

~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:

Let us give attention to basic reasons for treasuring up the Scriptures.

First, we must memorize Scripture because God commands us to do so.

God spoke to His people on Mount Sinai out of the midst of the fire, and the people responded by saying, "Behold, the Lord our God hath showed us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire: We have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth" (Deut. 5:24).

The people perceived that the great and glorious God expresses Himself in words that can be understood.

Immediately after that, God said, "And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart" (Deut. 6:6). God explained further that they were to put out the effort necessary to have His words in their hearts: "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul" (Deut. 11:18).

God specifically commands us to memorize His word so that we can have it in our hearts. This is His will and His plan for us. We cannot escape it. We dare not say to Him, "I don't have time," or "I just cannot memorize."

The second reason why we must memorize Scripture is because we cannot really "live" without it. In Deuteronomy chapter 8, we are told how God deals with His people, how He disciplines them, humbles them and lifts them up, that "He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. 8:3).

We can exist all right without His word, but without it we cannot "live."

Why Memorize?

Since we have God's word printed nicely in a book which we may carry with us wherever we go, why is it necessary to go through all the effort of memorizing it? As a matter of fact, I remember how a distinguished preacher once boasted before a large audience that he did not memorize Scripture. He inappropriately compared Scripture to the train schedule, and said with a self-assured satisfaction, "WHY should I memorize the train schedule when I have it in my pocket?" We will readily concede that he was wise in not memorizing the train schedule which is constantly subject to change. Furthermore, we are not told, "The train schedule have I hid in my heart that I might not sin..."

The travel schedule we may need five minutes or so a week, but the word of the living God is urgently needed 10,080 minutes a week, and having it in the mind and heart makes it instantly accessible at all times.

Yes indeed, daily read the word of God, daily meditate on it, and your spirit will be daily exposed to the heart and mind of God.

Still much more profit is gained from searching and studying the Scriptures in some methodical way. Martin Luther compared Bible study to gathering apples. First shake the whole tree--read the whole Bible through just as you would read any other book. Then shake every limb, studying it book after book. Then shake every branch--give attention to every chapter. Then shake every twig by careful study of the paragraphs and sentences, and you will be greatly rewarded if you will then look under every leaf, by searching the meaning of each and every word.

In studying the word, we seek for truth not eloquence, we search after profit not subtle arguments, and best of all we yearn to find the Person of Christ on the sacred pages.

But the most effectual way of assimilating the word of God is by memorizing it, so that it is not a transient occurrence, like a caller who stays for an hour or so and continues on his journey; nay, this word of God is invited to remain in us, to settle down in us, to make its home in the inner soul and live in the deepest recesses of our being.

The Rationale

Why should I memorize Scripture?

Some years ago, the executive officer of a denomination with headquarters in Indiana wrote me to ask concerning some details regarding Scripture memorization. He stated that many of their people were suggesting memorizing the Scriptures, and then in what sounded like a distressing predicament, he said that his denomination had not even developed a rationale for Bible memorization. He proceeded to ask me if we had a rationale, and would I mind telling him what it was, both from the Biblical, the educational, and the psychological points of view.

The letter was somewhat unusual, but basically it was sad. Here is a large group of presumably Christian people whose leading officer does not seem to know the value and the basic reasons for memorizing Scripture. Since then, however, I have come to believe that perhaps the serious lack of that denomination was not just an isolated case of the problem.

I prayed and considered the matter, and after a week or two I answered briefly as follows, "At the risk of being simplistic, I can say that we do indeed have a rationale for memorizing Scripture, and that it was established by God Himself many, many years ago. Here it is: (1) 'Thy word'--that's the Biblical aspect of it. It is God's infallible, inerrant word that we are dealing with. (2) 'Have I hid in my heart'--that's the educational or disciplinary part of it. It takes real effort to store up the word of God in the mind and heart, but it is exceedingly profitable. (3) 'That I might not sin against Thee'--that's the psychological or spiritual aspect of it."

I concluded the letter by saying, "'Thy word'--that's the best possession; 'have I hid in my heart'--that's the best place; 'that I might not sin against Thee'--that's the best purpose."

We memorize the Scriptures because they are the living words from God. We desire to have in our minds His words so that we may know at every turn what His will is for our lives.

One reason why many people do not take the word of God seriously is because they question the veracity of God, as Satan first did in Genesis 3:1: "Hath God said?"

The Bible is a miracle book! It came supernaturally through divine revelation (1Cor. 2:10). God moved upon certain men called prophets and apostles in a special way, and made His will and His words known unto them. They wrote them down, "Not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth" (1 Cor 2:13).

Paul denies the notion that they put down God's thoughts in their own words, or in words suggested by human learning. Peter confirms this fact when he said, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21). The Bible came to us from God.

The Bible is superior to all other writings. Its excellence is infinitely superior, just as "the heavens are higher than the earth" (Isa. 55:9). The inspired writers themselves marvelled at its immeasurable greatness, "O Lord, how great are Thy works! and Thy thoughts are very deep" (Ps. 92:5). "Like a telescope, the Bible reaches beyond the stars and penetrates the heights of heaven and the depths of hell. Like a microscope, it discovers the minutest details of God's plan and purpose as well as the hidden secrets of the human heart" (L.S. Chafer).

Therefore, as the very word of God, it works effectually when it is personally received and appropriated as the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). The famous surgeon, Dr. Howard A. Kelly, of Johns Hopkins fame, a staunch defender of the Bible as God's infallible word, described the practical reality of God's word thus, "The Bible appeals to me strongly as a physician, because it is such excellent medicine; it has never failed to cure a single patient if only he took his prescription honestly. It is in the spiritual therapeutics just what we so long for in all our bodily ailments, a universal remedy."

God's Word Is Indispensable

God wants us to realize that His word is not only important but that it is absolutely indispensable in every sphere of life (Deut. 8:3).

God intends that the believer should live by the word daily and momentarily. His hidden life is to be sustained by it; his activities are to be guided by it. In every circumstance the quickening word of God will be

his comfort and his consolation. Weighed down by sorrow, losses and disillusionment with friends, Job found his solace and sustenance in the word of God, of which he said, "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (23:12).

God's word is essential to keep us from failure (Josh. 1:8). God's revelation is not just to be treated with high regard but it must be continually in our hearts and upon our lips all through the day and through the night seasons as well. The man whose "delight is in the law of the Lord," so that he "meditates" in it day and night, "shall be like a tree"--growing and flourishing--"and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps. 1:2-3). "Men," said Calvin, "never act skillfully, except insofar as they allow themselves to be ruled by the word of God."

God's word is essential to keep us from error (Matt. 22:29). The Sadducees erred, Christ said, for two reasons: (1) They did not know the Scriptures. (2) They seriously underestimated the power of God. They argued and philosophized brilliantly about the problems of life in heaven but they were wrong because they did not perceive the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures.

God's word is essential to keep us from sin (Ps. 119:11). The discovering word is to be treasured up in our hearts so as to become a source of power and life from within. Elsewhere the Psalmist said, "The law of his God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide" (37:31). Every day we have need of letting God's word probe the deepest recesses of our being to discover the hidden evil within, to search out every flaw and to restrain every tendency to do wrong. "By them is Thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:11). God's word in the mind and the heart continually is the most effective guard there is for our motives as well as our actions.

God's word is essential to keep us from stunted growth (1 Pet. 2:2). Where there is no heart longing for the divine milk, there is at once spiritual decline, which results in stunted spiritual growth. The word, like milk, is nourishing food, and it is delightful to the taste; by it we grow, and in it we taste the graciousness of God.

We live in a day when Bibles are accessible on every hand, but there is throughout the whole earth, as Amos prophesied, "a famine of hearing the words of the Lord" (8:11). Man does not seem to hear the blessed word of God addressing itself to the depths of his life; he pursues his own way, restless, wandering from sea to sea, craving some new thing, some new thrill, oblivious to the voice from Heaven. How exceedingly needful it is for man to accept the authority of God's law, and submit to the sovereign sway of the Holy Spirit in his life! This is the invitation and pleading of God in that dramatic call of the prophet Jeremiah, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!" (22:29).