

The Saving Knowledge of the Scriptures

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of scripture, guarding against error, and the necessity of self-examination to live a holy life.

Scripture: Psalm 119:15, Psalm 119:18, Isaiah 8:20, Matthew 7:15, Matthew 7:20, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:16, James 1:22, 1 John 4:1

Topics: "Scripture Study", "Discerning Truth"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches on the importance of meditating on and praying for the saving knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. He emphasizes the need to rely on the pure, unadulterated Word of God for guidance and truth, rather than human writings or traditions. Reade urges believers to search the Scriptures diligently, test teachings against the Word of God, and be discerning of false prophets. He highlights the necessity of self-examination, humility, faith in Christ, and bearing fruits of righteousness as evidence of true belief and surrender to God.

Transcript

4. MEDITATION AND PRAYER FOR THE SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

"I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways." Psalm 119:15

"Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law." Psalm 119:18

While passing through this benighted world, how happy is the man who can say with David: "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." While surrounded with errors of every kind, how privileged are we, of this highly favored land, who possess the pure unadulterated Scriptures of truth. Oh! that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly in all wisdom. Then we shall know how to choose the good, and refuse the evil. We are too apt to draw our opinions from the writings of men, rather than from the word of God; and to range ourselves under certain theological leaders, rather than follow the mind and commands of Christ. Thus parties are formed in the Church; and charity expires on the field of battle. If I would I reach the Fountain of Truth, I must pass by all uninspired men, however venerated for antiquity; however renowned for wisdom and piety. I must pass by Milner, Scott, and Simeon; Owen, Watts, and Doddridge; Hooker, Hopkins, and Reynolds; Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer; Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin; Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Basil; Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius; yes the whole army of saints and martyrs, until I come to the Light of the World, the adorable Jesus, whose word is THE TRUTH; and to his inspired

Apostles, who were guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth, and whose writings alone contain the mind and will of God under the gospel dispensation.

Here I arrive at the source of truth. Here I find the true Rule of Faith. Here all is luminous, purifying, and consoling. Here I come to the Promiser of light and guidance. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Here I am told the happy result of searching the Scriptures. "And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to check up on Paul and Silas, to see if they were really teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did some of the prominent Greek women and many men." They did not receive the declarations even of Paul and Silas with a blind submission, but searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things which they spoke, were so; that is, in accordance with the predictions of the Prophets. This search was not displeasing to God, for faith is his gift, and many of them believed.

The beloved Apostle has commanded us to guard against being entrapped by error: "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world." Our blessed Lord has given us the same caution with respect to their character: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

How are we to try the spirits? Isaiah tells us: "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in them." How are we to form our judgment of character? Our Lord has taught us: "You shall know them by their fruits." "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit; therefore, by their fruits you shall know them."

The judicious Hooker has forcibly expressed his opinion on the subject of 'Tradition.' "When the question is, whether we are now to seek for any revealed law of God anywhere than only in the sacred Scripture; whether we do now stand bound in the sight of God, to yield to traditions urged by the Church of Rome the same obedience and reverence we do to his written law, honoring equally and adoring both as divine? Our answer is, No! Those who so earnestly plead for the authority of Tradition, as if nothing were more safely conveyed than that which spreads itself by report, and descends by relation of former generations unto the ages that succeed, are not all of them (surely it would be a miracle if they should be) so simple as thus to persuade themselves; howsoever, if the simple were so persuaded, they could not be content perhaps very well to enjoy the benefit as they account it, of that common error. What hazard the truth is in when it passes through the hands of Tradition; how maimed and deformed it becomes. Let those who are indeed of this mind, consider but only that little of things divine which the heathens have in such a way received. How miserable had the state of the Church of God been long before this, if, lacking the sacred Scripture, we had no record of his laws; but only the memory of man receiving the same by report and relation from his predecessors."

Oh! how delightful it is to open the Book of God, with the full assurance that there all is TRUTH; pure, unadulterated Truth! What, then, must we think of that Church, which would debar her members of this inestimable gift of God? Time was, when the Holy Bible, like a prisoner, was fastened by a chain in our Parochial Churches; but now it is furnished with wings, and flies from east to west, from north to south, proclaiming the gospel of the grace of God.

This blessing may be withdrawn if we slight or abuse it. Dark clouds are gathering around us. Oh! that we may be found faithful; that we may have a humble, teachable spirit; a prayerful frame of mind, to receive the revelations of God's will with an earnest desire, through the Spirit, to live under its influence. Then will Christ be formed in us the hope of glory, then we shall be prepared to dwell with him in glory everlasting.

When I read the blessed Scriptures of truth, what amazing love and mercy do I find contained in one single promise! How inconceivably great, then, is the whole treasure which lies concealed in this sacred volume. Like the rich ore in the mountain, the most precious lies the deepest, but when found it well repays the laborer's toil. When I read the writings of pious men, whether ancient or modern, I must always peruse them with caution, and bring them to the test of Scripture.

Tradition is useful for establishing a fact; but must not be exalted into the tribunal of Scripture; for Christ himself has declared, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day." Those who read the Scriptures with little attention, receive little comfort from them. But the Christian, who not only reads, but marks, learns, and inwardly digests them; who peruses them with prayer for God's Spirit to understand them, and then meditates upon them day and night, finds them a well of salvation; they become his delight and his counselor, and by them he is made wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Lord! open my understanding that I may understand the Scriptures; that I may know you, the only true God, as therein revealed; and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent, as my Sacrifice, my Righteousness, my Example; to know whom is life eternal. Teach me to know myself, the vileness of my nature, the depravity of my heart, the sinfulness of my life, that I may fly out of myself to Jesus, for pardon, peace, and holiness.

Teach me to know, by blessed experience, the work of the divine Spirit, that being convinced of sin; all pride and self-love may die in me; and being led to the cross of my Redeemer, love and gratitude may fill my soul, and invigorate my endeavors to please you.

Teach me to know the vanity and emptiness of the world; its insufficiency to gratify the desires, or satisfy the longings of the new-born soul; yes, its utter inability to make its most devoted votaries happy.

Teach me to number my days, to estimate their shortness and uncertainty, that I may not procrastinate in the great work of salvation. When I think of a dream or a flower, I am reminded of the fleeting life of man. Your word is full of warnings, cautions, and admonitions, to awaken my solicitude about eternal things.

Teach me to value the bliss of heaven above all earthly joys- to dread the torments of hell above all earthly sorrow. Alas! how often do the pleasures of sense blunt our sensibilities to those things which are above; while the troubles of time obliterate from our minds the misery which awaits the impenitent and unbelieving.

Teach me, O blessed Savior, cheerfully to refuse the pleasures of sin, which end in everlasting torment; and cheerfully to endure those trials, for your sake and the gospel's, which terminate in endless glory.

Oh! my soul, remember where you are, in a world of sinners, yourself a sinner. Time is flying with rapid wing. Eternity, with all its solemn realities will soon open before you. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation; tomorrow, the door of mercy may be closed; tomorrow, your state may be everlastingly fixed. Tomorrow? Oh! my soul, boast not yourself of tomorrow, for you cannot tell what a day may bring forth. While you are forming schemes of happiness for many years, the word may have passed the lip of

the Eternal: "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you."

Call together your scattered powers, which have too long wandered amid the vanities of time. Let all your faculties be brought to ponder well the solemn truths of God. Meditate on everlasting things. Soon must your old companion, this mortal body, be consigned to the tomb, there to moulder into dust, until the all-awakening trumpet of the archangel shall rouse it from its earthly bed, to stand, re-united to yourself, before the judgment-seat of Christ. But, you, my soul, can never die. When the hour of dissolution comes, you only change your habitation, remaining ever a conscious, thinking being. Your powers, when freed from the burden of the flesh, will be more expanded, and more fitted for the extremes of bliss or pain. O then how important is the enquiry- on what state shall I then enter? in what habitation am I then to dwell?

Unfold the sacred volume, the Scriptures of the God of truth, and there you read, that the righteous shall go into life eternal, but the wicked into everlasting fire. Who then are the righteous, and who are the wicked? This, you learn also from these sacred oracles. All, who live in open, willful sin, despising, rejecting, or neglecting the gospel of Jesus Christ; all, who will not have Christ to reign over them; all, who love the world more than God; all, who hate holiness, and die in this impenitent, unbelieving state, are denominated wicked, and shall have their portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.

All, who come, as lost sinners to Jesus Christ, weary of the service, and heavy laden with the guilt of sin; all, who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness; all, who are seeking with earnest solicitude, for the pardon of sin, for peace with God, for purity of heart, through the blood and Spirit of Christ; all, who through the power of the Holy Spirit, resist the devil, crucify the flesh, renounce the world, live by faith in the Son of God, esteem him precious and altogether lovely, labor to win souls to Christ, by prayer, by influence, and by example; are called righteous in the sacred Scriptures, and shall go into life eternal.

Now, oh! my soul, behold the truth spread before you. The countless millions which populate the earth are divided into only two classes by Him who searches the heart; the righteous and the wicked, saints and sinners, the sheep and the goats. Two states are prepared for them in the world to come: heaven and hell. No middle class is specified in the word of God; no middle state, no imaginary purgatory is revealed. Here on earth, the wheat and the tares grow together; here, pain and pleasure, sin and holiness, are strangely intermixed; but there, in the eternal world, it will be forever- unmixed bliss, or unmixed woe; unmixed evil, or unmixed holiness; joys unspeakable, or anguish beyond conception. To which of these classes do I belong? If I determine this, I shall know my future state.

Oh! eternal Spirit of Truth, enable me to examine myself as in your sight; yes, in mercy search me and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

Have I true faith in Christ?

Simon Magus believed; but he was in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, though by baptism a professing member of the visible Church. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. The Spirit of Christ dwells in him, to renew his soul in righteousness, to fill him with all goodness, and to prepare him, by a life of holiness on earth, for a life of happiness in heaven.

Have I put off the old man, with the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created him? Is sin, in all its forms, odious in my eyes and hateful to my heart? With relentless hand, have I torn the entwining mischief from my bosom, and cherished with delight the

blessed motions of the Spirit? "Those who are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." His servants are dead unto sin and alive unto righteousness. They serve God in all holy obedience, delighting to do his will.

Have I mortified the members of my body, and crucified all inordinate inclinations and desires? Do I never serve sin and the lust thereof? Can I freely part with it though it cost me much- the love of former friends, the esteem of the world, and the prospect of earthly gain? Do I esteem all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord?

The true believer can say- The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world by the Cross of Christ. His heart is in heaven. He abides in Christ, and Christ in him. Have I renounced the world and all its sinful pleasures, its carnal company, its vain amusements? Are my friends, the friends of Jesus? Is Jesus the Hope, the Joy, the Treasure of my soul? Is my acceptance with the Father founded wholly on the righteousness of the Son? Disclaiming all merit in myself, have I received the gospel as a message of grace, a revelation of love to perishing sinners? Do I receive Christ into my heart by faith in all his saving offices of Prophet, Priest, and King? Do I dwell in Him, and He in me!

Am I clothed with humility?

The redeemed of the Lord are humble; they look at the rock from where they were hewn, and beholding their honored station, as living stones in the spiritual temple, they exclaim, Lord! why me? When I find, on strict examination, that many former sins are subdued, and many once neglected graces attained, can I say from the heart, by the grace of God I am what I am; in the Lord alone have I righteousness and strength? Feeling the influence of holy love, am I pressing forwards in the path of holiness? Under the constraining love of Christ, am I running the race set before me, hastening with unwearied step towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?

Do I bring forth the fruits of faith?

True faith is known, like a good tree, by its fruits. Do I cherish benevolent thoughts towards my fellow creatures, as well as fellow Christians? Is the conversion of sinners to Christ, the ardent desire of my soul? While preserved from the allurements of the world, can I pity and pray for those who are drawn away by them, as well as pardon those who speak reproachfully of me, because I dare not run with them to the same excess of riot; because I dare not be found in companies and places where God is not; where his Spirit does not preside, where his fear is not found?

What is my conduct with respect to relative duties?

To be really holy, I must be relatively holy; holy in all manner of conversation. In every situation of life- as a child, a husband, a father, a master, a subject, have I searched the word of God to know the duties required of me in these particular relations? Have I diligently and frequently examined myself by that holy standard, in order to obtain a more perfect knowledge of myself, both as respects my attainments and deficiencies? Do I daily implore forgiveness for all my short-comings, and seek for grace to amend what is wrong? Does my heart overflow with gratitude to the Giver of all good, if, in any humble measure, I have been enabled to grow in grace and in the knowledge of my God and Savior Jesus Christ? Can I take encouragement from the experience of divine mercy, to pray with greater boldness for more faith, more hope, more love; knowing, that to him who has, shall more be given, and he shall have more abundantly?

Am I content to be nothing, that Christ may be all in all? Are my thoughts continually running after God as my only resting place in this ever-agitated world? Have I, in all sincerity, given my heart to God, and made a full surrender of myself to him? Have I submitted myself, through grace, to the righteousness of God, and received salvation as the gift of sovereign love, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus?

Oh! eternal God, who knows the hearts of all the children of men; you know that I desire to love you. In mercy fulfill the desires of my heart, desires of your own creating, for if I love you, it is because you have first loved me. Pardon what is amiss; restore what is defective; sanctify me wholly in body, soul, and spirit; and when the summons is given to call me hence, receive me to yourself, as an everlasting trophy of redeeming love!

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