

Scripture and Spiritual Development

If there are things that together compose the sine qua non of the disciple's life, Scripture is surely one of them. Scripture provides our primary physical revelation of both God and our purpose. It is with Scripture that we can measure our transformed being as we mature. Scripture is the authoritative record of God's interaction with Man. But Scripture, simply learned, memorized, parsed, and critiqued in an academic sense is powerless and fruitless. Approaching Scripture as an interesting product of Man's existence is to miss its importance.

Scripture's purpose is to lead us back to where we started; back to who God made us to be. Scripture reveals in its opening verses that Man (male and female) was made in the very image of God. Unlike the other animals, there is something different about Man and his being. It is not that we have physical bodies, or legs, or lungs, or blood. That we have a spirit is closer to the mark, but does not quite grasp the image concept. That image of God that we are is not just that we are spiritual beings in some aspect, but that we share the character of God Himself. We are intended to be people that model God, not because we have learned the fruit of the Spirit, but that we are transformed by the Spirit and evidence His character in our lives. We don't learn to be patient so much as we become patient, and that from our innermost being.

Scripture then serves as a picture, of who we were made and who we are called to be again. When we read Scripture we should be able to see aspects of God in all the stories, in all the events. This revelation of God grows and becomes more defined as Scripture progresses. The Law is a revelation of God in various aspects, not the least of which is the Law's demand for right action, justice, and mercy. The prophets pick up that theme, especially in Amos and Micah, and Jesus again brings it to the fore in Luke's fourth chapter. The same theme is echoed by Paul throughout his writings.

But we see more of God as well. We see His promises being kept even if it seems to us to take an inordinate amount of time. Even when the people in the events cannot see God working, we can see Him as He shapes the events to achieve what He wills. We see His steadfastness and His loving concern for His people. While we see these as aspects of God, we have a suspicion that these are intended for us too. In our relationships we are called to be steadfast and lovingly concerned for one another. Christian charity is not new with the New Testament.

We also see that God has a purpose and that we may only understand a part of it. We come to see that trusting God, being the people we are made to be, even in the midst of turmoil, when what we thought we believed is tested to the breaking point, is what we must do. We come to identify so closely with God that in the final analysis we can do nothing else than trust Him. This is the essence and epitome of faith. Faith that is not faithful in excruciating trial is not the faith we are after because it is not the steadfastness that characterizes the people we were made to be. Faith is only tested when it looks as though faith has failed.

Our calling, and the proper use of Scripture is to transform us into people who so closely identify with God, His character, steadfastness, and concern, that we implicitly trust Him, behave out of our being without having to resort to Scripture proof texts, and that we become aware of our oneness with Him and others in this life.