

How to Read the Holy Scriptures for One's Own Edification

(An abridged version of a brief lecture
by August Hermann Francke,
written in the 16th century as
an introduction to the earliest edition
of the Luther Translation of the Bible)

If a single-hearted man desires to read the Old and New Testaments in the Holy Scripture for his edification in God, he must, when coming before it, diligently guard himself against having a hidden wrong motive in his heart or having any unrighteous purpose for reading the Holy Scriptures. For the Scribes and Pharisees also read the Holy Scriptures and yet through their reading, nothing improved within them. They thought that by reading the Scriptures they had eternal life; but they would not come to Christ, that they might have life (John 5:39, 40). A wrong motive and an unrighteous purpose for reading the Holy Scriptures is ... when one does it merely as an outward work, and presumes that he is standing firmly in

his Christian faith, ... and thinks that by so doing, he is presenting a special good work to the dearly beloved God – like many who thus comfort themselves with the fact that they are diligently reading God's word, when in fact their mind and their whole life do not correspond to the word of God in the least – in the end, he only takes the Holy Scriptures to become a scribe, acquiring much knowledge, and thereby concealing underneath the self-love, honor-seeking, and many other evils of the Pharisees. Today, such is the intention of many scribes, who desire to be teachers of the law, yet they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm (1 Timothy 1:7). Yes, this is absolutely the perverted way of men, who engulf themselves in the Scriptures, giving heed to useless questions or lofty mysteries rather than laying the right foundation of repentance and of the faith. If someone has the aforementioned or similar wrong motives in his heart when reading the Scriptures, with all of his scriptural learning, he may still

be condemned to the pit of hell, even if he could memorize the entire Bible.

For the reading of the Scriptures, prayer must come first ...It is equally important to both read the Holy Scriptures with pure prayer and groaning and to offer praises and thanks to God. For this is the pure (or single-hearted) way, through which one can receive good edification. One may pause at every little verse in the Bible, as Luther said, and knock on every branch to see if perhaps a few little berries would fall down. In the beginning it may seem difficult, and the prayer may not flow immediately; but one should continue and knock on the next branch. If only one's soul is hungry, the Spirit of God will not leave him unsatisfied... But whoever despairs right at the beginning and thinks that it is too difficult for him, thinking he could not read the Holy Scriptures, then it is his own fault that throughout his whole life, he would not have acquired the proper appetite and joy in the Holy Scriptures...

Through prayer the desire to read the Word will be aroused and multiply; and through reading of the word, one will be stirred up to prayer. Bernhardus once said that no one can suddenly come to the top of the ladder. It is through climbing and not through flying that one will reach the highest steps of the ladder. Therefore, let us climb up with our two feet, namely through reading the word and through praying. Reading the word teaches us and shows us our lack, whereas praying helps us to receive and obtain so much from God our Lord so that we will lack nothing. Reading the word shows us the right way, but it is the praying that leads us through the same right way. And in another place, he continued to say: Through prayer we receive enlightenment in our reading the word, and through reading the word, our prayer becomes burning. When praying and reading the word are joined together so that one controls the other, we have a sweet and loving conversation and interlocution with the Lord. Furthermore, without reading the word, prayer becomes

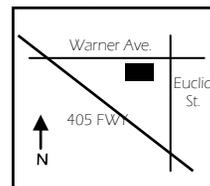
cold and sluggish, and without prayer, the reading of the word becomes unfruitful and absolutely unprofitable... And as reading the word should be started with prayer and continued with prayer, one should also conclude the reading with prayer.”

“take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, by means of all prayer and petition...”

Ephesians 6:17-18a (Greek Interlinear)

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