

LOVE THE WORD IN 2006

You cannot be *godly* without a love for the Word.

Below is a portion of a timeless message by the Puritan Divine Thomas Watson. His sermon has been a long-time favorite of mine and one that merits review on a regular basis. — Bob Bixby

A GODLY MAN IS A LOVER OF THE WORD

by Thomas Watson¹

"O how love I your law." (Psa. 119:97)

Part A: A Godly Man Loves the Word Written

Chrysostom compares the Scripture to a garden set with ornaments and flowers. A godly man delights to walk in this garden and sweetly solace himself. He loves every branch and part of the Word:

1. *He loves the counseling part of the Word, as it is a directory and rule of life.* The Word is the direction sign which points us to our duty. It contains in it things to be believed and practiced. A godly man loves the directions of the Word.
2. *He loves the threatening part of the Word.* The Scripture is like the Garden of Eden: as it has a tree of life in it, so it has a flaming sword at its gates. This is the threatening of the Word. It flashes fire in the face of every person who goes on obstinately in wickedness. "God will wound the head of His enemies, the hairy scalp of the one who still goes on in his trespasses." (Psa. 68:21). The Word gives no indulgence to evil. It will not let a man halt half-way between God and sin. The true mother would not let the child be divided (1 Kings 3:26), and God will not have the heart divided. The Word thunders out threats against the very appearance of evil. It is like that flying scroll full of curses (Zech. 5:1).

A godly man loves the menaces of the Word. He knows there is love in every threat. God would not have us perish; he therefore mercifully threatens us, so that he may scare us from sin. God's threats are like the buoy, which shows the rocks in the sea and threatens death to such as come near. The threat is a curbing bit to check us, so that we may not run in full career to hell. There is mercy in every threat.

¹ From *The Godly Man's Picture* by Thomas Watson, a Puritan Paperback edition published by the Banner of Truth.

3. *He loves the consolatory part of the Word - the promises.* He goes feeding on these as Samson went on his way eating the honeycomb (Judges 14:8,9). The promises are all marrow and sweetness. They are reviving to us when we are fainting; they are the conduits of the water of life. "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul." (Psa. 94:19). The promises were David's harp to drive away sad thoughts; they were the breast which gave him the milk of divine consolation.

A godly man shows his love to the Word written:

(a) By diligently reading it. The noble Bereans "searched the Scriptures daily" (Acts 17:11). Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:12). The Word is our Magna Carta for heaven; we should be daily reading over this charter. The Word shows what is truth and what is error. It is the field where the pearl of price is hidden. How we should dig for this pearl! A godly man's heart is the library to hold the Word of God; it dwells richly in him (Col. 3:16). It is reported of Melanchthon that when he was young, he always carried the Bible with him and read it greedily. The Word has a double work: to teach us and to judge us. Those who will not be taught by the Word shall be judged by the Word. Oh, let us make ourselves familiar with the Scripture! What if it should be as in the times of Diocletian, who commanded by proclamation that the Bible be burned? Or as in Queen Mary's days, when it spelled death to have a Bible in English? By diligent conversing with Scripture, we may carry a Bible in our heads.

(b) By frequently meditating on it: "It is my meditation all the day" (Psa. 119:97). A pious soul meditates on the truth and holiness of the Word. He not only has a few transient thoughts, but leaves his mind steeping in the Scripture. By meditation, he sucks from this sweet flower and ruminates on holy truths in his mind.

(c) By delighting in it. It is his recreation: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." (Jer 15:16) Never did a man take such delight in a dish that he loved as the prophet did in the Word. And indeed, how can a saint choose but take great pleasure in the Word? All that he ever hopes to be worth is contained in it. Does not a son take pleasure in reading his father's will and testament, in which he bequeaths his estate to him?

(d) By hiding it: "Your word I have hidden in my heart" (Psa 119:11) - as one hides a treasure so that it should not be stolen. The Word is the jewel; the heart is the cabinet where it must be locked up. Many hide the Word in their memory, but not in their heart. And why would David enclose the Word in his heart? "That I might not sin against you." As a man would carry an antidote about him when he comes near an infected place, so a godly man carries the Word in his heart as a spiritual antidote to preserve him from the infection of sin. Why have so many

been poisoned with error, others with moral vice, but because they have not hidden the Word as a holy antidote in their heart?

(e) By defending it. A wise man will not let his land be taken from him but will defend his title. David looked upon the Word as his land of inheritance: "Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart." (Psa 119:111) And do you think he will let his inheritance be wrested out of his hands? A godly man will not only dispute for the Word but die for it: "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God." (Rev 6:9)

(f) By preferring it above things most precious: (1) Above food: "I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food." (Job. 23:12). (2) Above riches: "The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver." (Psa. 119:72). (3) Above worldly honour. Memorable is the story of King Edward the Sixth. On the day of his coronation, when they presented three swords before him, signifying to him that he was monarch of three kingdoms, the king said, "There is still one sword missing." On being asked what that was, he answered, "The Holy Bible, which is the 'sword of the Spirit' and is to be preferred before these ensigns of royalty."

(g) By talking about it: "My tongue shall speak of your word." (Psa. 119:172). As a covetous man talks of his rich purchase, so a godly man speaks of the Word. What a treasure it is, how full of beauty and sweetness! Those whose mouths the devil has gagged, who never speak of God's Word, indicate that they never reaped any good from it.

(h) By conforming to it. The Word is his compass, by which he sets his life, the balance in which he weighs his actions. He copies out the Word in his daily walk: "I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). St Paul kept the doctrine of faith, and lived the life of faith.

Question: [Why is a godly man a lover of the Word?](#)

Answer: [Because of the excellence of the Word.](#)

1. *The Word written is our pillar of fire to guide us.* It shows us what rocks we are to avoid; it is the map by which we sail to the new Jerusalem.
2. *The Word is a spiritual mirror through which we may see our own hearts.* The mirror of nature, which the heathen had, revealed spots in their lives, but this mirror reveals spots in the imagination; that mirror revealed the spots of their unrighteousness, this reveals the spots of our righteousness. "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom. 7:9). When the Word came like a mirror, all my opinion of self-righteousness died.

3. *The Word of God is a sovereign comfort in distress.* While we follow this cloud, the rock follows us. "This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life." (Psa. 119:50). Christ is the fountain of living water; the Word is the golden pipe through which it runs. What can revive at the hour of death but the word of life (Phil. 2:16)?

Part B: A Godly Man Loves the Word, Because of the Efficacy It Has Had upon Him

A godly man loves the Word preached, which is a commentary upon the Word written. This day-star has risen in his heart, and ushered in the Sun of righteousness. The Scriptures are the sovereign oils and balsams; the preaching of the Word is the pouring of them out. The Scriptures are the precious spices; the preaching of the Word is the beating of these spices, which causes a wonderful fragrance and delight. The Word preached is "the rod of God's strength" (Psa. 110:2) and "the breath of his lips" (Isa. 11:4). What was once said of the city of Thebes, that it was built by the sound of Amphius' harp, is much more true of soul conversion. It is built by the sound of the gospel harp. Therefore the preaching of the Word is called "the power of God to salvation" (Rom 1:16). By this, Christ is said (now) to speak to us from heaven (Heb. 12:25). This ministry of the Word is to be preferred before the ministry of angels.

A godly man loves the Word preached, partly from the good he has found by it - he has felt the dew fall with this manna - and partly because of God's institution. The Lord has appointed this ordinance to save him. The king's image makes the coin current. The stamp of divine authority on the Word preached makes it an instrument conducive to men's salvation.

Application: Let us test by this characteristic whether we are godly: Are we lovers of the Word?

1. *Do we love the Word **written**?* What sums of money the martyrs gave for a few pages of the Bible! Do we make the Word our bosom friend? As Moses often had 'the rod of God' in his hand, so we should have 'the Book of God' in our hand. When we want direction, do we consult this sacred oracle? When we find corruptions strong, do we make use of this "sword of the Spirit" to hew them down? When we are disconsolate, do we go to this bottle of the water of life for comfort? Then we are lovers of the Word! But alas, how can they who are seldom conversant with the Scriptures say they love them? Their eyes begin to be sore when they look at a Bible. The two testaments are hung up like rusty armour which is seldom or never made use of. The Lord wrote the law with his own finger, but though God took pains to write, men will not take pains to read. They would rather look at a deck of cards than at a Bible.

2. *Do we love the Word **preached**?* Do we prize it in our judgments? Do we receive it into our hearts? Do we fear the loss of the Word preached more than the loss of peace and trade? Is it the removal of the ark that troubles us?

Again, do we attend to the Word with reverential devotion? When the judge is giving his charge from the bench, all attend. When the Word is preached, the great God is giving us his charge. Do we listen to it as to a matter of life and death? This is a good sign that we love the Word.

Again, do we love the holiness of the Word (Psa. 119:140)? The Word is preached to beat down sin and advance holiness. Do we love it for its spirituality and purity? Many love the Word preached only for its eloquence and notion. They come to a sermon as to a performance (Ezek. 33:31,32) or as to a garden to pick flowers, but not to have their lusts subdued or their hearts bettered. These are like a foolish woman who paints her face but neglects her health.

Again, do we love the comforts of the Word? Do we love the Word when it comes home to our conscience and shoots its arrows of reproof at our sins? It is the minister's duty sometimes to reprove. He who can speak smooth words in the pulpit, but does not know how to reprove, is like a sword with a fine hilt but without an edge. "Rebuke them sharply" (Titus 2:15). Dip the nail in oil, reprove in love, but strike the nail home. Now Christian, when the Word touches on your sin and says, "You are the man", do you love the reproof? Can you bless God that "the sword of the Spirit" has divided between you and your lusts? This is indeed a sign of grace and shows that you are a lover of the Word.

A corrupt heart loves the comforts of the Word, but not the reproofs: "They hate the one who rebukes in the gate." (Amos 5:10). "Their eyes flash with fire!" Like venomous creatures that at the least touch spit poison, "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth." (Acts 7:54). When Stephen touched them to the quick, they were mad and could not endure it.

Question: [How shall we know that we love the reproofs of the Word?](#)

Answer 1: [When we desire to sit under a heart-searching ministry. Who cares for medicines that will not work? A godly man does not choose to sit under a ministry that will not work upon his conscience.](#)

Answer 2: [When we pray that the Word may meet with our sins. If there is any traitorous lust in our heart, we would have it found out and executed. We do not want sin covered, but cured. We can open our breast to the bullet of the Word and say, "Lord, smite this sin."](#)

Answer 3: When we are thankful for a reproof: "Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it. For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked." (Psa. 141:5). David was glad of a reproof. Suppose a man were in the mouth of a lion, and another should shoot the lion and save the man, would he not be thankful? So, when we are in the mouth of sin, as of a lion, and the minister by a reproof shoots this sin to death, shall we not be thankful? A gracious soul rejoices when the sharp lance of the Word has pierced his abscess. He wears a reproof like a jewel on his ear: "Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprover to an obedient ear." (Prov. 25:12).

To conclude, it is convincing preaching which must do the soul good. A nipping reproof prepares for comfort, as a nipping frost prepares for the sweet flowers of spring.

J.C. Ryles' (1816–1900) hints for reading the Bible²

1. Begin reading your Bible this very day.
2. Read the Bible with an earnest desire to understand it.
3. Read the Bible with deep reverence.
4. Read the Bible with earnest prayer for the teaching and help of the Holy Spirit.
5. Read the Bible with child-like faith and humility.
6. Read the Bible in a spirit of obedience and self-application.
7. Read the Bible daily.
8. Read all the Bible, and read it in an orderly way.
9. Read the Bible fairly and honestly. Determine to take everything in its plain, obvious, meaning, and regard all forced interpretations with great suspicion.
10. Read the Bible with Christ continually in view. The grand primary object of all Scripture is to testify of Jesus. Old Testament ceremonies are shadows of Christ. Old Testament judges and deliverers are types of Christ. Old Testament history shows the world's need of Christ. Old Testament prophecies are full of Christ's sufferings, and of Christ's glory yet to come. The first advent and the second, the Lord's humiliation and the Lord's kingdom, the cross and the crown, shine forth everywhere in the Bible. Keep fast hold on this clue, if you would read the Bible aright.

² From J.C. Ryle "How Readeest Thou?" *An Earnest Appeal to Search the Scriptures*.

Legitimate Motivations for Daily Bible Reading

1. **Duty.** If we read the Bible out of duty we are still doing the right thing. “The chief end of man is to *glorify* God.”
2. **Doctrine.** We should want to study the Scriptures to find in them the vital truths for godliness.
3. **“Defrost.”** We should go to the Word of God to warm our hearts again for the things of heaven.³
4. **Delight.** “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to *enjoy Him* forever.” Remember that delight in the Word of God is a work of grace. You must pray earnestly to God to be gracious to you.

Hints

- Learn to measure your attention span.
- Learn to extend your attention span.
- Adjust the lighting.
- Get comfortable for brain work.
- Eliminate distractions.
- Learn to talk to yourself.
- Vary your approach. Sometimes study; sometimes read to “defrost.”
- Remember the best way to eat an elephant.⁴

³ Jim Elliot closed one of his letters to his brother in this way, “Must get into the Book for a little defrosting.” *Shadow of the Almighty*, p. 64.

⁴ One bite at a time!

A Minister's Bible

O God of Truth,
I thank thee for the holy Scriptures,
 Their precepts, promises, directions, light.
In them may I learn more of Christ,
 be enabled to retain his truth
 and have grace to follow it.
Help me to lift up the gates of my soul that he may come in
 and show me himself when I search th Scriptures
 for I have no lines to fathom its depths,
 no wings to soar to its heights.
By his aid may I be enabled to explore all its truths,
 love them with all my heart,
 embrace them with all my power,
 engraft them into my life.
Bless to my soul all grains of truth garnered from they Word;
 may they take deep root,
 be refreshed by heavenly dew,
 be ripened by heavenly rays,
 be harvested to my joy and thy praise.
Help me to gain profit by what I read,
 as treasure beyond all treasure,
 a fountain which can replenish my dry heart,
 its waters flowing through me as a perennial river
 on-drawn by the Holy Spirit.
Enable me to distil from it pages faithful prayer
 that grasps the arm of thy ominipotence,
 achieves the wonders, obtains blessings,
 and draws down streams of mercy.
From it show me how my word have often been unfaithful to thee,
 injurious to my fellow-men,
 empty of grace, full of folly,
 dishonouring to my calling.
Then write thy own words upon my heart and inscribe them on my lips;
So shall all glory be to thee in my reading of thy Word!⁵

⁵ *The Valley of Vision, A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*, p. 190.