

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE

Part One

by Lee Moses

The story is commonly told of a small-town courtroom. When the time came to swear in the first witness, the court clerk realized he did not have a Bible. The judge interjected, “That’s alright. Mrs. Jones is here, and she is a member of the church of Christ. Just have the witness place his hand on her head.”

Whether historical or legendary, this story portrays the reputation New Testament Christians had in times past for their knowledge of the Scriptures. It seemed to others that their minds were overflowing with Scripture. This thorough knowledge of the Scriptures did not come by accident. Gospel preachers made determined efforts to memorize the entire New Testament, and occasionally the entire Old Testament as well. Gospel meetings would extend for weeks, with Scripture-filled sermons running at least an hour each night. Country plowboys would memorize Scripture while they worked their rows. Families would memorize Scripture together each day. Members of the Lord’s church truly comprised a “Bible-totin’ and Bible-quotin’” people.

Very few people, if any, would affirm that members of the Lord’s church in the twenty-first century have committed Scripture to memory to the extent that they did a hundred, or even fifty, years ago. This is very unfortunate, and at least partly explains many of the other problems plaguing the church today. Christians need to recommit themselves to memorizing Scripture.

Why Memorize Scripture?

Our desire to memorize Scripture must be more noble than to impress others with our knowledge of the Scriptures. Indeed, there are very compelling reasons to memorize Scripture, based on principles taught by the Scriptures themselves. As Christians, we are to have God’s laws placed in our minds and written in our hearts (Hebrews

8:10). As Jude wrote, “*But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Jude 17). Consider further some specific reasons to memorize Scripture.

To Be Better Bible Students

The Lord commands us to be diligent students of Scripture (2 Timothy 2:15; compare with Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:2). Indeed, our salvation depends on our having a knowledge of the Scriptures (1 Timothy 2:4; John 17:17; Romans 10:17). Memorizing Scripture certainly facilitates one’s growth in God’s word. Our time spent in Bible study will be more fruitful if related verses immediately come to mind. When one has memorized Scripture, he can study and meditate upon God’s word even when he does not have a Bible in front of him. When reading commentaries or other extrabiblical writings, we will know what Scripture references say without having to look up each of them. We will be able to read such writings with a more discerning eye (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1).

Preparing sermons and classes can be a very painstaking, time-consuming process. Indeed, one should always take such responsibilities very seriously, but one who has memorized Scripture will be able to prepare sermons and Bible classes more effectively.

Time spent memorizing Scripture is worthwhile Bible study in itself. It is impossible to do a cursory reading of Scripture while memorizing—one is forced to focus on the words much more intensely than when merely reading. Memorizing helps one understand how Scripture works together, as one has in mind other parts of Scripture well in mind while reading and memorizing. I cannot count the “Aha!” moments I have had while memorizing Scripture, as I finally understood a Biblical teaching that previously eluded me.

One plainly knows Scripture better when he has committed it to memory than when he has simply read it.

To Live the Christian Life

We sometimes sing, “O to be like Thee, Blessed Redeemer...stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.” The Lord is not going to stamp His own image on anyone mystically or miraculously. Christ left us an **example** to follow (John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 3:16). We become Christ-like as we follow the truths found in Scripture. However, one cannot live by truths he does not remember.

The wise man instructs, “*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*” (Proverbs 4:23). Whatever is in our mind is going to direct the way we live. Filling our minds with Scripture makes us far more likely to live Christian lives. The word hidden in one’s heart strengthens him for the trials and tragedies of life (Psalm 119:81; Romans 15:4).

Living the Christian life must remain a goal, if not **the** goal of memorizing Scripture. God does not only want us to know His word for the sake of knowing it—He wants us to be saved by it, and He demands that we obey it (Deuteronomy 5:29; John 13:17; 15:14; 1 Timothy 2:4). The infamous Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev allegedly had committed large portions of the New Testament to memory, yet his life was far removed from God. If one should memorize the entire Bible yet live and die apart from God, his memorization was a vain enterprise. However, as one maintains a view toward faithful obedience, no moment spent memorizing Scripture is wasted.

To Resist Temptation

Immediately following His baptism, our Lord faced fierce temptations from the tempter. However, Jesus was well-armed for the temptations that came His way. Whether a temptation appealed to the lust of the flesh, to the lust of the eyes, or to the pride of life, Jesus met each temptation with “*It is written*”—He quoted Scripture from memory (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). For our battle against the tempter, we likewise arm ourselves with Scripture (Ephesians 6:14-17).

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(continued from page one)

Each of us faces numerous enticements to sin, probably every day. Although the world pressures us to be like the world, God tells us we must not let that happen and what must happen to keep that from happening: *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:2). We are acceptably transformed by the renewing of our minds, and our minds are renewed by the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. The world places thoughts in our minds that will conform us to the world if not countered, but we can counter that conformation by placing thoughts from Scripture in our minds (Philippians 4:8). And we should not merely have an awareness of what Scripture says, but we should deeply etch the precious Scriptures in our minds. As the psalmist penned, *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11).

To Avoid Doctrinal Error

Avoiding error might well be classified with resisting temptation, because error can be very alluring, and succumbing to it is sin (Isaiah 30:10; Micah 2:11; Romans 16:18). To avoid error, one needs to know the truth. *“I*

have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me...Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Psalm 119:102, 104). Many have departed from the truth because they did not thoroughly engrain the truth in their minds; they did not hate every false way because they did not grasp the truth.

The restoration of New Testament Christianity that took place in the nineteenth century required numerous honest-hearted individuals to come out from under the haze of denominational error. There can be little doubt that Scripture memorization helped many of them to do just that. Elias Smith, Thomas Campbell, Walter Scott, Raccoon John Smith, Alexander Campbell and many of the other preachers of the restoration made a great commitment to memorizing Scripture. It is altogether possible they would have remained under that haze had they not made that commitment.

Almost without fail, those I have known to take the strongest stands against error have had a great deal of Scripture memorized. However, I have seen many succumb to error because they did not know the Scripture, or at least did not retain knowledge of it. In the time of Hosea, the LORD lamented, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children”* (Hosea 4:6). We want to ensure that we do not fall into the same lack of knowledge; we want to ensure that we do not forget the law of our God.

To Better Teach Others

Christians are commanded, *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”* (1 Peter 3:15). How can a Christian be better prepared to “give an answer” regarding his hope than to know specifically what God’s word says about it? A memory of Scripture will help one teach others. If you are able to remember exactly what a passage says and where it is found, will you not be much more effective in what you have to say?

Parents are to teach their children the word of God, and prior to instructing parents how diligently they are to teach their children (Deuteronomy 6:7-9), the Israelites were told, *“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be*

in thine heart” (verse 6). If we are to teach our children successfully, we will need to have the words of God already in our hearts and minds.

Also, one who has memorized Scripture will be more effective in delivering sermons and Bible classes. Quoting Scripture gives time for the preacher or teacher to look his hearers in the eye instead of reading to them. Some say, *“I memorize my sermon outline and illustrations, but read the Scriptures.”* Which is more valuable, for the preacher to memorize his outline, or to memorize his Scriptures? Which is more valuable, for the preacher to memorize his illustrations, or to memorize his Scriptures? Sermon outlines and illustrations are useful tools, but their usefulness is limited—*“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever”* (1 Peter 1:25).

For Love of God’s Word

The Christian’s love of God’s word should nature stir in him the desire to memorize it. *“I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word”* (Psalm 119:16). *“I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me”* (119:93). Our appreciation for God’s word, and our gratitude for God’s salvation granted through the Gospel, should create in each of God’s children a burning desire to write God’s message deep in our hearts.

Many elderly people do crossword puzzles and similar activities to keep their minds sharp. Memorization has also been shown to be very good mental exercise. If one is going to spend time exercising his mind, why not spend that time deriving spiritual benefit out of that exercise as well?

Memorizing all 6200 verses of the Koran is a fairly common accomplishment among Muslims. Memorization schools, devoted to this task, are found throughout predominantly Muslim countries, and have sprung up in several places in the United States. While the Bible is much longer than the Koran, the New Testament is not much longer. If Muslims can devote themselves to such an extent to memorizing a most **unholy** book, can we not match or exceed such devotion in our own love for the Divinely-inspired word of God?

[We will conclude this study next month as we consider “How to Memorize Scripture” – LM].

MURMURING AT MARAH

by Dub McClish

Exodus 15:22–26 gives the account of Israel’s murmuring at the bitter waters of Marah. At this very beginning part of their journey from the Red Sea toward Canaan, their water supplies were exhausted. They had hardly ceased their songs of thanksgiving and triumph before they raised a new cry—murmuring and complaining. This was but the first of several times they would so behave. Their repeated, faithless complaints became so displeasing to God that He would later send a plague to destroy 14,700 of the ungrateful wretches (Numbers 16:41–49). Still later God sent the fiery serpents to kill many others because of their murmuring and whining (21:4–6).

After a journey of three days from the Red Sea, they came to the waters of Marah, but they were too bitter to drink. The people murmured and complained. Moses brought the complaint of the people before God, Who pointed Moses

to a certain tree, which, when cast into the water, made it sweet. Could Moses have sweetened the water by any other tree than that selected by God? I think not. Had Moses’ attitude been, “One tree is as good as another,” two results would have obtained: (1) Moses would have been disobedient and disrespectful toward God, and (2) the water would have remained bitter. Note some practical lessons:

1. When God specifies his choice or his desire for men in any circumstance, they dare not presume to make changes or substitutions. Most people who claim to believe in the Bible deny this sacred principle. “One church is as good as another,” “One baptism is as good as another,” “One doctrine is as good as another,” “One kind of music is as good as another,” and like statements are proofs of this denial. Just as Moses was content to use the tree of God’s choice, so must

we be content with God’s choices in all matters. God’s command to Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood allowed no addition, no substitution, and no alteration of any sort (Genesis 6:14). When God specifies any element He simultaneously **includes** what He desires and **excludes** everything else in the same class of items—without having to name them.

2. We see God’s attitude toward murmuring. Paul used those very occasions of Israel’s murmurings in the Wilderness as warnings against such behavior in the Christian age (1 Corinthians 10:10–11). Those murmurings sorely provoked God so that He shut that generation out of the land of promise (Hebrews 3:8–11). The root of the complaining, gainsaying, murmuring spirit is unbelief, which leads to rebellion (verses 16–19). We are to serve the Lord without murmurings (Philippians 2:14). This ugly trait will keep us out of the promised land of Heaven.

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FIVE FAITHLESS PHRASES

by Lee Moses

Zacharias, the father of John the baptist, was a faithful man of God, a priest said to walk “*in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*” (Luke 1:6). In light of this, his response is somewhat surprising when Gabriel, an angel of the Lord, told him that he and his wife Elisabeth, though aged, would have a son who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the children of Israel to the Lord. Zacharias’ response was, “*Whereby shall I know this?*” (Luke 1:18). He had been told of this great blessing that would come upon him, and he responded with five faithless words (four in the original language), asking for a sign. He explained the reasoning behind his doubt, “*for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.*” When Zacharias asked for a sign he showed a lack of faith; as Jesus

explained to a group of scribes and Pharisees who had asked Him for a sign, “*An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign*” (Matthew 12:39). Because of his lack of faith, his ability to speak (and likely to hear) was taken away from him until the fulfillment of Gabriel’s prophecy. As put by J.W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, “Four faithless words [five in English, LM] cost him forty weeks of silence.”

Certainly the words of Zacharias do express a lack of faith. But how much more do the following phrases not uncommonly heard in some form or another express a complete lack of faith and trust in God and His ability to provide?

“I have more pressing things to attend to than attending every church service.”

People are busier today than they have been in the past. This is not because they are generally working longer hours each day, but because they have taken on a greater load of outside activities. Sometimes, an emergency may arise rendering it impossible for a Christian to meet with the saints at the designated hour of worship. But when it is not an emergency, what can be more pressing than attending to the needs of the soul? One who puts personal activities above attendance at every worship service is clearly not putting the Lord first.

“I won’t give to the church until I know I have taken care of my needs.”

Although there is the responsibility to provide for one’s own, seeking after food and raiment is not the Christian’s primary motivation in working—“let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, *that he may have to give to him that needeth*” (Ephesians 4:28; emphasis LM). In giving, God demands the firstfruits, not the leftovers. The

Christian confidently knows that the Lord will provide for his basic needs (Matthew 6:33).

“If I don’t marry this non-Christian, I won’t ever have a chance to get married.”

There is a tendency for some young people to think that their opportunities for marriage are limited to those with whom they are presently acquainted. God has promised to bless those who seek Him with the whole heart (Psalm 119:2), and they will be blessed who decide to wait for a spouse who will help them to serve God rather than accepting one who may hinder them from serving God.

“If I don’t compromise some of my Christian principles, I won’t have any friends.”

Those who stand for the truth and stand with the Lord will drive some people away, just as happened with the Lord Himself (John 6:66). Friends intolerant of those who insist on living by the moral principles found in the word of God are not really friends at all. The Lord has provided us with a body of Christians to encourage each other. The Psalmist wrote, *“Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes”* (Psalm 119:23). Even if a Christian were to have no friend left in the world but the Lord, what greater friend could he have?

“I can take care of myself.”

To some, this might sound like the voice of confidence; however, it is actually the voice of one with little confidence in God. God needs to be included in every aspect of our lives. *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (I Cor. 10:12).

Zacharias came to know that he was wrong to doubt God, and his five faithless words cost him his speech for forty days. The five faithless phrases above could cost one his soul for eternity. Let us each have the faith and trust in God to put Him first in all that we do.

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GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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