

Memorizing Scripture

by Wayne Goff

I recently read an interesting article on the value of Scripture memorization. Let me share some of those valuable thoughts with you, as well as some of my own.

Scripture memorization is often scorned by today's culture. The attitude is often summed up with phrases like "rote memory" and "rote learning." Memorizing seems to discourage creativity, critical thinking, and conceptual understanding.

However, our everyday experiences tell us otherwise. When one is training to be a doctor or lawyer, much memorization of facts is required. We do not foolishly assume that the creativity of actors or musicians is crushed by their heavy load of memorization. The best NFL quarterbacks today spend countless hours in the film room, studying defenses, looking for patterns to memorize in preparation for Sunday's game.

So what value occurs in our brains when we memorize Scripture? First, it is not an end in itself. When we meditate deeply on the words of Scripture, then we bear fruit. As the inspired words of Paul to Timothy state: "Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Tim. 4:15). Notice the phrases "meditate" - "give yourself entirely" - "your progress" in this passage. Something is happening here. Your mind is being affected, then altered, and the way you view the world is changed to harmonize with God's way of thinking.

Yes, we have many electronic versions of God's Word immediately at our disposal today on hand-held devices, or on desktop and laptop computers. These tools are time-saving, most portable, and extremely valuable. But even these do not substitute for memorizing God's Word! For example, the Psalmist wrote: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps. 119:11). God's righteous moral standard affects our thinking, and thus our actions!

God knew this all along! When He instructed His favored nation, Israel, He said: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your hearts" (Deut. 6:6). So how did those commandments get in their hearts? From reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word daily (Deut. 6:7-9). That way, God's Word is with you at all times and in every place -- in the home, at school or work, when you are in a place of safety, or in the realm of danger and temptation. It dwells in your heart, where real transformation takes place! See also Deuteronomy 4:9, 11:18 and 30:14. Note how many times this thought is repeated throughout Scripture: Job 22:22; Ps. 19:11, 14; 37:31; 40:8; 119:9-11; Isaiah 51:7.

God's leaders are expected to have this kind of knowledge, understanding and familiarity with God's Word. God commanded Joshua centuries ago: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Josh. 1:8). In the Lord's church today, God's shepherds are to hold fast to God's Word in order to exhort and convict those in error by sound doctrine (Titus 1:9).

Job said that he desired God's Word more than his necessary food (Job 23:12). David said that the happy man is the one who delights in God's Word and meditates on it day and night (Ps. 1:1-2). The great prophet Jeremiah said that God's Word absorbed was the joy and rejoicing of his heart (Jer. 15:16).

For the faithful disciple, God's Word is in his mouth and heart (Rom. 10:8). The Word of Christ is to dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16).

One writer explained the value of memorized Scripture with these words:

"Through memorization God's words reside in our body, in our social environment, in the constant orientation of our will and in the depths of our soul. They become a power, a substance, that sustains and directs us without our even thinking of them, and they emerge into conscious thought and action as needed. This is what Jesus spoke of as abiding, dwelling in him." [Dallas Willard]