

COMING TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH (THROUGH MEDITATION)

We are still working on the thought of 2 Tim. 3:7 - *"...ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."* In two previous articles we discussed the important theory of this verse, that there is a difference between what we know and how we let what we know direct our lives. We discussed four steps to really coming to the knowledge of the truth - education, meditation, participation, and evaluation. In the last article, education was discussed. Now let's consider the second step - meditation.

Meditation is the link between our education and our participation. It is the thinking process that lets us know how to act in our life's situations based on what we read in a book written 2,000+ years ago. To illustrate this link between words and actions, consider the following statements: "We have too many high-sounding words, and too few actions that correspond with them." (Abigail Adams, 1744-1818, Former first Lady). "The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear." (Socrates, 470-399 BC, Greek Philosopher). "In the last analysis, what we are communicating far more eloquently than anything we say or do." (Stephen R. Covey, American Speaker/Trainer/Author). Study each statement and you will see they are hinting at the relationship between our thoughts, words, and actions.

Let's consider a few general observations from the scriptures.

MEDITATION IS THE LINK BETWEEN OUR EDUCATION AND OUR PARTICIPATION. In 1 Sam. 17:37, the youth David explains to King Saul why he (David) is so confident he can defeat the giant Goliath when Goliath had already bluffed the Israelite army. David said the Lord already delivered him from the hand of the lion and the bear, and he was confident the Lord would deliver him from Goliath, too. Now, did David know from experience that he could defeat Goliath? No, because he had never fought Goliath before. But David was ready to act according to what he knew he had done in a similar situation. Meditation is the mental process that David went through to apply God's providence from one situation to another. Can you?

MEDITATION IS GOAL SETTING - THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP. What is the difference between management and

leadership? Consider this example - Management has a group of workers cutting a trail through a jungle. Leadership climbs a tree and looks around and shouts, "Quit cutting, wrong jungle!" Management shouts back, "Don't stop us now, we're making progress!" The illustration is that management is concerned with efficient activity, whereas leadership is concerned with the direction of the activity. In Philippians 3:14 Paul tells us of his direction. He said he presses "*toward the mark for the prize.*" Not only did he desire the prize, but he directed himself toward some sort of mark that would get him there. Only through meditation!

MEDITATION REQUIRES OUR VISION. In Exo. 16:3 the children of Israel wanted to go back to Egypt to the flesh pots where there was plenty to eat. They were forgetting that the flesh pots came with bondage and without a chance of freedom in the Promised Land. They had lost their vision and wanted to return to their feelings. We can so easily do the same thing. We can lose our vision of heaven if we don't take time to let our minds meditate on it, and can slip back into sin where we can indulge our feelings without much brain power.

MEDITATION OCCURS SOMETIMES WITHOUT READING, BUT BY OBSERVATION. Very important! We must think about what we see and always be ready to learn from what's happening around us. All lessons do not come from the written word, but through the examples of others. Paul used himself as an example (Phil. 4:9). When you observe and imitate the good acts of others, you're taking advantage of their meditations. That's like giving ourselves a jump-start on doing good. Isn't this one of the main reasons Jesus came to live among us?

OUR MEDITATIONS ARE REVEALED BY OUR TONGUE. Jesus said (Matt. 15:18-20) a man is defiled when evil comes from his heart through his mouth. A man may appear reserved, but given enough time and familiarity he will reveal things about his attitude through his speech. And what will he say? He will speak of his meditations. Sooner or later they will come out, and the cat will be out of the bag!

MEDITATIONS ARE AUTOMATIC, BUT NOT AUTOMATICALLY WORTHY. Humans are always thinking, even when we are sleeping, so I'm told. But we don't always think good thoughts. God has a problem with this. It brought on the flood (Gen. 6:5). If we allow ourselves to have evil meditations, it won't sink the world again, but it will sink our world. We must direct our meditations to worthy things.

OUR MEDITATIONS CAN/MUST BE DIRECTED TO THE PROPER IDEAS. What a thought in Phil. 4:8! Not only does Paul tell us what we should think on, but he states it so smoothly he makes me want to fill my mind with these good things. Why spend good brain cells thinking about lust, anger, envy, control, worry, etc. when you can think on such pleasing thoughts as in verse 8?

MEDITATIONS CAN BRING A BLESSING TO THE PRACTITIONER. David wrote (Psalms 1:1,2) of a blessed man who avoids evil actions by meditating on the law of the Lord. Here is a case where meditations are not used to produce good deeds, but to prevent evil ones. What a lesson for us today with all the opportunities we have to think on the evil that bombards us daily through the media!

Let's move from general observations to more specific uses for our meditations. Let's consider the idea that we must meditate to practice the doctrines that will get us to heaven.

MEDITATE TO REHEARSE A SOFT ANSWER. Proverbs 15:1 illustrates the difference between a soft answer and grievous words. The problem is that grievous words usually come to mind faster than a soft answer, unless you have spent time meditating and rehearsing a soft answer. Can this really work? Consider the idea that most of the time when we get angry and in a situation to use grievous words, it's in a situation we've been in before. So if we've been there before, then does it not follow that we could anticipate the situation and plan a soft answer or a soft way to handle the situation? Sure, but only through meditation!

MEDITATE TO REHEARSE A READY ANSWER. 1 Pet. 3:15 gives another situation that requires meditation for a proper answer. The situation is when explaining the hope that is in us with meekness and fear; we give God all the glory. The proper answer is one that glorifies God for any good that someone sees in us.

MEDITATE TO TRANSFORM OURSELVES FROM BRUTE BEASTS TO THE ELECT. Peter describes the potential of man to reduce himself to the status of a brute beast (2 Pet. 2:12), but thankfully he also gives the remedy (2 Pet. 1:5-9). Examine this last passage closely and you will see the act of meditating all through it. All of the Christian graces must be developed internally before bursting forth for all to see. And how can they be developed internally without meditation? For instance, I can't imagine a person developing the grace of Godly patience without thinking about it, but if they could would it still count as a Christian grace? Think about it!

Finally, let's meditate on the idea that we must meditate to apply the parables. I personally find this to be one of the most productive and practical ways to practice mental Christianity, to put myself into the parables of Jesus and imagine which character I would be.

WHO AM I IN "THE LOST COIN"? Who am I in the parable in Luke 15:8-10? You say there's only one character? Look closely. There's the woman that lost the piece of silver through carelessness, neglect, taking it for granted, etc. Then there's the same woman acting differently. Now she's diligently seeking, even in the night, not stopping until she finds it. Then she's the woman who has so much joy at finding the piece that she must share the joy with others. There are also the friends and neighbors. Do they come and celebrate, or do they stay to themselves to not get involved with another's personal trials and triumphs? See the parallels between these characters and the characters we can be at church? It's painfully obvious to me.

WHO AM I IN THE "PEARL OF GREAT PRICE"? Another short parable in Mat. 13:45,46 with apparently only one character, but look again. There's the man whose business was searching for many pearls, not just one. Then there's the same man when he found the one pearl, and he recognized it for what it was and gave up his search for many pearls. Then he became the man that not only found his one pearl, but put action to his find and did all he could to acquire the one pearl. And don't forget the other merchant who sold the pearl, either because he didn't know what he had or thought the money would be better. We may have been all four characters at some time in our lives.

WHO AM I IN THE "TARES OF THE FIELD"? What a parable (Matt. 13:24-30) full of characters! We could be the sower, the sleeping men, the enemy, the tares, the good wheat, or the servants. I'm afraid I have seen all of these characters before, in church, and have been a few of them myself. The men that slept have always been troubling characters to me. I don't want any of us to fill this role, but it is such an easy role to fill. Please, let us meditate diligently to be the blade that springs up, bears fruit, and is gathered into the barn!

We've covered many things about meditation. I hope you see the impact of controlled, planned, detailed, and diligent meditations. Not the kind that people practice to relax and relieve stress, but the kind that stirs our spirits and moves us to action! It is the link in the knowledge process that makes

the Bible an active part of our modern lives. Please meditate on these things about meditation!

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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Can you explain what Paul meant when he told us that as Christians we are not to be conformed to the world in Romans 12:1-2?

ANSWER: The passage in the inquiry reads as follows:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 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 12:1-2)

The above passage is embedded in an epistle that has as its main purpose an explanation of God's system of justification or as is stated elsewhere salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Paul in Romans 1 and verse 16 tells us that he is not ashamed to preach the gospel because it (the gospel) is God's power to save all men. He tells us how in verse 17 when he states,

"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

The reason that the Gospel is so powerful is that it is a revelation of God's righteousness. The phrase "God's righteousness" does not have reference to God's own personal righteousness but rather to the way that God justifies or makes sinful man righteous. This interpretation is further substantiated by Romans 3:21-22 which reads,

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:"

Thus the book of Romans is a complete explanation of justification by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first 11 chapters, Paul addresses what justification of faith is. It becomes very clear that it is salvation that is not based upon one's ability to be good enough but rather one that is imputed to sinful man through faith in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection as the payment for sin. It is equally clear that Biblical faith is far more than just believing the facts of the Gospel but rather includes a response. Many in this day and age confuse saving faith with merely believing the truth concerning Jesus and His death. But Biblical faith is much more than that. In fact the writer of Hebrews gives us a very clear definition of faith in chapter 11:6.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Note that saving faith involves believing the truth and also responding to the truth as we seek to follow after God. In fact all of Hebrews 11 is full of not only those who believed but those who also responded to God. For example Noah believed there would be a flood and thus prepared an ark. Abraham believed and went out when he was called to go the land he would receive as an inheritance. We could go on and on but these should suffice to make our point.

We mention all of the above in order to properly understand how and why Paul begins chapter 12 as he does. He has shown the readers in the previous chapters that justification is through faith in Jesus and that faith in Jesus involves believing in Him and His sacrifice as well as a response to Him and what He requires of us.

What He requires is seen in Romans 12:1-2. Note that Paul tells us that God requires that we present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Faith in Christ involves death to self. Thus we sacrifice ourselves, what we want and what we desire, for what He wants and what He desires for us to do. He points out that this is our reasonable service. His reasoning is that as we live here in this world after having been born again our purpose has changed. Before conversion life was all about us. But after having obeyed the Gospel we become all about Him. Note Paul says we are to *"prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* It is up to us to declare to the world God's will. We do that by the life that we live.

This explains Paul's instruction not to be conformed to the world. Since our purpose in Christ is to prove to the world God's will, it is only logical to believe that the world does not know God's will. If the world does not know God's will and it is up to us to prove it to them then it only goes to reason that we must be different than the world!

The word conform means to literally desire to be like someone else, i.e. to do what they do or to act as they act, speak as they speak, wear what they wear. Basically it is to pattern our actions after that which is the mainstream in contrast to being different. This is what God is telling us He wants us to avoid. He has called us to be different that what we were. Thus now Paul says if you live by faith then do not be like the world around you!

Perhaps it would be good to define what is meant by the word "world". The word has many uses in the scripture. It can refer to the earth. It can refer to the lost. It can refer to Satan and his kingdom. It is the latter two that we must avoid conforming to. We are not to live like we are lost souls nor are we to live in compliance to what Satan requires of his subjects. This is fully explained in I John 2:15-17 where we are warned against the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

God wants us to be different. We are not to give in to the lust of the flesh and practice immorality like those in Satan's kingdom do. Nor are we to succumb to the lust of the eyes and trust material things. And we are to yield to the pride and arrogance of self. This we are to avoid. In fact instead of conforming (being like) we are told to be transformed. Being transformed is to be one who has undergone a real change. This involves a renewal of our minds. It begins with conversion and then continues throughout our lives as we become more and more Christ-like. As we become more and more like Jesus we prove more and more the will of God to those around us by the life we live. We become leaders who prove what is good, what is acceptable, and what is perfect. We become people who are not afraid to say no to wrong practices. We become people who fight off the pressure to conform and we refuse to let others think for us or to lead us down the wrong path.

All of us will experience from time to time the pressure to conform and be like those around us. Satan will constantly bombard us with temptation in order to get us to live in the world and be of the world. But we are not to yield. We are to

stand strong and be obedient to the will of God. Rather than being conformed to the world we must be transformed to the image of Christ!

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GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
June 29 - July 1 7:00 p.m. Fri. - Sat. 10:30 a.m. & 5:00 p.m. Sun.	Chapel Hill Congregation Pell City, AL	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
July 3 - 11	Country Club Congregation Tucson, AZ	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
July 12 - 15	Cloud Nine Congregation Sierra Vista, AZ	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
July 15 - 20	Oak Grove Congregation Woodland, AL	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)
July 16 - 20	Freefield Congregation State Line, MS	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
July 20 - 22	Fourth Avenue Congregation Algood, TN	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
July 20 - 22	Antioch Congregation Greenup, IL	Bill Prince, Jr. (Oxford, AL)
July 22 - 27	Napoleon Woodland, AL	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
July 28 - 29	New Bethel Congregation Cullman, AL	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

Remember last month's questions?

1. How old was Adam when his third son, Seth, was born?
130 YEARS (Gen. 5:3)
2. What was the name of David and Bathsheba's second son?
SOLOMON (2 Sam 12:24)
3. According to Proverbs, on what does the soul of the
unfaithful feed? VIOLENCE (Pro.13:2)
4. Who was appointed to carry the cross upon which Jesus was
to be crucified? SIMON THE CYRENIAN (Luke 23:26)
5. Paul said that we should not do what while doing good?
GROW WEARY (Gal. 6:9)