The President's Desk

The Word Upon My Heart—II

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In the last issue, my column focused on the value and object—the “what”—of Christian meditation. Christians meditate on various aspects of the Word of God. In this article, the focus will be on the “when” and the “how.” Of all the basic questions to consider on this subject, the “when” and the “how” might be the easiest to understand but perhaps the hardest to practice.

When I was a young pastor, I once asked Leslie Hardinge, the former and highly esteemed theology professor of a previous generation, how he went about studying the Word of God. I had considered his insights into Scripture refreshing, his thoughts profound and yet simple about the character of God. His reply stayed with me to this day; he simply said: “Little and often.”

To cover less ground but do so several times each day is better than studying a huge amount occasionally. Memorizing or focusing on a verse or passage in the morning, going about one’s business having stored it in the heart, then coming back to it for a few minutes at noon, and yet again before bed, forces the mind to grapple with the intent of God’s words.

This concept has a higher source: “There is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the Bible through and yet fail to see its beauty or to comprehend its deep and hidden meaning. One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained. Keep your Bible with you. As you have opportunity, read it; fix the texts in your memory. Even while you are walking the streets you may read a passage and meditate upon it, thus fixing it in mind.”

No wonder Joshua was urged to meditate on God’s word “day and night” (Joshua 1:8, KJV), and the first promise in Psalms is “Blessed is the man . . . [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Ps. 1:1, 2, KJV)! There is evidence that suggests we keep thinking through the night, while we sleep, what we pondered during the day.

This may have become obvious by now: the reason we meditate on God’s Word is to appropriate God’s character: “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18, KJV).

When Jesus encountered Saul on the road to Damascus, His purpose was to induce meditation upon His wayward Israelite to help him recognize that he was pursuing the wrong foe. He blinded him for three days and nights to give him a chance to ponder what he was doing.

It turned out that Saul saw more while in darkness than when, while sighted, he was so busy persecuting God’s people. Insights into the purposes of God became so much clearer to him than when he sought advanced teaching from the apostles in Jerusalem. They had nothing new to offer him. He changed from Saul, the Pharisee who read and studied Scripture that resulted in religious elitism, to Paul, the apostle who pondered Scripture, leading him to see Jesus’ humility as the ultimate self-emptying experience.
Once I was meditating on the story of the feeding of the 5,000. At the end of the day, after thousands were fed, after Christ walked on water and enabled Peter to do the same, the disciples had still not grasped the power of the miracle of the loaves. Why? Had they been obedient to Him perhaps their hearts would not have become hardened in spite of witnessing such great miracles. But obedient to what? To Christ’s command: “‘You give them to eat’” (vs. 37, NKJV).

Christ wished to empower John’s disciples as well as His own to act on God’s word alone. Had they not cast out demons and healed the sick just days before? If the disciples had acted on Jesus’ word, they would have saved Him great heartache and spared others the ensuing confusion. They would have seen that God was even able to provide for multitudes in a similar fashion to what He did with His prophets of old. We enter into His audience to hear a personal word from the King rather than an impersonal pronouncement by a monarch to whom we could hardly relate. We’re often surprised at His longing that we remain before Him to hold conversation with us, so great a group of sinners. He seeks communion. And as we part from His presence represented by that favorite chair in the den at 5:00 a.m., or by the tree in the forest near our home, we carry with us His words that, when replayed in our minds later in the day, will slowly and surely lead us to more than communion with the Almighty. It will bring union with God’s purposes, wishes, and hopes.

REFERENCES

1 In Heavenly Places, p. 138.