

Proverbs 19:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.

Analysis

Obedience to God's commandments is not merely external conformity but soul-keeping—the preservation of one's whole being in covenant relationship with God. The Hebrew 'shamar' (keep) implies careful, watchful attention. Conversely, to 'despise his ways' is to treat God's revealed will with contempt, resulting in death—both spiritual and often physical. This verse affirms the inseparable connection between obedience and life in God's covenant. While salvation is by grace alone through faith, true faith necessarily produces obedience (James 2:17). The one who genuinely keeps God's commandments does so because God has given him a new heart.

Historical Context

In Israelite covenant theology, obedience to Torah brought life and blessing, while disobedience brought curse and death (Deuteronomy 28). This principle, while fulfilled in Christ, still reveals the moral structure of God's universe.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. Do you view God's commandments as burdensome restrictions or as life-giving wisdom?
2. What areas of disobedience are you tolerating that endanger your soul?

Interlinear Text

נֶפֶשׁ	וּ	שְׁמָן	רַ	מְצֻהָה	שְׁמָן	רַ	נֶפֶשׁ
He that keepeth		the commandment		He that keepeth		his own soul	
H8104		H4687		H8104		H5315	
בָּזַבְזָן	דָּבָרְךָ	יְמִתָּהָה					
but he that despiseth		his ways		shall die			
H959		H1870		H4191			

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 13:13 (Word): Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.

Luke 10:28 (Parallel theme): And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

Luke 11:28 (Word): But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

Proverbs 16:17 (Parallel theme): The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.

1 John 5:3 (Word): For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

1 John 3:22 (Word): And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Revelation 22:14 (Word): Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

Proverbs 29:18 (Word): Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

Proverbs 21:23 (Parallel theme): Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.

Proverbs 3:1 (Word): My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:

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