

**THE MIND,
HAND,
AND MOUTH
OF CHRISTIANITY**



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THOUGHT, DEED, AND WORD

MIND, HAND, and MOUTH

“It shall be for a SIGN unto thee upon thine HAND, and for a MEMORIAL between thine EYES, that the Lord’s law may be in thy MOUTH,” Exodus 13:9.

You may ask the question whether this command is to be taken metaphorically or literally. No doubt the remembrance of the great deliverance of the Exodus was entrusted to acts. Besides the annual Passover feasts, inscriptions on the door posts, and fringes on the dress were appointed for this very same purpose. And the Jews from a very early period, certainly before our Lord’s time, wore phylacteries fastened, as this and other places prescribes, on the left arm and on the forehead, and alleged these words as the commandment which they therein obeyed.

But it seems more probable that the meaning is metaphorical, and that what is enjoined is rather a constant regulation of the practical life by it. For what is it that is to be a “sign?” It is the Passover feast.

The “therefore” of the next verse seems to say that keeping this ordinance in its season is the fulfillment of this precept. Besides, the expression “for a sign,” “for a memorial,” may just as well mean, “it shall serve as” or “it shall be like,” as “you shall wear.”

So I think we must say, this is a figure, not a fact, the enjoining of an object for **thought** and for **motive** for life, not of a formal observance. It is very characteristic of the Jews, and of the universal tendency to harden and lower Christianity into outer rites, that a command so wide and profound was supposed to be kept by fastening little boxes with four slips of parchment containing extracts from the Pentateuch on arm and forehead.

Jewish rabbis are not the only people who treat God’s law like that. **Even if literal, the injunction is for the purpose of remembering.** Taking the meaning, then, the text sets forth principles that apply quite as much to

us. For you will observe “hand,” “eyes,” and “mouth,” the symbols of **practice, knowledge and expression, work, thought and word.**

Observe also that there is a slight change in construction in the three clauses, the two former ones are to be done in order that the latter may come to pass. The memorial of the great deliverance is to be “on the hand” and “before the eyes,” in order that “the Lord’s law” may be “in the mouth.”

Keep these points in view: **First, God’s great deliverance should be constantly before our thoughts.** It is more than an accident that both Judaism and Christianity should begin with a great act of deliverance. And that the act of deliverance should constitute a community. And that a memorial rite should be the center of the ritual of both. The Lord’s Supper historically took place, and took the place of the Passover. It was instituted at the Passover and instead of it. It is precisely the same in design, a memorial feast appointed to keep up the vivid remembrance of the historical fact to which redemption is traced, and not only to keep up its remembrance, but to proclaim the importance of extending that remembrance through all life. “Do this in remembrance of Me, because as you drink this cup and eat this bread you evangelize the Lord’s death till He come.”

Notice the peculiarity of both the Jewish and the Christian rite, that the center point of both is a historical fact, a redeeming act. Judaism and Christianity are the only two in regard to which this is true to anything like the same extent or in the same way.

Christianity as a revelation, is not so much the utterance of words of great spiritual thoughts as the history of a life and a death, a fact wrought upon the Earth, which is at once the means of revelation and the means of redemption. This is a feature unshared by religions.

This characteristic determines the principle object of Christian thought. The true object for Christian thought is Christ and His life and death. All Christian Truth flows from and is wrapped up in that, whether it is theology, or the nature of God, anthropology, or the nature of man, soteriology, morality, etc. All truth for the individual and for the race has its source in God's great, gracious, redeeming act.

Christian emotion is best fed at this source; thankfulness, wonder, love. All these transcendent feelings which are melted together in adoration. Here is where they are all kindled. You cannot pump them up, or bring them into existence by willing, or scourge yourself into them, any more than you can make a seed grow by pulling up the germ with a pair of pincers, but this gives the warmth and moisture which make it germinate.

The clear perception of this truth is valuable, as correcting false tendencies. In Christianity the tendency to be much occupied with the derived truths, and to think of them almost to the exclusion of the great fact from which they come, the tendency to substitute melancholy self-inspection for objective facts, the tendency to run out into mere feeling. The command requires of us a habitual occupation of mind with the great deliverance.

And the habitual presence of this thought will be best secured by specific times of occupation with it. Let every Christian practice the habit of meditation, which in an age of so many books, newspapers, magazines, and the distractions of our busy modern life, is apt to become obsolete.

Secondly, the great deliverance is to be ever present in practical life. "The hand" is clearly the seat and home of power and practical effort. So the remembrance is to be present and to reside over our practical work. How it is fitted to do so. "Take, eat. Take, drink."

A. It gives the law for all our activity. The pattern, the death as well as the life of Christ, teaches us what we ought to be. The motive: Well, He died for me. Shall I not serve Him who redeemed me?

B. That remembered deliverance arms us against temptations, and lifts us above sinking into sin. How blessed such a life would be. How victorious over the small motives that rule one's life, the deadening influence of routine, the duties that are felt to be overwhelmingly and monotonously small. How this unity of motive would give unity to life, and simplify its problems. How it would free us from many a perplexity.

There are many things that seem doubtful because we do not bring the test of the highest motive to bear on them. **Complications would fall away when we only wished to know and be like Christ.** Many a tempting amusement, or occupation, or speculation would start up in its own shape when this ithuriel spear touched it. How it would save from distractions. How strong it would make us, like a belt round the waist bracing the muscles tighter.

"This one thing I do," is always a strengthening principle. How far is this possible? Not absolutely, but we may approximate very closely and infinitely towards it. For there is the possibility of such thought blending with common motives, like a finer perfume in the scentless air, or some richer elixir in a cup.

There is the possibility of its doing to other motives what light does to landscape when a sudden sunbeam gleams across the plain, and everything leaps into increased depth of color.

Let us try more and more to rescue life from the slavery of habit and the distractions of all these smaller forces, and to bring it into the greatness and power of submission to the dominion of this sovereign, unifying motive. Our lives would thus be greatened and strengthened, even as countries have been delivered from a rabble of petty dukes and brought under the way of one emperor or king, as our country and its independence. Let us try to approach nearer and nearer to the fusion of action and contemplation, and to the blending with all other motives of this supreme one.

This command supplies us with an easily applied and effective test. Is there any place where you cannot take it, any act which you feel it would be impossible to do for His sake? Avoid such. Where the safety lamp burns blue and goes out, is no place for you.

It is a beautiful thought that Jesus Christ does for us what we are thus commanded to do for Him. The high priest bore the names of the tribes on his shoulders, and in his heart. "I have graven Thee on my palms of my hands." We bear Him in our hands and in our hearts. "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Thirdly, the great deliverance is to be ever on our lips. The three regions here named are the inward thought, the outward practice, and the testimony of the lips, of our gift of eternal life in Christ. Note that that testimony is a consequence of thought and practice.

1. The purpose of the deliverance is to make "prophets of His law." Such was the Divine intention as to Israel. Such is God's purpose as to all Christians. The very meaning of redemption is there. "He has opened our lips, that we should show forth His praises." "He has regard to His own Name." His desire is to make us vocal. For the same purpose for which a man strings a harp, or to bring sweet music out of it, "**words of testimony are a form of love.**" This is my spouse...

2. The other two are incomplete without this vocal testimony. "With the heart man believeth unto salvation and with the mouth he acknowledges his salvation."

3. The utterance of the lips, to be worth anything must rest on and follow the other two. Now noble, then, and blessed, how strong and calm and simple our lives would be if we had this for the one great object of our thoughts, or our practical endeavor of our words, if all our being was sustained, impelled, made vocal by one thought, one love.

See to it that you give yourself to Christ. That great light will gladden your eyes, will guide your activity, and like the sunrise striking voiceless, stony lips, will bring music. Thought will have one boundless home of "many mansions." Work will have one law, one motive, its consecration and strength, and as in some solemn procession, all our steps and all our movements, will keep time to the music of our praise, to "Him who loves us and gave Himself for us."

"As a man thinketh in his mind so is he," in deed and in expression.

"A sign upon thine hand" - Salvation, Gospel, Saviour.

"A memorial between thine eyes" - Salvation, Gospel, Saviour.

"That the Lord's Word may be in thy mouth." - Salvation, Gospel, Saviour.

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