

The life-giving obsession: The Word of our God

Deuteronomy 11:18–25

Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. ¹⁹ And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ²⁰ And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: ²¹ That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth. ²² For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; ²³ Then will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. ²⁴ Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be. ²⁵ There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you.

Dear Christian Friends,

Those who teach languages will tell you that the best way to learn a foreign language is to immerse yourself in it so that you are forced to learn it and use it just to perform even common every day activities. In our lesson today in Deuteronomy, it is such total immersion that God has prescribed for His people Israel, a total immersion in His Word. Truly, the Word of God *is* foreign to man. It speaks a language that we can understand, but though it uses the same words that we speak, it expresses thoughts that we cannot naturally think or understand. It directs men to behave in ways in which they would never normally behave. It promises and threatens things that man is barely able to understand, for the reality and experience of both heaven and hell can barely be expressed in words. In all these ways, learning the Word of God is like learning a foreign language, the language of heaven itself, where every word and thought, even the *way* in which one is to think, is utterly holy. Nor is it only holiness that is foreign, for in these Words of God there is also grace, and mercy. Truth and beauty.

None of these things are human concepts. Men do not know what holiness means until God shows them a glimpse of His own holy nature. His commandments reveal the nature of his holiness, commandments which are of an entirely different order than anything which the conscience of man imagines God must be like. Paul declares, “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom. 7:7). To even look upon the true holiness of God would be deadly to man, for

the glory of God is too great for sinners to behold. God could only allow Moses to see a reflection of His holiness. Even to be in the presence of God as God declared the Law in words, Moses face shone like the sun so that even that much of God’s glory was too much for Israel to behold. When God spoke the words of the Ten Commandments audibly to all the people of Israel, it was to them a voice of a thundering trumpet, so fearsome that they cried out to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear, but do not let God speak with us, or we will die” (Exo. 20:19).

So it is that the glory of God is hidden in words, the Words of the Old and New Testaments. It is in Words that God chooses to speak to men, not the bare Words of God speaking from heaven, but words on a page, words in the heart, words in the mouth of God’s prophets, or of a friend. His Word has the same power as it did when Israel could not bear to hear it directly, but now it is in a more gentle form.

But even the more gentle form of words of the Scriptures are not gentle to men at all. The commandments of the Lord demand just as much of us as they ever did. They are just as true, just as holy, just as wise. But they are also just as filled with love, compassion, and grace. It is of His whole word, His threats and His promises, that God speaks when He tells Israel, “Lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.” Now God said that His Word should be *as* frontlets between your eyes, as if on little bands of paper you were to write His words, and fasten them between your eyes so that wherever you went, you would see them there. Later the Jews took this literally, and observed it like a tradition that by itself would make them holy. But that is not what God meant. He wanted His Word to be so thoroughly within them and around them that it is almost as if they had it physically attached to them wherever they went, so that no matter that they saw or did, they would view all through the lens of God’s Word, and do all things according to His commandments.

The Lord did actually command them to write His Word on their door posts, and upon their gates, so that they could not enter or leave their houses or their cities without seeing His Word. It was indeed total immersion that He commanded, for this was the only way in which their entire manner of existence could be transformed. And what was the effect of these commandments? It depends when and whom you are talking about. Often Israel simply rebelled against the Word, and did none of these things. At other times, they immersed themselves in it, but even when they did so, they did not keep God’s commandments. The holy Law of God condemned their works and their thoughts, and its presence among them was a constant reminder of their inadequacy. Even though they tried with all their might, saturating themselves with the Word was not enough to make them a holy people. Why then

did God command it when no one who obeyed succeeded in keeping His Word?

Nothing God speaks can be without value, for He does not speak only to hear His own voice. Therefore all Scripture is profitable for our use, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. How little we value the Word of the Lord! This same Word is given to us also. God bids us to have the same obsession with His Word which He instituted among the Israelites. He wants you to surround yourself with it, so that you cannot do *anything* without hearing and considering His Word. Wear it, cover your walls with it. Write it on your door posts. Make it the constant subject of your conversation, your thoughts waking and sleeping. Why is this necessary? For a holy people, this would not be needed, but for a fallen people it is vital, for the more we hear God's Word, the more it has its effect upon us.

The aim of this is described in verse 21: that your days might be lengthened in the land. That promise cannot apply to us today, because it was made concerning the Israelites and the promised land. Israel lost the land because of their unfaithfulness, because they finally despised God's Word. Therefore all the promises of old which God made to Israel regarding this land are void. What then is the underlying meaning of this promise? That *life* would be theirs. Abundant and enduring life. It was a promise of life which God placed into His Word, and it is the promise of life that makes it so necessary that an unholy people hear it even today. The time and lands have changed, but the heart of the people remains the same. Man cannot but fail to keep the commandments. The life which God has promised is always outside their grasp. No, not always. Almost always, for there is one ray of hope, one glimmer of life that they may grasp: the life of the Anointed One whom God has promised. The Land of Israel would *have* to endure until the day that God brought His promised Christ into the world. The world will *have* to endure until the day when Christ Jesus ends the reign of sin and death. The very Word which God commanded become an obsession to Israel day and night, taught them that this Christ, God's holy one, would be their Redeemer. Such a Redeemer they needed. Such a Redeemer *we* need! Apart from the promise of life that is there in Christ, even though it be true, even though it be filled with all of God's glory, apart from the promise of life in Christ the Law must mean death to all men. But the Word of God is also filled with grace and mercy, the comfort that even as the Law condemns us, Grace and truth came unto us by Jesus Christ, that we might not perish, but have everlasting life.

But unless these things are heard, and read and believed, then none can be saved. And unless they are constantly reinforced, men will cease believing them and be lost. Therefore what God prescribed for Israel is the very thing we need also. A complete obsession with the Word of our God, so that it is

our last thought upon going to bed, and our first upon rising in the morning. In eating and working, in our conversations with men at all times. Only the Word of God brings life to men. Everything else in the world brings death. Without the Word of God as your constant companion at all times, you will surely perish, for the commandments of the Lord will no longer urge you to do good. The threats of His Law will no longer fill your heart with dread. The comfort of Christ Jesus will no longer soothe your troubled mind.

Beyond the hearing of the word, there was another promise which God made in our lesson. That is, if Israel actually kept *all* the commandments of the Lord, they would not only have the Land of Israel, they would have the entire earth. Every nation would be subject unto them, and no man would be able to stand before them. Israel could not keep even their own land because of their sins. How then does this promise have any meaning? Not only does it have meaning, but it has been quite literally fulfilled. All the rest of the nation might have failed, but one man succeeded. Jesus Christ kept all the commandments of the Lord. He gave his perfect life as a sacrifice for the sins of all men. Therefore in Him all men have kept the Law of the Lord perfectly, and also in Him, this promised son of Abraham, all who believe receive this promise: Christ rules the whole world on their behalf. Every nation and kindred and tongue. Paul explains, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:25).

So you see, every promise of the Lord has been kept in Jesus Christ, and every promise in Christ Jesus is lost to us if we do not have His Word. Jesus describes His Word as a seed that is sown. They that hear the word of God and keep it grow up as a tender and fruitful plant before Him. His Word has the power to give us such life. But sometimes our heart is hard and unprepared. Sometimes the stony soil must be broken up. Sometimes we are distracted with many temptations, and the devil comes and steals the word from our heart. For these reasons, we need the Word of God constantly. It can prepare the soil of our heart and make it ready for the seed. We do not know *when* we need the Word the most, when we need its hammer to break the rocks, or its comfort for strength and new life. Therefore we need it *always*. May God grant that you surround yourself with His Word constantly, that you may learn of Christ, grow in His grace and knowledge, and be fruitful in every good work, until the day when He comes to rule over even the last enemy, death itself. Amen.