

# Treasuring the Word in your Heart

## THE FORGOTTEN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION

### Introduction

The Christian life can be described as an ongoing pursuit of holiness. Christians are called to constantly live in such a way as to strive for the fruit of holiness:

1 Timothy 4:7 (NASB95) discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

**“Spiritual Disciplines are the God-given means we are to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness”-Donald Whitney**

Discipline-(verb form from which we get the word gymnasium) It means to train/exercise (athletic training context)

Thus, spiritual disciplines are the means of godliness which promote growth in the Christian life. They are habits of devotion which Christians cultivate, by the aid of the Spirit to pursue godliness. 1 Timothy 4:7 teaches that striving for godliness is *work*. It is daily effort to pursue the things of God. There are many spiritual disciplines in the Christian life—prayer, Bible intake, worship, fasting, evangelism, etc. However, one spiritual discipline which aids in Scripture intake is rarely discussed and underutilized. Scripture memorization—the discipline of orally reciting Scripture accurately is a crucial spiritual discipline in the life of the Christian. Our lives are lived at such a pace and volume that most of our lives we are reacting to stimuli around us. In those moments, we almost always default to what’s inside of us:

Luke 6:45 (NASB95)

<sup>45</sup> “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Without being deeply saturated in Scripture, we are often powerless to engage biblically in every area of our lives. To curb the overflow of evil decisions, it must be replaced by deep the truth and goodness of God internally before it is external. Like a tree, the good roots must go down deep before the goodness of the fruit springs high. Or as John Piper puts it, “*we don’t stand a chance to be holy if we’re not memorizing and meditating deeply on God’s word.*”

Scripture memorization helps us to grow in godliness, which is even more profitable than bodily exercise (1 Tim. 4:8). We will examine this spiritual discipline closely for application in our lives.

Therefore this study aims to:

- Demonstrate the value of Scripture memorization in Scripture.
- Study the way Scripture memorization was used in Christ’s life and ministry.
- Discover the practical benefits of memorizing Scripture.
- Survey a plan for memorizing Scripture.

### The Value of Scripture Memorization

**HOW CAN WE CALL OURSELVES CHRISTIANS IF WE SPEND OUR DAYS HARDLY EVER THINKING OF CHRIST? BUT WHEN YOU THINK OF CHRIST, BE CAREFUL THAT YOU ARE GUIDED BY THE WORD OF GOD. IT IS EASY TO INVENT A FALSE CHRIST.- JOHN OWEN**

Christians must think of Christ well. When and what we pray, how we spend our time and resources and our attitude reflects what we think of God regularly. In other words, every day Christians are thinking and living *theologically*. When examining how we spend our time or reviewing our day, does our actions, thoughts, speech convey that we are living in Christ? Scripture meditation helps us to remember that our lives are not autonomous but are spiritually dependent on Christ every moment. Scripture commends to us the value of memorizing scripture:

**John 15:1–7 (NASB95)**

<sup>1</sup> “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup> “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. <sup>7</sup> “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Jesus gives the disciples an analogy for everyday living. He compares Himself to the role of a vine and believers the branches. Healthy branches produce fruit, but they only bear fruit if they are being properly nourished by the vine. Thus the branch cannot be healthy nor produce fruit on its own. It is completely reliant on the vine for nutrients and supplication. Therefore, Jesus concludes in verse 5 that only the branches which abide in Him can produce the good fruit of life. Those who do not abide are useless and is discarded. Jesus commands us to abide in Him. That verb is an imperative which means *to live, dwell or reside in*. Christians are commanded to abide in Christ by faith every moment of our lives. Notice Jesus continues by adding to His instruction in verse 7. We are to abide in Christ *and His words are to abide in us*. What does it mean for the word to abide in us? At minimum it impacts how we *receive* God’s word. Superficial, joyless, reading of the word is how NOT to abide in his word. At the least, abiding in His word this means that we know, understand, trust and treasure His word. There are fewer ways to have the word abide in our hearts than by first committing it to our mind. Scripture memorization is a discipline which encourages the word to dwell in us moment by moment.

We find a similar command given by the Apostle Paul:

**Colossians 3:16 (NASB95)**

<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Memorizing Scripture is one of the ways we can obey the clear command given. Notice the communal operation of the word of Christ as well. Here Paul is talking to the entire church in Colossae, therefore the command is really let the word of Christ richly dwell within you all (plural). The believing community should let the word gloriously reside among them as the word operates teaching and admonishing with singing and worship *in their hearts* to God. In other words, the Christian community is a word-centered, word-dwelling people. Memorizing Scripture strengthens the unity of our gatherings.

**Heart check question. In what ways am I practically obeying the command to “let the word of Christ richly dwell within me”?**

## Scripture Memorization In the Life of Christ

We don't often consider how Christ used the word in His kingdom mission and every day life. We know that Christ is the *Logos of God*, as He is divinity shrouded in humanity. However, we should not be too quick to dismiss how Christ relied upon the written word of God in His life:

Luke 2:40 (NASB95)

<sup>40</sup> The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

**Jesus's intimate acquaintance with Scripture did not come [magically from heaven] during the period of his public ministry; it was grounded no doubt on his early education, but nourished by long years of personal meditation. Later, in his public ministry, it becomes evident that he was intimately familiar with its contents . . . and also possessed in his human nature a knowledge of God by the Spirit which lent freshness, authority, and a sense of reality to his teaching. -Sinclair Ferguson**

### A. Jesus quoted Scripture from memory in His \_\_\_\_\_ ministry

There were times in His ministry where Christ would pick up a scroll and minister from the passage He read (Lk. 4:16-21). Yet Christ also regularly quoted the scriptures in His teachings. Before quoting the scriptures, He would often say, "It is written" to begin His quotation. Or He would refer to the quotation by the author. (Mark 7:1-11). Or when He chides the religious leaders by saying "Have you not read" (Matt. 22:31-32). Over and over Christ displays a perfect recall of the scriptures to effectively preach and teach faithfully the Word of God. (Cf. Lk. 19:46)

### B. Jesus quoted Scripture from memory when \_\_\_\_\_ by Satan

Most famously, Christ thwarts the temptations from Satan by quoting Scripture (Mt. 4:1-11). Most impressively He combats Satan with passages all used from Deuteronomy implying that Christ did not just memorize individual verses by subject but commanded mastery over entire books.

### C. Jesus reflected Scripture from memory during the \_\_\_\_\_ events of life

During moments which seemed ordinary; like the next travel destination, Christ demonstrates that His mindset was always on the contents of the word. He understood that the events which led ultimately to Calvary were preordained according to the scriptures (Lk. 18:31-34)

### D. Jesus quoted Scripture from memory when He \_\_\_\_\_

During the climax of His suffering on the cross; while facing excruciating pain, Christ quotes Scripture (Mk. 15:34). He quotes Psalm 22 which describe His anguish and the hope of deliverance by the Father.

With Christ as our model, we see that Scripture memorization is crucial for living a life of faith each and every day.

## The Benefits of Scripture Memorization

### A. *Personal Sanctification*

#### A. Growing in the Faith

Faith can only grow in truth (Jn. 17:17). In fact every believer first cultivated faith by *hearing* the word of God (Romans 10:17). Thus it stand to reason that to grow in our faith we must be growing in our understanding and applying of the word. Scripture demonstrates that the way we receive the word *first* must be of the mind:

Proverbs 22:17–19 (NASB95)

<sup>17</sup> Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, And apply your mind to my knowledge; <sup>18</sup> For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, That they may be ready on your lips. <sup>19</sup> So that your trust may be in the Lord, I have taught you today, even you.

Scripture memorization is how we can apply our minds to His knowledge. It is good to keep the word *ready* and able to speak the word. Notice that it doesn't stop there, but must move to the heart. For the intended effect of applying our minds to the word is that it will strengthen our trust in the Lord. This is essential, for the goal of memorization is not simply knowledge, but knowledge leading to our affections and our affections leading to trust and dependence on the Lord. Memorizing scripture reinforces the truth over and over to be digested into our souls.

#### B. Thinking God's Thoughts After Him

Memorizing scripture also reshapes our view of reality in any area. We are called to apply the word of God to our lives in every area. Memorizing scripture and meditation on His word is how we have access to the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:16 (NASB95)

<sup>16</sup> For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

#### C. Fighting Sin

The Puritan John Bunyan (1628–1688), in his classic work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, describes the main character, Christian, battling the evil dragon, Apollyon. The description is worth noting: "While Apollyon lifted himself up to deliver his last blow and to make a full end of this good man, Christian nimbly stretched out his hand for his sword and grabbed it, saying, 'Rejoice not against me, O my enemy: when I fall, I shall rise back up.' With that, Christian gave Apollyon a deadly thrust, which made the fiend fall back as one who had received a mortal wound." Notice that Christian grabs his "sword" and then speaks God's Word, using it as both a defensive and an offensive weapon.

The Apostle Paul teaches that Christians should "put on the full armor of God" (Eph 6:11)—belt, breastplate, sandals, shield, and a helmet.

Ephesians 6:11 (NASB95)

<sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

However, he gives one final and essential piece of armor: "the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God" (v. 17).

Ephesians 6:17 (NASB95)

<sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The word for "word" here, in Greek, is the more unusual *rhema*, which is the spoken word. In order for Christian to pick up his sword and speak God's Word in battle, he had to first know the Word in his heart. Scripture memorization affirms that the spiritual battles we face are serious and the way the Lord calls us to fight the enemy is effective.

#### B. Public Ministries

#### A. Personal Evangelism

Scripture memorization enables us to be prepared to communicate the gospel of salvation to lost people. During moments where there is an opportunity to share hope we tend to feel scared or nervous. Some of that comes from fear of not knowing what to say. That is helped when we have a biblical understanding of salvation and what it offers for sinners.

#### B. Mutual Encouragements

Knowing the Scriptures does not just encourage us personally, but allows us to encourage our fellow Christian brothers and sisters. In a time of need, we can love one another by reminding our fellow Christian of the truth of God's word:

1 Thessalonians 4:18 (NASB95)

<sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NASB95)

<sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

### Conclusion

Scripture memorization is a key aspect of the life of discipleship. As James commends to us, we must do more than look at the word to be a doer of the word, but we must look at the word intently *and* do not forget in order to obey. This is a clear call to memorize God's precious word.

James 1:22–25 (NASB95)

<sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup> But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.