

The Bible as a Personal Message to You

by Father Matta El Maskeen (Matthew the Poor)

When you read the Bible as a personal message to you from God, the words find their way to the depths of your conscience and spiritual sensitivity. You read with a spiritual awareness, your heart being open, receptive and ready for obedience and joy. Like living and distinct fingerprints of God's will and pleasure, they move, form and impress their divine, effective impact. In response, the deadened conscience revives...

It is easy to find scientific, historical and literary books which seek truth. They explore the reality found within and without man, and they seek it in all its forms. They shed light on knowledge of all kinds, both regarding man and truth in general. They are written on the mental level. They address his physical well-being, increase his awareness and enrich his intellectual and cultural heritage.

But the Bible is not so, and should not be approached in this way. The Bible is a direct, personal message from God to man aiming at his salvation and lifting his spirit to prepare him for the better life, eternal life.

In such a message, God unveils his identity to man in a very personal and private way. He makes known his surpassing powers to strengthen man in his weakness, his transcendent love to fill man's heart, his holiness to cover man's nakedness, and his enormous ability to forgive, pardon, wash and purge so we may enter a new life as sons of God. It is upon this hope that man's conscience rests. These divine, efficacious traits are what bring man to life. As God unveils them to man, he calls and prepares him for entering with him into a sincere and pure fellowship of life. Man thus never returns to his lostness in which he used his own mind and abilities as he groped for salvation.

The fellowship to which God calls us is not an illusion, nor does it come through words of human persuasion. It is founded by Christ's own blood. It is a fellowship which rests on God's perfect generosity and total acceptance. God gives His own spirit, blood, and self through his favors and gifts. Rising above himself, man receives them and in turn perceives matters which surpass his abilities. This is the nature of the Almighty's gifts.

Most amazing about this fellowship is that God's generosity is not limited to what man will receive. God offers his gifts in the Spirit without limit or measure, according to the extreme largess of His nature. Hence the whole burden rests on the ability of man to believe, then receive, then comprehend.

So, dear Reader, the nature of the Bible is revealed and renewed before you. When you approach the Holy bible it is not as a book of knowledge or science. Rather, it is a personal message from God to you, an inheritance containing rights sealed with God's covenants. Never again will you merely be a reader, but a receiver and an inheritor. The Bible will no longer be a book of reading for knowledge, but a bonded inheritance and a key to the treasure of divine favor and gifts. On every gift the name and seal of God are stamped. Attached is a personal photo of Jesus Christ, a living pictured framed within your heart. If you believe him, you will receive and reign. He will give you life as He transforms you more and more into odd's image, moving, thrusting you forward, and encouraging you to fathom more of the depths of this fellowship in righteousness, holiness and truth.

All those who have entered this sphere, the realm of the divine message in the Holy bible, have come to know God and accepted from him a perpetual invitation into his presence. The treasures of God's gift have been opened to them. To the degree that they strive after it, to that degree they receive. They have therefore absorbed all the purposes. Slowly, but surely, God has come to live within their inner being without them being full aware of it. Their condition is altered, their appearance changed, that their minds renewed and they are strengthened in their weakness. The result is that they launch out preaching what they have seen, heard, and tasted in experience after experience. So the gospel transforms within them from a message into a treasury, then into a testimony, then into a proclamation of the good news of God's surpassing love.

The testimonies of those who have tasted the Lord and experienced him through the Bible have accumulated throughout the ages. The bottom line is that their testimony became part and parcel of the message of the Bible itself. In this our profit is certain, and we are drawn to enter the same sphere, confident of the end before we even begin.

The Fingerprints of the World on Your Heart

When you read the Bible as a personal message to you from God, the words find their way to the depths of your conscience and spiritual sensitivity. You read with a spiritual awareness, your heart being open, receptive and ready for obedience and joy. Like living and distinct fingerprints of God's will and pleasure, they move, form and impress their divine, effective impact. In response, the deadened conscience revives. Tears flow as the word comforts the will and conscience. It reshapes the soul, closer and more like God's will and pleasure. It pushes man forward in thankfulness as he makes steps toward God in the light of the word. Christ holds man's hand, leading him through the hardships of life and the darkness of this age, until he reaches the heart of God the Father.

A Conflict of Two Methods

Again we are warned that a sterile and objective approach to the word only leads to examination,

questioning, and finally skepticism. A contrite spirit, on the other hand, that approaches the word as a personal and living message, purifies, sanctifies and fosters the heart in all piety and faith.

These two methods are before you, dear Reader, and you are free to choose:

If you choose the first method, you will be snared by the sciences of examination, analysis and criticism, and finally the darkness of skepticism.

But if you choose the second, as the verdict in your case for sanctity lies in the balance, you will be vindicated as you are defended by the experiences of the fathers, prophets, apostles, and saints. Your new life of experiential faith will be built upon the testimony of the Spirit in the depth of your conscience. Out of your own faith and experience, you can then answer all the doubts and approach the study that merely criticizes and analyzes.

It is a great danger to begin with the first method. With pure knowledge the soul quickly becomes discouraged, for it provides neither profit nor support. The Bible becomes a burden to the mind and may in fact be an enemy to the conscience. It finds no comfort in it and may come to fear it, despite it, and avoid it. In this condition, when the mind approaches the Bible, it feels alienated from the truth and senses that God is very distant.

At the beginning of his life, if man gives himself to the second method, his soul will leap as he approaches the Bible. Hungering for it day after day, he eats from it only to return to it with more hunger. When it quenches his thirst, with its living water, he thirsts for God all the more. At the same time, his hunger and thirst for the world is deadened. The more the heart of man's soul yearns for its eternal destiny, the more the light of God's face is reflected on it as a gleaming seal. While he himself feels nothing, others see its brightness. For the soul sees nothing of itself except its weakness carried by the love of God. It is then that the open-minded soul can face the world's erudition, skepticism, and violence of the mind. With enlightenment and love, he patiently receives the open-hearted love of God and, as seen in his Holy Bible, his condescension to man.

In this way, the problem of the scientific method disappears, and there is no more anguish in the mind and conscience. When approaching the Bible, man begins with the spirit, not the letter, with experience before study, with vision before moving out, with love before confrontation.