

HOW TO PERMANENTLY ASSIMILATE THE WORD

The Word of God is intended to change us, to transform us. A disciple, we have said, is a learner and an adherent.

As an adherent, a disciple follows the Lord.

As a learner, he hears and obeys the words of his Master.

These activities on the part of the disciple will inevitably cause him to become like his Master (Luke 6:40 A disciple...after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher). However, the experience of many seems to indicate that merely hearing (and even studying) the Word does not produce this expected transformation. How can a disciple abide in the Word of the Lord so that he or she is permanently transformed?

Scripture suggests two basic activities by which a disciple can permanently integrate the truth of Scripture into his life. The first involves his thinking, the second his doing. One addresses his attitudes, the other his actions. We turn now to these two activities.

Meditation

Our words and deeds reflect the content of our hearts (Matthew 12:34; 15:17-20). Unfortunately, our words and actions often suggest hearts that are not filled with material pleasing to God. As a result, our attitudes and actions do not please God, and often trouble us.

But merely reading the Scripture, as good and necessary a practice as that is, does not saturate one's "inner man" with God's thoughts and perspective. And so, we ask, how can a person approach and utilize the Word of God so that it takes root in one's life? The answer of the Scripture is meditation.

Meditation is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "that kind of private devotional exercise which consists in the continuous application of the mind to the contemplation of some religious truth, mystery, or object of reverence, in order that the soul may increase in love of God and holiness of life." Meditation is deliberate reflection upon spiritual truth. It is a serious and sustained musing over the words and ways of the Lord God. It involves deep pondering and prolonged consideration of the biblical narrative, its precepts, principles and promises. It is absolutely essential to the development of a mature Christian character. A man cannot be other than his meditation (Prov. 23:7).

Meditation affects the conscious and subconscious. For example, the first thought you have in the morning is the last conscious thought you had when you were last awake. Our subconscious takes the material filling our conscious thoughts, builds on it, and then returns the results to our conscious mind. Therefore, it is extremely important that God's truth fill our hearts and minds.

Meditation requires time and discipline. It is a private activity. What a person does when he is alone is the best indicator of what he is really like.

"The men who most fully illustrated Christ in their character, and have most powerfully affected the world for Him have been men who spend so much time with God as to make it a notable feature in their lives."

-E.M. Bounds

Effective meditation presupposes an intimate acquaintance with the portion of Scripture one is pondering. The necessary degree of familiarity can be best obtained by memorization and thorough study of the passage.

Second, meditation involves turning over in one's mind the words and thoughts, the meaning, the precepts, principles and promises of a section of Scripture. (Please note that meditation "for the sake of meditation" is not profitable and may be harmful; we are only encouraging mediation on truth, that is, the Scriptures!) This process of reflection often includes inquiry - "What do I learn of God from this passage? What has He said or done? and why? What does this reveal about how He works? How does He view reality?" etc. One might also ask - "What do I learn about man here? What is he to do? and why? What is he promised? and with what conditions or warnings? What is God's desire or intent for him?" and so forth.

Meditation may pass into praise (silent, spoken, sung) to God for Who He is and what He has done or is doing. It may lead to prayer, petitioning that the truth of the passage might come to govern and characterize the life of the believer. Matthew Henry wrote "In meditation we converse with ourselves; in prayer we converse with God." However, in practice it is sometimes difficult to distinguish where meditation leaves off and prayer (or praise) begins.

The process of meditation on the truth of Scripture revolutionizes the way one thinks and evaluates. It transforms one's perspectives and alters one's attitudes. In short, it is a practice that remodels a believer on the "inside."

Illustration - The word employed for meditation in the Old Testament pictures a cow chewing his cud. Just as a cow regurgitates his food for further munching, so the believer meditating on Scripture ruminates repeatedly on God's Word, chewing on it again and again.

Implementation

Jesus concluded His great manifesto with the following words: Therefore, every one who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man,...And every one who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man....(Matthew 7:24,26). James adds very similar words: But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.. 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 shall be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22,25).

These verses are clear. Scripture is to be read (or heard) and understood so that it may be obeyed. It does not merely consist of "things nice to know." It is truth meant to be realized in human experience. It is designed to enable the mind and will of God to control and direct the acts and attitudes of men. If its truth is not implemented, if its precepts, principles and promises are not applied, then the purpose of Scripture is thwarted!

When a disciple applies the truth of Scripture to his or her life, it not only changes the way he or she acts in one specific situation, it forges a link in a new chain of behavior. We remember most completely those things that we do, and often repeat them! The more the truth of Scripture is practically applied to one's experience, the more that truth is practically assimilated and integrated into one's life.

Illustration - There are three basic steps to effectively learn to do anything.

- 1) Explanation of the theory/behavior to the learner
- 2) Demonstration of the theory/behavior to the learner
- 3) Implementation of the theory/behavior by the learner with supervision and correction by the teacher

After this, the learner can do it! Consider this; the "theory/behavior" is found in the Word; this "theory/behavior" was demonstrated in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ; as we implement the "theory/behavior", the Holy Spirit supervises, empowers and corrects us!