

Meditating on Meditation

“While I was musing the fire burned.” – Psalm 39:3

The Bible speaks often of meditation. “Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening,” says Genesis 24:63. Despite Joshua’s demanding task of supervising the conquest of Canaan, the Lord commanded him to meditate on the book of the law day and night so that he might do all that was written in it (Josh. 1:8). The term *meditation*, however, occurs more often in the Psalms than in all other books of the Bible put together. Psalm 1 calls that man blessed who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night. In Psalm 63:6, David speaks of remembering the Lord in his bed and meditating on Him in the night watches. Psalm 119:148 says, “Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.”

As I was ‘meditating’ on these thoughts my mind was drawn to some of the many quotes I’ve collected over the years by a variety of godly men in ministry, from history past to present; men whose devotional lives were anchored in the most necessary command and practice of meditation. These great love gifts of Christ to the Church never tired of the subject of meditation; meditating on the Scriptures; its doctrines; salvation, justification, sanctification, grace, and its assuring promises. I share some thoughts here by these faithful mentors in order that we might perhaps recover the biblical practice of meditation for our time.

Meditation on biblical truths exercises both the mind and heart; the one who meditates approaches his subject with his intellect as well as his affections. Thomas Watson defined meditation as “a holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truth of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder upon them and apply them to ourselves”. Edmund Calamy wrote, “A true meditation is when a man does so meditate of Christ as to get his heart inflamed with the love of Christ; so meditate of the Truths of God, as to be transformed into them; and so meditate of sin as to get your heart to hate sin”. He goes on to say that, in order to do good, meditation must enter three doors: the door of the understanding, the door of the affections, and the door of practical living. The Westminster Larger Catechism records the following: “As oil lubricates an engine, so meditation facilitates the diligent use of means of grace (reading Scripture, hearing sermons, prayer, and all other ordinances of Christ), deepens the marks of grace (repentance, faith, humility), and strengthens one’s relationships to others (love of God, to fellow Christians, to one’s neighbors at large).”

Thomas Manton once said, “God trained up the old Church by types and ceremonies, that upon a common object they might ascend to spiritual thoughts; and our Lord in the New Testament taught by parables and similitudes taken from ordinary functions and offices among men, that in every trade and calling we might be employed in our worldly business with a heavenly mind, that, whether in the shop, or at the loom, or in the field, we might still think of Christ and heaven.” He went on to say, “A gracious heart is like an alembic [distillation apparatus], it can distil useful meditations out of all things it meets with. As it sees all things in God, so it sees God in all things.”

Another Puritan, Thomas White, said, “Deliberate meditation draws from four sources: Scripture, practical truths of Christianity, providential occasions (experiences), and sermons.” He went on to say, “It is better to hear one sermon only and meditate on that, then to hear two sermons and meditate on neither.”

The Puritans constantly stressed the need for meditation. They said that, first, God command us to meditate on His Word. That should be sufficient reason alone. They cite numerous biblical texts (Deut. 6:7; 32:46; Ps 19:14; 49:3; 63:3; 94:19; 119:11, 15, 23, 28, 93, 99; 143:5; Is. 1:3; Luke 2:19; 4:44; John 4:24; Eph. 1:18; 1Tim 4:13; Heb. 3:1) and examples (Melchizedek, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, David, Mary, Paul, Timothy). When we fail to meditate, we slight God and His Word and reveal that we are not godly (Ps. 1:1-2).

Again, Thomas Watson wrote, “A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost.”

Thomas Gouge, in his book on Christian Directions, admonishes, “Had you even tasted of the sweetness of the duty of Divine Meditation, you would find little time for vain talk and idle discourses...”

In his book, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*, Richard Baxter writes, "Why so much preaching is lost among us, and professors can run from sermon to sermon, and are never weary of hearing or reading, and yet have such languishing, starved souls, I know no truer or greater cause than their ignorance and unconscionable neglect of meditation." Some hearers have spiritual anorexia, Baxter said, for "they have neither appetite nor digestion," but others have spiritual bulimia – "they have appetite, but no digestion."

William Bates wrote, "Hearing the Word is like ingestion, and when we meditate upon the Word, that is digestion; and this digestion of the word by meditation produces warm affections, zealous resolutions, and holy actions."

Thomas Hooker says, "Meditation sharpens the sting and strength of corruption that it will pierce more prevailingly. It is a strong antidote against sin, and a cure of covetousness."

William Bridge states, "Meditation helps us persevere in faith; it keeps our hearts savory and spiritual in the midst of all our outward and worldly employments."

In conclusion, if many of history's godly men were present today I believe they might say this:

"If you continue to neglect meditation, it will dampen or destroy your love for God. It will make it unpleasant to think about God. It will leave you open to sin so that you view sin as a pleasure. It will leave you vulnerable and fragile before trials and temptations of every kind. In short, it will lead to a falling away from the consciousness of God."

And finally, perhaps these words will lure you to a meditative thought life:

"O saint, do you not know that your husband Christ is bashful, and will not be familiar in company? Retire yourself by meditation into the closet, or the field, and there you will have Christ's embraces."