
**"The Eternal Word"
(Psalm 119:97-104)
Pastor Peter Yi
July 30, 2017**

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⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
⁹⁸ Your commands are always with me
and make me wiser than my enemies.
⁹⁹ I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
¹⁰⁰ I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.
¹⁰¹ I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.
¹⁰² I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.
¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
¹⁰⁴ I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.

Our Presbyterian Confession is summed up in the historic document called the Westminster Confession of Faith. It's a document that was written in the 1600s that serves as an accurate summary of our doctrine, of what we believe as Christians. And from that Confession, we get the Westminster Shorter Catechism. That's the catechism we've been working through the first half of the year. The confession's first several questions are perhaps one of the greatest statements about our faith that's ever been written. It really is hard to improve on them. Let me read them for you.

Q1: What is the chief end of man?

A1: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

The question begins with man, because the confession is for us, but the answer quickly tells us that our purpose is bound up in God. We exist to bring honor and glory to God and to enjoy God forever. Now, did you notice something odd about this? The question asks for a singular response, but then gives two answers. Now, that's not as uncommon as you might think. In fact Jesus did that too. Do you remember when? "What is the greatest commandment," he was asked. To which he replied,

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." **(Mark 12:29-31)**

Jesus was saying that the greatest commandment is two that are inseparable. You can't have either in isolation from the other.

Let me give you a more modern example. You might be asked, "What is primary purpose in work?" You might answer, "To make money and serve others." or "To make money and be fulfilled." Almost certainly, you cannot remove either of those answers.

So, it is with this wonderful statement in the Westminster Catechism. The statement is saying that glorifying God on the one hand and our joy on the other hand are inseparable, which is an amazing thought. Consider this question. Could God have made it so that he is glorified but regardless of whether or not we are happy? I suppose he could have, but I'm sure glad he didn't. In fact, in the words of Pastor John Piper, he coined this unforgettable phrase. "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."

Let's look at question #2:

Q2: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him?

Another way to ask this question is, "Where do we go to find out how we can glorify God and enjoy Him?" It's also implying that there is a right way and there is a wrong way to approach God. If we go about it the wrong way, then God is not glorified and neither are we satisfied.

Here's the answer...

A2: The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.

So, according to this statement, there is no other place we can go or look to find the answer to this question. Now think about that for a moment. We are all looking for purpose, significance, happiness and fulfillment in life. Christianity tells us that these things can only be found in our Creator God. And where we get the specifics is in his holy Word, the Bible.

Let's look at one more question, question #3:

Q3: What do the Scriptures principally teach?

If someone were to ask you, what is the Bible all about? After all, it's a big book, with multiple genres, multiple authors, written across two millennia. How would you summarize in one sentence, the main purpose of the Bible? Again, I don't know if you can improve on the Westminster Catechism's answer.

A3: The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

That's what's contained in the Bible. It contains the most precious and important information that any human being could have. Within the Bible we discover that there is a God. He's our creator. And because he's our creator we are obligated to obey him. We discover that he is holy, just, loving and merciful. It tells us that we have a problem—that sin has created a chasm so great that we cannot cross over from where we are to where God is, but God made a way. He sent his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us. In dying, he paid the just penalty for our sins. What are we to believe? We are to believe what God says, we are sinners, deserving God's just penalty. We are to repent of our sins, to turn away from them and to believe and trust that God sent his Son, and if we believe, we will be forgiven and will be given eternal life.

And then, once we become Christians, it's to the Bible we turn, over and over again, so that we can continue to learn how to glorify God and enjoy God, and to learn what duty God requires of us.

To live well, we need to know the wisdom that comes from God's word and that's what our passage today is about.

Wisdom comes from the Word of God.

119:97 Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
98 Your commands are always with me
and make me wiser than my enemies.
99 I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
100 I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.

What exactly is wisdom? When we look at the wisdom sections of the Bible, in particular the book of Proverbs, we find that wisdom is not merely knowing the difference from right and wrong. It, for certain, is that. That's the bare minimum of what wisdom is. We cannot begin to be wise or have wisdom without knowing what God says about what is right and what is wrong, but beyond that, wisdom is to know and do what is better and best. There's so much gray area in life -- things that are neither right or wrong. A person who is interested only in the letter of the law is concerned about what is right and wrong, but that is all she is concerned with. A person who is wise, wants to know what is right and wrong, but within the area of what is right, he also wants to know what is best. And he wants to know how to apply that wisdom to all of life. How does this work in my marriage and family? What does this mean to me since I am single? How does apply to me as a young university student? What implication does this have in my business and work relationships? That's what wisdom is. It's incredibly practical application of God's truths to all areas of life.

The first half of this passage teaches us that meditating on the word of God is the means by which we become wise. This passage mentions three competing theories on wisdom.

1. Wisdom that comes from an alternate worldview -- from my enemies.
2. Wisdom that comes from education -- from my teachers.
3. Wisdom that comes from age -- from my elders.

All these alternate sources of wisdom might be sometimes true, but not irrefutably true, not always true. Think about all three of these alternative views for a moment. As we live in a secular society we are given sound bites and tweets and memes that become the wisdom of our society. And many of these things are true. Here is very wise saying that's on a popular meme. "One does not simply walk into Mordor." Oh how true, oh wise Boromir. But, there are a lot of things in our culture that are contrary to what the Bible says, and we should never allow them to become wisdom for us.

Here are a few: “Just believe in yourself.” “You can become whatever you set your mind to.” “Follow your heart.”

What about the next two...let’s put them together: wisdom that comes from our teachers and from our elders. Especially for us Asians, that’s a big deal. We show incredible respect for teachers and elders. That’s a huge part of our culture’s Confucian heritage. If you’re Asian, this is part of your DNA, whether you’re aware of it or not. The idea of a guru or shee-fu, or master, or teacher, or tutor is so engrained in our Asian culture. We look at those who are older and who are teachers, they are the experts, the ones who have the wisdom. And while that is mostly true, it is not always true. Just because you’re older doesn’t mean you give great advice. Just because you’re a parent doesn’t mean that everything you tell your child is good wisdom. All of us have met older people to whom you’d never go for advice. Or if you’re a Christian who grew up under non-Christian parents, you might look back and see that a lot of what parents said, though they meant well, were completely contrary with what God says in his word.

Now, here’s what’s remarkable about what the psalmist is saying. He’s saying, that there is a way to truly be wise, to attain a kind of wisdom. It doesn’t come by adopting a different worldview, the one of your enemies. Nor does it come by sitting under a teacher. And not merely from listening to an elder person. There is a wisdom that comes from God that has nothing to do with age or education. That’s a pretty powerful principle.

Listen to **James 1:5**:

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

When Paul told young Timothy,

Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. (**1 Timothy 4:12 NIV11-GK**)

I believe he was essentially saying, “Timothy, this is how you become wise. It’s got nothing to do with age and everything to do with God!”

How does he go about achieving and attaining this wisdom?

Meditation upon the word of God. What is meditation? And what is it not? Well here’s what it isn’t. Eastern religions teach that meditation is emptying your mind. It’s thinking about nothing. Clearing your mind. It is the complete opposite of Christian meditation. Christian meditation has a object, a focus. We don’t think about nothing, we fill our minds with something. What is that something? It’s the word of God.

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (**Joshua 1:8**)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (**Deuteronomy 6:4–9**)

So, how exactly do you meditate? Simply, you take a verse or passage of Scripture and apply your mind and heart to understand the meaning of it. That's the first and most important, because if you don't understand it or misunderstand it, you can't benefit from it. And then after understanding you consider what it means even more deeply and then look for application in your life, and then you respond with obedience and prayer.

Let's look at:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (**John 3:16 NIV11-GK**)

How would you meditate on this verse?

As you work through each word of this word, you would seek to attain greater meaning and understanding.

"For God" – the Creator, the one who is holy and just.

"Loved" – He is also a God of love. God is love. He is the ultimate source and definition and standard of love.

"World" – the entire world, not just part of the world. And it's a sinful world, yet he still loved it. I'm a part of that world. I'm a recipient of His love. Oh there's so much of our world that doesn't know this yet.

"That he gave" – God is one who gives. He gives and he takes away. He gives because he loves. Or the expression of his love is in his giving. This giving is something he's done in the past. It's an event that happened.

"His One and only Son" – Not one son among many, but his one and only. His Son, Jesus, the God-man. The one who was God from the beginning and yet became flesh and made his dwelling among us. How else did God give his Son. He gave him to die as a sin offering. He died a cruel unjust death on the cross, for sinners like me. God, my creator, loves, by giving, his one and only, Son, the God-man, to die for sinners.

"That whoever believes in him" – It's not enough that he came and died, I have to believe in him. That's what I have to do. But how can I believe unless God helps my unbelief? Lord, I have already believed. Help me to believe more and better, unshakably, never doubting, but trusting and believing with more of myself.

"Should not perish." How can this be? We all perish, and yet it says we will not perish. How wonderful. How amazing!

"But have eternal life" Wait a sec. This implies that the perishing was also an eternal perishing. So though I deserved eternal death in hell, I now have eternal life?" Not just life, but eternal life. Didn't you also say that you came that we might have life and life to the full? Didn't you say to the criminal on the cross, today you will be with me in paradise? Didn't you say, that you are the resurrection and the life? Didn't you say that those who believe in you will never die?

Then you might pray, “Lord, I’ve known this verse since I was a child. It was the very first verse I ever memorized. Forgive me for neglecting the depth of what is in this verse. Oh God, thank you for being the great gift giver. Thank you for unwrapping that gift in my presence, opening my eyes and heart to see Jesus, and to believe in him. Thank you Jesus for doing what you did for me. Thank you God for the unwavering promise of eternal life. Yet Lord, there are still so many people I know personally and even many more in this world that have no idea that this is true. Call them to yourself. Give them eyes to see and faith to believe. Amen.

Now that that’s done, let me ask you a question. If a Christian were to do that more often, if she were to pause a little longer, linger a bit more, chew on God’s word, would God’s word become something she delights in more or dislikes more?

Consider these two verses:

^{119:97} Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

So how do we do this? Do we need to love the law first in order to meditate deeply upon it? Or do we need to meditate on it deeply to begin loving it? It’s the chicken or the egg question. What came first? So how does it work?

Here’s how I understand how it works according to Scripture:

First, all spiritual appetites are created in us by God.

Second, they are the result of being saved. Or they arise in our hearts, because God has changed our hearts. Consider all of them: prayer, worship, giving, fellowship, hatred for sin. All of these appetites we don’t create by ourselves. No, they are created in us by God, when we are saved.

Third, we grow and cultivate these appetites through the spiritual disciplines. We come to love praying more by praying more. Isn’t this true? As a Christian, if you pray less, you won’t love prayer more. Doesn’t that make sense? If you worship less, you won’t love worshiping more. If you fellowship with other Christians less, you won’t love fellowship more. We grow in our love for a spiritual discipline by doing the spiritual discipline.

Consider the John 3:16 meditation exercise. If you did that more with the Bible, what do you think will happen with your heart and attitude toward the Bible? Can’t you see yourself saying, along with the psalmist, “OH how I love your law!” “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth?”

Fourth, we must constantly ask God to change and increase our appetites for God. Think about it. How will we love giving of ourselves, our time, and our money more? Just by doing it? Or with prayer, or scripture or whichever spiritual discipline? No, we must ask God for help. We ask God to continue to increase our hunger and appetite for the Bible, for prayer, for holiness, for obedience, for worship.

Conclusion:

Wisdom comes from God. It comes from meditating on the word of God. This wisdom is something we all need in order to live lives that will glorify God and lives in which we will find our ultimate happiness in God. Let’s commit together to meditate more deeply on God’s word. Let’s pray.