

4 Learn His Word to Revere Him

“Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, ‘Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.’” (Deuteronomy 4:10)

Fred had been in the church longer than anyone could remember. Every Sunday he was there. In fact, every Sunday before worship, he could be found sitting in Sunday School class—third from the left in the second row of chairs. There was little question of his dedication. He had the pins to prove it. Each year the Sunday School department gave out pins for perfect attendance. Fred had seven of them—seven years in a row of perfect attendance.

One day, a visitor came and joined in the study. Afterwards, Fred greeted him, and welcomed him to the church. As the conversation progressed, the visitor noticed the seven pins that Fred wore on his coat. He asked Fred what they were for. Fred proudly shared that they were given to acknowledge his seven years of perfect attendance in class. “I have never missed a class, except the one time they cancelled it due to the blizzard of five years ago.” The visitor responded, “My, with all that knowledge, you must really be equipped to do something quite significant. What, may I ask, will you do with all that learning?” Fred thought for a while. No one had ever asked him that question before. Fred had never asked himself that question. After a few moments of quiet reflection, Fred beamed proudly and said, “Why, I am going to get another one. I am going to get an eighth pin. No one, I believe, has ever done that around here.”

Sadly, this story is repeated over and over again in many circles. Maybe not with Sunday School pins, but how many people study God’s Word Sunday after Sunday and year after year

but have no purpose in mind as to what they will do with all that they learn?

This is not to put down learning and study. Let there be no doubt, God wants us to learn His Word. His Word declares,

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-16).

God wants us to learn His Word, but not as an end to itself. In learning His Word, we gain wisdom in two key areas. First, in the matter of salvation, we get to know Jesus. The Scriptures show us what He has done for us and how we are saved. Secondly, all of our learning is meant to give us wisdom in the area of day-to-day living, as we are “equipped for every good work.”

There is a huge difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge, which the world knows much about and values so highly, is fostered by curiosity. Twenty-four hour news coverage—and behind-the-scenes coverage like we have never seen before—feeds our curiosity, increasing our appetite for more of the same. We live in a society that values information and knowledge (i.e., the more you know and

have at your finger tips, the more influential and powerful you are in life). Wisdom, however, is fostered by reverence. God says,

“Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, ‘Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children’”
(Deuteronomy 4:10).

God has revealed His Word to us that we might revere Him and stand in awe of Him. This reverence will then draw us in to learn more about Him. Don’t confuse reverence with fear. Reverence, or awe, is a sense of wonder and humility that is created when one is in the presence of greatness and mystery. Fear repels us, causing us to shrink back in terror. Reverence will draw us near in humbleness as we are empowered to live changed lives. Time after time, this is evident in those who are exposed to the teaching of God.

Remember the woman at the well with Jesus (John 4)? Knowing little of who He is or what He offers, nonetheless her life is changed. Throughout her conversation with Jesus, even though Jesus exposes her sinful life, she is drawn in closer to Him. That is what reverence does. When she leaves Jesus to go back to town and the folks there, she is a changed woman. She knows it. The townspeople sense it. By what they see and hear from her, they feel compelled to go and check this out for themselves. The response of her neighbors is exactly what God had in mind all along when we learn His Word. It is not about getting one more Sunday School pin. It is about mission. It is about drawing others into the fellowship of God. This is the good work that follows once God has made us wise unto salvation. Listen to how God described His original intent for our learning:

“See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will

show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?’”
(Deuteronomy 4:5-7).

The world knows what it is like to see people living in fear. We have plenty of that around us these days. The world is not so familiar with those who live in awe and reverence. There is nothing quite so compelling as witnessing someone whose life is lived out not in mundane routines and uncertainty of the future, but with a sense of awe and reverence for a God whose love and authority lays claim on their day-to-day living.

When God delivered His people out of Egypt, He gathered them together at Sinai, giving them His Word with a mission in mind. They were to learn it and live it—not to gain His love (they already had that, undeserved and freely given). God had shown them His grace and mercy in His saving act through Moses. His intent was that their witness would compel nations to be drawn to Him.

When the people of God stood before Him at Sinai, the Word He gave them revealed two things: His Law and His Gospel. In His Law, He clearly said what He demanded of them. The commandments were not suggestions but His revealed will. In His Gospel, He revealed what He had already done for them in delivering them from slavery. His Word—both Law and Gospel—caused them to stand in awe before Him. These are the two great teachings of Scripture—Law and Gospel. The Word caused them to stand in reverence before Him. That is the result of learning His Word—it fills you with reverence.

Today, we stand at another mountain—not Sinai, but Calvary. We need not approach this one in trembling. Nor should we be too casual, lacking deep reverence. For here again God reveals Himself in both Law and Gospel. It moves one to fall before Him in both fear and

love. Emil Brunner, a Swiss theologian, wrote in a sermon:

“Only at the cross of Christ does man see fully what it is that separates him from God; yet it is here alone that he perceives that he is no longer separated from God. Nowhere else does the inviolable holiness of God, the impossibility of overlooking the guilt of man, stand out more plainly; but nowhere else does the limitless mercy of God, which utterly transcends all human standards, stand out more clearly and plainly.”

One of the mission responses to God’s Word is learning—not as an end in itself, but rather that we might learn to revere Him. When our hearts are ablaze with reverence and awe before Him, then those around us will marvel at what kind of God we serve who is so near to us and who fills us with wisdom and understanding. Remember what God said in Jeremiah,

“Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast

of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things” (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Prayer: Dear Father, your Word reveals you as Holy and Just. That alone would fill me with such fear and trembling. How could I even dare come into your presence, let alone speak to you as I do right now? But your Word also reveals you to me as Gracious and Merciful. You delight in showing me love and kindness. You invite me to approach you as my Father. Holy and Just. Gracious and Merciful. I stand before you in awe and reverence. Who is a God like you? So pure that you cannot tolerate evil before you. So kind that you turn no one away who comes to you in the name of your Son. It is there, in Jesus, that I behold your wisdom and power and righteousness. In Him your holiness and justice and grace and mercy are satisfied and fulfilled. I stand in awe of you and praise, you dear Father. **Amen.**

Challenge: Write down on an index card the words of Revelation 4:11: *“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”* In the coming days, read and meditate over these words, using them as a form of worship and praise.

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 4

From the Book of Concord: “Let me tell you this. Even though you know the Word perfectly and have already mastered everything, you are daily under the dominion of the devil, and he does not rest day or night in seeking to take you unawares and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against these three and all the other commandments. Therefore you must constantly keep God’s Word in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. For where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it. On the other hand, when we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devotion, and it constantly creates clean hearts and minds. For this Word is not idle or dead, but effective and living. Even if no other benefit or need drove us to the Word, yet everyone should be motivated by the realization that through the Word the devil is cast out and put to flight, this commandment is fulfilled, and God is more pleased than by any hypocrisy, no matter how brilliant” (The Large Catechism, The Third Commandment, p. 400.100-102).