

The Benefits of the Word

Our readings for the day bring us to the second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy, and particularly the benefits of the Word described there in verses 15-17 of chapter 3. To begin with, we have the example of Timothy himself: "... from a child ***thou hast known the holy Scriptures***, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). It would appear that Paul had an intimate knowledge of Timothy's circumstances, for in chapter 1 and verse 5, he spoke of how "***I call to remembrance*** the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Tim. 1:5). He called to remembrance Timothy's family affairs, particularly the faith of his mother and grandmother (but his Father was a Greek - Acts 16:1,3), which implies that he had experienced these things first hand. How so? The record in Acts recounts the experiences of Paul at Lystra, Timothy's hometown, how he preached there, healed a cripple, was stoned, and rose up again only to return to Lystra once more. In practical terms, the apostle would have a need for a roof over his head: could it be that he stayed at Timothy's family's house, and saw for himself the faith displayed there? Be that as it may, Timothy was taught "from a child" the ways of the Living God by two faithful sisters of Christ.

HEAVENLY WISDOM

The "holy Scriptures" we are told, "are able to make thee ***wise unto salvation***" (2 Tim. 3:15). But the "wisdom" that the Bible imparts is not like the wisdom of this world. In the preaching of the Gospel, it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor. 1:19). Again, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, hath God chosen, to bring to nought the things that are" (vs. 27-28). The preaching of the cross is foolishness to the wise in this life, yet it is the power of God unto salvation.

James describes this heavenly wisdom as: "the wisdom that is ***from above***" (Jas. 3:17). As the proverbs have it: "the way of life is ***above to the wise***, that he may depart from hell beneath" (Prov. 15:24). There is a need to seek after heavenly things, as distinct from the natural, earthy way of the flesh. The prophet speaks of the greatness of Israel's God compared to the natural man:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Yahweh. For ***as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways***, and my thought as your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9).

Being that God's Ways are above the ways of man, it logically follows that if we seek after heavenly things, we should lift up our minds above it's natural carnal instincts, to develop a mind of Spirit. We should make God's Ways ours – so it is written elsewhere: "If ye then be risen with Christ, ***seek those things which are from above***, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). The elevation of our mind to a heavenly, as opposed to a carnal plane, can only develop our thoughts to become more in harmony with those of the God that we serve. This, of course, is a life-long exercise, which will amply reward us at the last.

ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED

The Apostle declares: “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). The word “inspiration” here literally signifies *breathed*, the statement meaning that all Scripture is God’s word, ***it is breathed out*** by God. This is the sense of Isaiah 55:

“so shall my word be ***that goeth forth out of my mouth***; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

The prophets who spoke and penned the words always attributed them to Yahweh. Constantly we read: “thus saith Yahweh”, and similar phrases. Consider also the testimony of David as to where his wise words came from:

“... the Spirit of Yahweh spake by me, and ***his word was in my tongue***” (2 Sam. 23:2).

Again:

“men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit ***by the mouth of David*** spake before concerning Judas ...” (Acts 1:16).

There can be no doubt therefore, the words that we have before us, which comprise the “Holy Bible” are those words that were breathed out by God. Sometimes, Inspiration is spoken of as a kind of editing process, whereby men collated their sources and wrote their records, and God ensured that what they said was right. But this, by definition, is not “inspiration”. The Bible doctrine of Inspiration is that all (not just some) Scripture is “God-Breathed”. All originated from Him, and were written down for our learning and admonition.

PROFITABLE FOR DOCTRINE

The Apostle continues: “... and is profitable for doctrine ...”. In our day, it is doctrine that sets us apart from other religious groups. Our doctrine is different from theirs, as it comes from the inspired word of God, and not human traditions. But in an endeavor to make the Word more pleasing to men of flesh, the doctrinal differences between us are minimized, and differences with “other Christians” over doctrine classed as not important. The Scripture however, teaches otherwise. The Inspired Word is “profitable for doctrine”, as Paul spoke to Timothy elsewhere:

“Till I come, ***give attendance to*** reading, to exhortation, ***to doctrine***” (1 Tim.4:13).

Doctrine therefore, is on of those things we should “give attendance to”. By contrast, those who do not embrace and retain the purity of true doctrine, are described as:

“children, tossed to and fro, and ***carried about with every wind of doctrine***, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (Eph. 4:14).

Rather than be persuaded by the wisdom of men, we ought ensure that all that we believe and practice is derived from the Holy Writ, which is able to keep us firm and stable as we pass through the stormy winds and waters of life.

PROFITABLE FOR REPROOF

One thing that human nature despises is reproof. As the Pharisees said to a certain man who corrected them: “Thou wast altogether born in sins, ***and dost thou teach us?*** And they excommunicated him” (Jno. 9:34). Notice the strategy used here: first character assassination (thou wast altogether born in sins), and then indignation that such a one had any authority to teach them. Thirdly, the actual issue in question is left unaddressed.

The wise man, however will welcome reproof – especially when it is derived from Scripture. “the ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise” (Prov. 15:31). Again: “Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man and he will love thee” (Prov. 9:8).

In the case of scorners, we do not cast our pearls before swine. But for those with the humility to hear, we give – and receive – correction and reproof, thus strengthening each other in the journey of life.

This is also an aspect of our witnessing, which because it is unpalatable, is minimized by some preachers of our day: “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather ***reprove them***” (Eph. 5:11).

It is difficult to find a voice of reproof in the holding of puppet shows and teddybears picnics that some organize as a means of bringing folk in. But whilst these activities are pleasing to the masses, they are devoid of the word of reproof that the Word is profitable for. They are also devoid of the Wisdom of God which comprises the True Gospel, reducing it to a mere husk, unable to save anyone.

PROFITABLE FOR CORRECTION

Similar in some respects to “reproof”, “correction” is something we must expect as sons and daughters of the living God. It is written:

“My son, despise not the chastening of Yahweh, neither be weary of his correction: for whom Yahweh loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Prov. 3:11-12).

It is common for men to think that when life passes easily, and when good things abound, that they are being blessed by the Almighty - but when hard times come, and we are at a loss as to what to do to lift ourselves out of them, that the Almighty is hiding his face from us. But this is a misconception: those very difficulties that we find hard to deal with are part of the method of chastisement from God, and are actually tokens of His Love towards us. As the apostle spake, citing this Proverb:

“if ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisements, whereof all are partakers, then are ye illegitimate, and not sons” (Heb. 12:8)

We should rejoice in our sufferings therefore, recognizing the Divine Hand in our lives, developing our characters through trial.

There is an instructive aspect of chastisement in the example of Joseph. Despite the difficulties he faced, it was said that “Yahweh was with Joseph,” and the end result being that he was elevated to be over all of the land of Egypt. But there is an aspect of his trial that is not commonly considered. Psalm 105 reads:

“he sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant:
Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his
word came: ***the word of Yahweh tried him***” (Psa. 105:17-19).

“the word of Yahweh tried him”. How so? Because the Word of Yahweh as revealed to him spoke of his future glorification before his family. How could the purpose of God be possibly worked out in such dire circumstances, when he was in irons, in prison? This is a sense in which the Word of Yahweh might try us also. We have been given many great and precious promises, and at times in our lives, we just cannot imagine how we can attain to those things, and how the purpose of God in our lives might be worked out. But we must trust in the Lord, knowing that all things are possible, and that though we might not understand it at the time, all things will be worked out according to His Will and Purpose.

PROFITABLE FOR INSTRUCTION

Psalm 19 demonstrates the importance of being instructed according to the Word:

“the Law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of
Yahweh is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of Yahweh are right,
rejoicing the heart, the commandment of Yahweh is pure, enlightening the
eyes” (Psa. 19:7-8).

The Testimony of Yahweh will make the simple wise. Some extol the virtue of a “simple faith,” but the word of Scripture instead describes how we must change and progress from simplicity to wisdom. This is a lifelong process of giving heed to the healing effect of the Word, which is “perfect”, “sure”, “right”, and “pure”. Verse 11 of this Psalm returns us to the theme of reproof: “Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward”. The Word therefore, sounds fast a warning. To strip this aspect out from our preaching is to remove a vital aspect of the Word, that we must warn men and women of the consequence of not obeying the call of the true Gospel.

In approaching the Word of the Most High God, we must seek to learn, understand, and be instructed in Divine things. “Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the word of knowledge” counsels the proverb (Prov. 23:12). We must seek out instruction and understanding more than the treasures of this life. Again the spirit of wisdom in the Proverbs teach:

“I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me ... my
fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice
silver” (Prov. 8:17-19).

To diligently search after instruction then, is something that pleases the Almighty, and which will make us “wise unto salvation”, with an inheritance far better than the fine gold that men of the world obsess over, in their endeavor to possess it.

THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE PERFECT

The perfecting of the Man of God is the ultimate aim of the Holy Writ. Hebrews chapter 13 gives the appeal that “the God of peace ... ***make you perfect*** in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:21).

We are God’s workmanship, and it is through the pressures of life, coupled with an adherence to the ways of Wisdom that we can be developed, and nurtured to become all the better for it.

The Greek word translated “perfect” in 2 Tim. 3:17 carries the sense of being *completely fitted*, or *equipped*. The man of God is “completely equipped, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”. The Word itself is able to equip us, to the doing of “good works” in the sight of God.

The reference to “good works” demonstrates that our faith must be seen in action. The Word equips us to do His Will, but we must seek to use the things entrusted to us for good. We must seek to be pure in word and in deed, so that when Christ comes, he might find in us an image of himself, and bring us into his kingdom.

THE NEED FOR STUDY

There is in some quarters a spirit of antipathy towards the word. Bible study is seen as something for the academics among us to do, with deep things being best left as uncertain details that we are not meant to understand. But when we think of all the benefits of the Word, as described above, there can surely be no sound reason why not to study it with all of our might. Again, Paul expressed the importance of Bible Study to Timothy thus:

“Study ***to shew thyself approved unto God***, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Bible Study is a work that God has set before us. If we do not engage in that work, we will need to be ashamed before our Master, and will not be approved in his sight. To the spiritually minded, there is much benefit in Bible Study, and there is no reason why it should be avoided. How can we be filled with the spirit of God, without attending to the Spirit-Word? How can we know what the will of the Lord is, unless we read it? But as we have shown, Bible Study is only effective if it brings forth the fruit of Wisdom, and is translated into “good works” before God our heavenly Father. Let us therefore earnestly study the word, that we gain the benefits, and become so developed in our character, to bear a likeness of our Lord, prepared for his Coming again.

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