

The Word of God and Prayer

by Samuel Chadwick

Samuel Chadwick emphasizes the integral relationship between the Word of God and prayer, advocating for a truth-centered approach to personal devotion.

Scripture: Psalm 37:3, Psalm 46:1, Psalm 116:7, Psalm 119:25, Isaiah 41:8, Isaiah 41:10, John 4:24, Ephesians 6:17, 2 Timothy 2:15, Revelation 5:5

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Scripture Study"

Description

Samuel Chadwick emphasizes the vital connection between the Word of God and prayer, highlighting the psalmist's reliance on God's Word for quickening the soul and instructing in prayer. He warns against emotional unreality and intellectual preoccupation in prayer, stressing the importance of truth and spirit in worship. Chadwick discusses the devotional use of the Bible, encouraging a deep, personal engagement with Scripture in prayer, and the significance of understanding the Scriptures for effective prayer. He shares his personal method of using the Word in prayer, focusing on the Psalms and the transformative power of praying through specific passages.

Transcript

The Word of God quickens the soul and instructs it in prayer. The psalmist speaks for all who pray when he confesses to seasons when the soul could not find its wings: "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy Word." It is always to the Word of God he turns for quickening and instruction. Saint Paul links together the Word of God and prayer. "And take. . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me." Watching where and whereunto? Watching with all perseverance! That is surely with diligence and patience, alertness and reverence. We must search the Word, that we may know how to pray. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Aids To Devotion

It must be remembered that I do not judge any man in the method of devotion. I speak only for myself. The practice of private prayer is so difficult to maintain that I grudge no help to those who find aids in things that to me would be a hindrance. Some find help in symbols and pictures, and most of those who seek to cultivate the prayer life of the soul keep some book of devotion at hand. Thomas a Kempis, Lancelot Andrewes, William Law, Andrew Murray, and the hymnology of all the churches have, been blessed to

tens of thousands who have sought to know how to pray. It may be a confession of shame, but I do not want any of them in the "inner chamber." I can appreciate, them, more or less, elsewhere, but not here.

There are two perils to be avoided: one is emotional unreality; and the other is intellectual preoccupation. An earnest believer whose religious enthusiasm found expression in service for the church and humanity was convicted of prayerlessness. He earnestly resolved to spend half an hour every day in private prayer. At the end of the month he gave it up because he could not endure the sense of unreality. He could not talk or meditate half an hour every day when there was no one there! There was not only no sense of a Presence, but there was a very real consciousness of an absence. There can be no experience of heart speech and soul fellowship without a consciousness of a Presence. The soul cannot keep up an emotional make-believe day after day. The mind cannot live in a vacuum. The Father is in secret, but it is the glory of His presence that makes the sanctuary. There must be truth as well as spirit in all worship, and nowhere is the combination more necessary than in the secret place of prayer.

Altar fires are kindled and quickened by truth, but the truth must get to the altar. Devotional studies do not necessarily lead to devotion. There may be a preoccupation with truth that becomes an obsession. The study of experimental truth may never become experience, and the experience of others may become a snare. Even the Bible may become a hindrance. Light can blind. Our Lord reproached the religious teachers of His day because their misuse of the Scriptures blinded their minds. Stepping-stones may become slipping-stones, and even a corner stone may be a stumblingblock. In all questions of the soul each must find help where he can.

The Devotional Use of The Bible

Have we still got a Bible we can take into the holy place? The most disastrous result of paganizing the Bible is that it has so largely fallen into disuse as a Book of Devotion. An honest man cannot pray through a discredited book. Truth is as essential to man as to God. If he is to worship, he must worship in spirit and in truth. Some teachers and preachers have what the learned called a "complex." The unlearned call it a "bee in the bonnet." They never miss a chance to drag in a jibe at what they call the traditional view of the Bible, and yet they insist that nothing has been lost in the change. The Scriptures are still "the living and sovereign Word of God." They admit that "Jesus took the Bible at its face value," and that in it He found His gospel, on it He fed His soul, and in all the great crises of His life He relied upon its truth. The disciple may be content to be as his Lord.

There are methods of Bible study that do not belong to the inner sanctuary of prayer. Historical Sources, Literary Criticism, Higher Criticism, and Lower Criticism belong to the forum and the study. They are concerned with the external conditions and progressive development of Revealed Truth. In the Holy Place the Scriptures are received as "the living, sovereign Word of God." How many soever may be the inspired writers, there is but one Author. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Questions of date, authorship, and the like are left outside, not because ignorance is more helpful to prayer than intelligence, but because they are irrelevant. In all Scripture there is a local and immediate message of truth, but there is also a revelation that is timeless and universal. Local knowledge is essential to complete understanding, but the soul in prayer comes to the Word that it may find God, and to the soul at prayer it is the infallible, sovereign, saving Word of God. Therefore we may still take the Scriptures into the inner chamber. Even the critics are anxious to assure us that the things for which they contend are not among the things that really matter, and, after all, their "assured results" are nothing more than "agreed hypotheses."

I do not want to harp unduly on the subject of biblical criticism, but I think it may help you if I tell you how I regard the Scriptures. It always seems to me that there is a very real analogy between the Word of the Lord and the law of the land. The judge and jury accept the law, and it is their business, not to criticize or amend, but to interpret and administer. They have no concern with the politics and politicians by whom the law came. It is very interesting to study the historical situation it was intended to meet, to trace the agitation of the reformers, to know who framed the bill, and who was responsible for amending clauses, but that is the business of historians, experts, and antiquarians. Even a lawyer may be ignorant of them. His business is to know the law. The business of a judge is to interpret the law. The business of the jury is to submit their verdict to the authority of the law. So it is with the Word of God. There may be two Isaiahs or twenty, two contributors to the Pentateuch or two hundred, Mark's Gospel may have begun with "Q" or any other letter of the' alphabet. The Word has passed beyond personal and historical limitations, and because of the inspiration that gave them, the Scriptures are the Word of the Lord that abideth forever. We take the Bible into the inner sanctuary, not that we may know what is its literary history, but that we may hear what the Lord our God will say unto us.

The Praying Method In The Word

Saint Paul said, "I will pray with the understanding also." The Word of God gives understanding to prayer. The Bible is not an easy book to the uninitiated, and that is why so many fall back upon ordered and simple books of devotion, but it is the Book of Common Prayer to be understood of the common people. I think I can help you best by telling you of my own method.

The first question is where to begin. Each will find his own starting point. I began with the Psalms. The next thing to decide is the most suitable time of the day. When I began I was called at five o'clock in the morning, and had to be at work at six, so I read my morning portion the night before. I read through the appointed portion in a prayer spirit again and again, then went over it clause by clause on my knees, turning its statements into prayer and thanksgiving. Then I wrote out the verse or phrase that spoke to me, read it over next morning as I dressed, committed the day briefly to God, and put the text in my waistcoat pocket. Before I found this method I used to try to work myself into a praying mood, but I lacked resourcefulness, and praying became "prayers" again, and listening a void. Prayer has been an experience of thrilling wonder, creative meditation, and real fellowship since it has been instructed, quickened, and inspired by the Word of God.

In addition to this simple method, I find, great help in the use of the marginal references, especially those of the Revised Version. The method taught by the Holy Spirit is to compare scripture with scripture, and spiritual things with spiritual. The Spirit that inspired the Scriptures is given to us for interpretation. The Holy Spirit and the Holy Word are never at variance. Revelation is progressive, and every part has its relative truth. To watch the unfolding of the Word deeply stirs my soul. New discoveries excite the mind and kindle the fires of worship and praise. Is this prayer? It assuredly is, so long as it is kept to its devotional purpose, and not followed with any other object. I once tried taking scriptures set for examination as my devotional portion, but it left the hour barren and unprofitable. God wants the whole presence of the spirit as surely as man wants the sense of the real presence of God. The soul is never less alone than when it is alone with God.

How To Use The Word In Prayer

It is best to have no book but the Bible, that scripture may be interpreted by scripture. I find it well to take the sayings of psalmist and prophet and turn them into prayers. Avoid the lure of sidetracks. I have been interested to find that men known far and wide for their biblical scholarship always use the Authorized Version in their devotions. I commend their example. Search the Scriptures. The heart is soon aglow when the Word is alight.

The Word of God is like God's world: it is all interesting and all wonderful, but there are places to which we go often in thought and affection if not in actual visits: beauty spots of which we never tire, and sacred places of hallowed association. So there are pages of the Bible that wear thin with use, and some that are stained with tears. There is no psalter like the book of Psalms. There are favorite psalms that register the pilgrimage of the soul. I love the thirty-seventh, the forty-sixth, the eightieth, and the one hundred and sixteenth, and many more besides. Usually I read through the psalm, and then return for meditation to a few verses that have appealed to me. How often I have countered "fret" with "trust" in Psalm thirty-seven, committed my way unto the Lord, and hummed and prayed through the matchless words, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him;" and my soul rejoices in the assurance that if I delight myself in the Lord, He will give me the desires of my heart. It is great to take the Lord's own words and speak them in praise and plead them in prayer.

The forty-sixth Psalm is just as wonderful, with its threefold division of catastrophe, hostility, and testimony. Then I go back to the first verse, with its description of God as Refuge, Strength, and Help. The Refuge is for sanctuary in perils in which man is utterly helpless. What can he do against a changing earth, hurtling mountains, and raging storms? When sudden calamity comes, and the foundations slip from under our feet, God is our Refuge. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Always underneath! Always lower than our deepest depths! God is also our Strength. There are demands for which we have no might and enemies against whom we have not strength. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Immediately the mind is among the heroes of God, and faith rejoices in the assurance of strength that shall be as the day. God is a Help. There are experiences in which we are incomplete. A Helper is near, companionable, encouraging, inspiring, achieving. Could assurance be more complete? No wonder the heart nestles near to God and whispers, "I will trust, and not be afraid."

"The Lord of hosts is with me [us];

And the God of Jacob is my [our] refuge."

I wonder how often I have prayed through Psalm one hundred and sixteen. It was one of God's earliest gifts to me. There is no need to change the pronoun, for there is a personal pronoun in every verse. I love the alternating surge of a sorrow escaped and the triumphant note of thanksgiving, and I linger long over the vows of the redeemed soul. He had been down into the depths. Every kind of trouble seemed to come at once, and greatest of all was his loss of faith in God and man. Deliverance came when he prayed. Praise followed prayer, and praise became a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

"Return unto thy rest, O my soul;

For the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.

For thou hast delivered my soul from death,

Mine eyes from tears,

And my feet from falling.

I will walk before the Lord

In the land of the living."

There are scriptures that I read at stated seasons. One of my earlier attempts at real Bible study was to try to write out in order the doings and sayings of our Lord in the week of His Passion, and I go over those passages always in the sacred week. There are similar passages for Advent and other festivals of the Christian year. The first thing I do with a new Bible is to mark the passages in Saint John in which our Lord makes His promise of the Paraclete, and those I read always between Easter and Pentecost, and then I find my inner chamber becomes my Lord's Upper Room.

There are three scriptures that I have read on fixed days of the week for more than forty years. Every Sunday morning I read the fifth" chapter of Revelation, and every Sunday night the seventh chapter from verse nine. Why do I do this? Sunday is the great day of my week. I preach other days, but there is only one day in seven that is specially the Lord's Day. It is a day devoted to worship and the ministry of the Word. To me is given the responsibility of intercessor and prophet, teacher and evangelist. I have to represent Christ, preach Christ, plead for Christ. For all this I need the vision of Christ, and nowhere do I find the vision as He is there revealed in the midst of the throne, in the midst of the redeemed, in the midst of the angels, and in the midst of creation. I can face the day when I have beheld His glory, and said "Amen, Hallelujah!" in His presence. At night I come back to the vision of His ultimate triumph and commit the day unto Him and rest my heart within the veil.

On Monday morning I invariably read Isaiah forty-one from verse eight. Monday morning is a difficult time for the prophet-evangelist. Sunday looks somber on Monday. A blue Monday is the devil's chance, so I resolved at the beginning of my ministry that if I had to have a blue Monday, I would have it in the middle of the week and God gave me this scripture as a protection against the "blues." Perhaps you would like to know how He did it. It was in my first month out of college. I was in my room on a Monday morning, wrapped in a rug, for I had a cold and the room was cold. It rained pitilessly all the morning. Just before noon a cab stopped at the door, and H. S. B. Yates, the minister of Leith, was announced. We had met only twice. When I asked how he was, he answered, "I am a worm, and no man." He had the blue Monday so badly that he had taken a cab and come to see me for a change. His church had been crowded the night before for the first time, and Satan taunted and tormented him into sheer terror. I listened with amused amazement. I am not made that way. He asked me what I did when I felt myself a creeping, crawling, contemptible worm? I had just read the forty-first of Isaiah, and I said "Here is the very chapter for you. It is God's promise to a worm" We read it. We prayed through it, and he went away greatly comforted. Since then I have read it every Monday morning, and I have found it a rare defense against depression, with the result that Monday has been one of my busiest and happiest days I go through the Bible, as I have gone through these passages of Scripture.

These are intimate words, but at any rate you do not wonder now that to me the Word of the Lord is precious. All the time I have tried to keep in mind the overworked and toil-driven who have little or no space for an inner sanctuary. That is why I urge the Bible as the only necessary book for the devotional hour. For the same reason I advise that it be studied in short portions, lest prayer become secondary in the place consecrated to prayer.

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