

Psalms 119:36

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to
covetousness.

Analysis

Incline my heart unto thy testimonies (נָטַח לְפִי לְעֵדוּתֶיךָ)—Natah (to stretch out, incline, turn) pictures God bending the lev (heart) toward His edut (testimonies). The heart naturally inclines toward self; God must supernaturally tilt it toward His revealed truth. This is effectual grace—not violating will but renewing affections so we freely choose what we couldn't choose before. **And not to covetousness** (וְלֹא לְבִצְרָא)—Betsa (dishonest gain, greed) is the antithesis of delighting in God's testimonies. Covetousness is heart-worship of creation instead of Creator (Romans 1:25), violating the tenth commandment's prohibition against desiring what God forbids.

The psalmist recognizes two magnetic poles competing for the heart: God's testimonies and covetous gain. Without divine intervention, hearts incline toward greed automatically. This prayer requests radical heart-reorientation—affections transferred from wealth to Word, from possessions to precepts. This is the New Covenant's 'new heart' (Ezekiel 36:26) and Jesus's warning that 'you cannot serve God and money' (Matthew 6:24). Only God can incline hearts away from idolatry toward Himself.

Historical Context

Ancient Israel's history is marked by cycles of covenant faithfulness and covetous apostasy (Achan's theft, Solomon's wealth, prophetic denunciations of greed). The psalmist writes from a culture where prosperity could lead to forgetting God

(Deuteronomy 8:11-14), needing divine heart-inclination to resist materialism's magnetic pull.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does it reveal about human nature that we need God to actively 'incline' our hearts toward His testimonies?
2. Where is your heart currently inclined—toward God's Word or toward covetous gain (money, possessions, status, comfort)?
3. How do you actively seek God's heart-inclining grace when you feel affections drifting from Scripture toward material things?

Interlinear Text

הִט	לִּבִּי	אֶל	עֵדוּתְךָ יְיָ	וְאֵל	אֶל	בְּצַעַף
Incline	my heart	H413	unto thy testimonies	H408	H413	and not to covetousness
H5186	H3820		H5715			H1215

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 13:5 (Parallel theme): Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Luke 12:15 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

1 Kings 8:58 (Parallel theme): That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers.

Psalms 10:3 (Parallel theme): For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth.

Psalms 51:10 (Parallel theme): Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Colossians 3:5 (Parallel theme): Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

Psalms 141:4 (Parallel theme): Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.

2 Peter 2:3 (Parallel theme): And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

Exodus 18:21 (Parallel theme): Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:

Ezekiel 33:31 (Parallel theme): And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.