us of three very important truths about being sustained in our weakness:

First, we are in danger of being double-minded. The theme of the *samekh* stanza is the psalmist’s need for support. *This stanza is not a prideful confession but a cry of panic*. The psalmist knows he is weak and is in constant danger of turning away from God and to sin. Listen to v. 113:

*“<sup>113</sup> I hate the double-minded, but I love your law.*

Verse 113 begins the same as v. 97, *“I love your law.”* But instead of saying that God’s Law was his meditation day and night as in v. 97, the psalmist says he *hates the double-minded*.

Who are the double-minded and why does he hate them? The double-minded are those people who consistently throughout Scripture claim to love God but in reality, they do not. They are people who try to live in two worlds. They want to party with the wicked and call themselves saints. They are hypocrites, pretenders, and play-actors. They are the ones Jesus said *love God with their lips but their hearts are far from Him*. So, before we are too hard on the psalmist for saying he hated the double-minded we must remember that Jesus gave His harshest rebukes to this crowd of people during His ministry.

All of Matthew 23 is dedicated to Jesus condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees. He called them hypocrites and double-minded. He invoked the curses of Deuteronomy 27 and 28 on them. He called them a brood of vipers, blind guides, lawless, whitewashed tombs, and murders. This is the same Jesus who called us to love our neighbors and our enemies.

The reason Jesus can call us to love our enemies and not judge them is because He is the Supreme Judge. We don’t have to judge, Jesus will do all the judging on the last day. Also, only Jesus has the right to judge and He is the only One who knows how to judge in righteousness. Like the psalmist, we can call on Him to judge because He is the Rightful Judge

So, because Jesus is the Righteous Judge, He calls us to love our enemies and leave the judgment to Him. A careful reading of this stanza and the imprecatory Psalms reveals that the psalmist does NOT judge but calls on Yahweh to apply covenant judgment to the wicked.

Bottom line, we can pray for God to judge the double-minded. We can leave all judgment to God so we are free to love them and share the gospel of Christ with them. With complete honesty we can tell others that they currently stand under God’s wrath and if they do not flee to Christ there is a horrible judgment coming.

The psalmist realized the double-minded were tempting Him and God’s people to turn away from God but his desire was to be single-minded for God. He did not want to be corrupted nor see God’s people corrupted. This was why he said in v. 114:

*<sup>114</sup> You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word.”*

The psalmist, in contrast to the *double-minded*, sought *double protection* in God. He says God is his *place of refuge* and his *weapon of protection*. Then with the double-protection comes hope that he would endure although he was weak.

William Grant, a 19<sup>th</sup> century pastor, in regards to v. 114 said:

*“Of all the ingredients that sweeten the cup of human life, there is none more rich or powerful than hope. Its absence embitters the sweetest lot; its presence alleviates the deepest woe. Surround me with all the joys that memory can awaken, or possessions bestow, but without hope, it is not enough. In the absence of hope, there is sadness both in the past and present joys . . . if you strip me of all the joy that past or present can confer, as long as tomorrow shines bright with hope, I am glad in my grief.”<sup>1</sup>*

The danger we face is to be double-mind because we are weak. Double-mindedness is a constant temptation even for a true follower of Christ. Yet, because we are new creations in Christ, there is a desire to

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1181.

be single-minded and single-hearted for Christ. This means in the heat and pressure of temptation we must flee to the Living Christ who is strong for us.

Notice what the psalmist says v. 115. He flees temptation and confesses his allegiance to God and His word.

*"<sup>115</sup> Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God."*

Verse 115 is the only verse in Psalm 119 that does not address God but instead addressed the double-minded. He cried out for them to leave him alone and to leave his presence.

The psalmist knew he was weak. He knew he was in danger of being double-minded. He could feel the temptation to cave and simply follow the crowd. He wanted to obey the first commandment but in order to do that he was going to have to separate himself from those who pulled him away from Jesus. If he was going to be single-minded and single-hearted for Christ, then he must get away from the double-minded and immerse himself in God's word for double-protection and taste the sweetness of hope.

The Apostle Paul warned the arrogant Corinthian church with similar words in 1 Corinthians 10:12-14, *"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."*

Brothers and sisters, we must remember that we are weak. We must also remember that we are not sustained by proclaiming our strength but our weakness.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, the Apostle Paul was still trying to teach the Corinthian church how Christ is strong in our weakness. He told them about his own weakness and how he asked Christ to heal but Jesus told him:

*"'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

When we lean into the grace of God in the word of God because we are weak, the strength of Christ changes us and grows our love for what God loves and hate what God hates. When we flee to Christ, He fights our battles for us. Jesus is our double-protection from temptation.

Finally, brothers and sisters, there are times when we must separate from others in order to not give in to sin and to remain faithful to Jesus. I know we want to reach the lost and love our enemies but there are times when the temptation is too great. There are some places we should not go and some people we should not hang out with in life so that we will remain faithful to Christ. The temptation is simply too much for us so we will have to depart from the double-minded because we are weak. We will have to flee to Jesus.

However, there will be times when we cannot help but be around the double-minded. It is in those times we must pray and cry out to Jesus to be our double-protection. This leads us to vv. 116-117.

II. We are sustained in our weakness through prayer (vv. 116-117)

*"<sup>116</sup> Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope! <sup>117</sup> Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually!"*

When we are weak we need to pray for God to sustain us. That is what these two verses are about.

The psalmist exercised his faith in Yahweh and Yahweh's covenant promise to uphold His people in their temptation by crying out in prayer.

As Christians, we lean into the fulfillment New Covenant in the person and work of Christ. Our strength to endure temptation comes the Living Christ. Jude 24-25 says,

*"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."*

Jesus Christ is the "Him" who keeps us from falling into sin and falling away from the faith once for all delivered to the saints. So, when you are struggling with temptation, Psalm 119:116-117 is an excellent verse to pray. Jude 24-25 are wonderful verses to pray. Pray them. Pray God's word back to God when you are in the fire of temptation.

III. We are sustained in our weakness by remembering Yahweh is the Sovereign Judge (vv. 118-119a)

Because Yahweh is the Sovereign Judge, we can be confident that no matter how bad it gets, no matter how much it seems like the wicked are prevailing and getting away with murder that they will eventually stand before the Judgment Seat of God. Every one of us will give an account for his or her life to God.

At Judgment Seat of God, all of those *who have walked in the counsel of the wicked, who have stood in the way of sinners, and sat in the seat of the scoffers* will be judged correctly and in righteousness by Yahweh. Verses 118-119a remind us:

*"<sup>118</sup> You [Yahweh] spurn all who go astray from your statutes, for their cunning is in vain. <sup>119a</sup> All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross."*

Remember in v. 115, the psalmist told the double-minded to depart from him. Now, in vv. 118-119a, Yahweh administered the separation of His people from sin and sinners. The psalmist desire for holiness is finally realized when Yahweh's judgment is fully and finally administered.

The Hebrew word for *spurned*, in v. 118, means *to treat as worthless*. In the final judgment, Yahweh has treated as *worthless* those who treated His people as *worthless* because they rejected Him and His word.

The double-minded can no longer hide behind their clever cunning. Their false righteousness has vaporized like a mist in the hot sun. The wicked are burned up in the fire like dross is cooked away from precious metals. There has been a final separation and the pure and true believers remain and the double-minded will perish.

Verses 118-119a are defibrillator verses aren't they? They are like paddles placed on the heart where by we are shocked back to reality. They remind us that God will judge the wicked, the evil, and the double-minded. We are reminded there will be a separating of the sheep from the goats. The chaff will be blown away from the threshing floor. No one is able to fool God. His gaze penetrates all flesh and sees down into the heart. He knows those who are His and those who are not.

Revelation 21:8 says, *"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."*

Friends, this is shocking and frightening imagery. It is meant to be. The reason it is so shocking is because very few in the world live as if Heaven is real and Hell is real. The fact is eternal wrath of God in Hell is real and it will be so much worse than we can ever imagine.

Friends, do not miss salvation that is given by the Son of God. Turn from your double-mindedness and by faith flee to Jesus today. Cry out to Him in faith and ask Him to give you a new heart that is laser focused on Jesus and loves His word. It will be the best decision you have ever made.

#### IV. Sustained by love and fear (vv. 119b-120)

*"<sup>119b</sup> therefore I love your testimonies. <sup>120</sup> My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments."*

Here is more shocking imagery given to us by the Holy Spirit. Through the psalmist's pen, the Spirit of God, grabbed the heart of the psalmist and birthed a proper fear of Yahweh in him. The greatness of Yahweh spilled over two powerful emotions: *love and fear*.

The first emotion birthed is love. The psalmist loved God's word because God had graciously given His word to him and His people. The fact that God speaks to us is sheer mercy. God does not owe us anything but God in His grace and mercy stoops down to our level. He came to earth in Christ to save His people. In Christ, the Father was revealed. If you want to see what God looks like then look to *His Incarnate Word*. Then, Christ, the Living Word of God went to the cross for wicked sinners in order to save them. Jesus, the Living Word of God, kept the covenant of God perfectly where all we did was break covenant with God constantly. He was crucified for our sin buried in a borrowed tomb. Then He rose from the dead on the third day as our Victorious Savior. Jesus is the Covenant Keeper of God's testimonies and He died on the cross for covenant breakers.

The psalmist loved God because, by faith, he knew Yahweh was going to send the Covenant Keeper. He believed the Covenant Keeper would keep God's testimonies for him and this birthed love for God and confidence in God's word.

The second emotion it birthed in his heart is fear. The greatness of God overwhelmed the heart of the psalmist. He hears the words of judgment on the wicked, he knows his own sin and yet he knows it is by sheer grace that God has kept His promise and saved him. He knows that he could just have easily been double-minded and burned up like dross. He knows he is a sinner and yet he saved. So, like Job where he has finally seen the majesty and glory of God in the world and it stuns him and shocks him back to life and proclaims with Job in Job 40:4, *"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth."*

As the psalmist sees into the judgment of God on the wicked he says, *"My flesh trembles for fear of you."* The Hebrew word for *my flesh trembles* is something like: *my hair stands on end and dread has overwhelmed me*.

You might think this kind of fear seems inconsistent with the Christian faith but it is not. The problem in western Christianity is that we have lost the ability to fear God rightly. In our light-hearted western, church-growth culture many people seek out worship that lacks both gravity and gladness. Most churches in the U. S. worship with shallow, peppy songs. We don't want to sing songs in the minor key. We don't want to confess our sin in worship or lament our sin in worship. Instead, people desire light-hearted worship services and shallow, topical preaching that just helps me in my daily life or gives them a feel-good kind of experience. They do not want services and sermons that declare the holiness, majesty, and glory of God. They don't want services and sermons that call them to repent of sin and especially their shallow understanding of God. Preachers today are just as guilty and they avoid preaching the hard texts encountered by preaching verse-by-verse.

So, what is going on in these last two verses? Bottom line, the psalmist realizes it is only by grace that he has been saved. He realizes he is weak and undone like Isaiah standing before the holiness of God. He realizes has done nothing to deserve his salvation and births in him both love and fear of Yahweh.

Listen, if you think you are saved and will stand in righteousness before a holy God because YOU made a smart decision to trust Jesus or if you believe you are spiritually smarter than those who do not trust Christ then the fact is you are standing before God clothed in your own righteousness. When the fires of judgment come, your self-righteousness will not protect you. You will perish eternally in the white-hot brilliance of the glory of God's holiness. If you are saved then this should humble you not make you prideful. Jesus told His disciples after they came back from preaching in the villages, *do not marvel that the demons submit to you but marvel that you are saved at all.*

Here is my point, it should make us all tremble that we are saved. We did nothing to earn it or deserve it. The fact that you decided to follow Jesus means that Jesus worked in you to do God's good pleasure not because you were more spiritual than your neighbor. Without the new birth you would never have any desire to follow Christ. It was God who had mercy on you. God has mercy on who He wills to have mercy. This should make every Christian stand in awe, reverence, fear, and love of our Great God and King for out of His sheer grace He set His love on you and gave you new life and adopted you into His family. By the blood of Christ, you are redeemed. He made you and He bought you. You are twice His.

I want to close by reading 1 Peter 1:17-18:

*"And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, <sup>18</sup> knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."*