

SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION, ONCE MORE.

RADU GHEORGHITA

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Kansas City, MO 64118

RGheorghita@mbts.edu

“You should write a piece about it and submit it to our *Midwestern Journal of Theology*.” Such was the advice from our former Dean after I informed him that my proposal for a paper on Scripture memorization for the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting was declined by the committee as not fitting the profile of the session. The paper, “A Better Way: Scripture Memorization Book-by-Book”, was originally submitted for the section on Hermeneutics, usually open for papers that explore ideas, old and new, in biblical interpretation. To be fair, it must be said that Scripture memorization as such does not recommend itself as a topic capable of competing with the more exotic proposals that usually make the cut. There was nothing in my paper that had the look of, to echo one of Churchill’s sayings, a syntactical riddle, wrapped in a lexical mystery, inside of an enigmatic passage.

Yet, my reason for suggesting the paper was precisely the fact that, after 20 years of practicing biblical exegesis, I can think of no methodology more capable and adept at unpacking the biblical text than the memorization of the entire book. There is much hermeneutics involved in the exercise of memorizing a book, even though it is not as obvious as one might expect; rather, it lurks behind the surface, not always easy to distinguish or pin down. Unfortunately, my proposal was not persuasive enough. The paper did not make the cut, even for the general sessions, and hence the decision to follow the Dean’s advice and offer it to the readers of the *Midwestern Journal*.

The rejection of the proposal left me with mixed feelings, alternating from nonchalance to disappointment. Disappointment, not

because of the rejection as such; after a certain age, one learns to not take personally life's closed doors. The disappointment comes solely from witnessing again the low ranking that serious Scripture memorization receives in today's Evangelical academia. This is most surprising when one considers that it used to be part of the normal work of biblical scholars. There is a long string of anecdotal evidence, from R. Bultmann to G. B. Caird and from C. H. D. Moule to F. F. Bruce, that they all, allegedly, had committed to memory the entire Greek New Testament. The Southern Baptists, too, have a representative in this privileged elite group. Professor Dale Moody of SBTS, according to a recently published history of the seminary, "had a prodigious memory and seemed to be able to quote any verse in the Greek New testament by heart." It seems that memorizing significant portions of the Scriptures was once considered part of the trade of the Biblical scholars. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case, not even among evangelicals.

This was not the first time when I encountered a lack of interest in my attempts to upgrade the status of Scripture memorization from "something that we only do in Sunday school," to something that is accepted as an indispensable part in the instrumentarium of biblical studies. In the past decade I submitted several proposals for books devoted to Scripture memorization to various evangelical publishing houses. Their response was invariably enthusiastic, yet negative: "good idea, but not marketable; it will not sell." This was intriguing, especially when a browsing of current titles reveals that there is little attention devoted to this spiritual discipline. Take Zondervan as a case in point. A search for "prayer" yields eight pages of titles; "memorization," however, appears only in the advertisement of the Zonderkidz Bible Memorization App., with an attached blurb from Chuck Swindoll reading, "I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture." The situation is similar at Baker Academic: "prayer" yields two dozen titles, while "memorization" has not even a single entry. InterVarsity Press fares a bit better: there are twenty titles under the topic of prayer, yet only one under memorization. It would be fair to conclude that Scripture memorization has gone out of favor not only with academia but also with the ecclesia. I should mention, however, that Lifeway Resources did show some interest and included a series on Scripture memorization under their Ministry Grid platform.

The given situation naturally raised a few questions in my mind, none more pressing than those probing the rationale for the proposal's rejection: why would an approach to biblical studies based on book-by-book Scripture memorization fail to convince academia about its usefulness and legitimacy among the panoply of approaches to biblical studies? Why does serious Scripture memorization fail to assert itself as a bona fide methodological approach in the serious, professional study of the Scriptures? The remainder of this paper proposes several possible answers to these questions, followed by a subsequent piece in which the work of memorization and its results will be exemplified by a concrete example taken from a New Testament book.

Here then are some possible explanations for the desuetude of memorization in recent times.

First, I believe that this current fate is the result of a close association of Scripture memorization with Sunday school activities. What works in Sunday school, the argument goes, is not a discipline worthy to be considered alongside the more scholarly approaches. Inadvertently, AWANA Clubs and other similar programs of Scripture memorization for children have tainted this spiritual discipline. To memorize the Scriptures ends up being unvaryingly associated with this particular age group and church activity. It is thus condemned to obsolescence for other ages and groups, and ultimately unable to acquire a legitimate status among the more serious disciplines of biblical studies.

In all fairness, I would be the first one to concede that Scripture memorization, the verse-by-verse approach in the classical Sunday school setting, useful as it is, would not qualify for a place among the facets of biblical *Untersuchung*. But the method advanced here – essentially the same as the one proposed for the ETS paper – envisages not a verse-by-verse approach to memorization, but rather it advocates a more substantive endeavor: a book-by-book approach, with the life goal of covering the entire New Testament. Also, the proposal is not limited to working with an English translation; in fact it recommends memorization of books in the original languages. This approach cannot be dismissed as outdated or unprofitable. On the contrary, memorization of significant portions of the Scriptures – a default approach to their sacred writings taken by both the Rabbinic schools and the Islam devotees – needs to be reintegrated among the disciplines of biblical studies. Could it be that Christianity is becoming the first and only one

of the three “religions of the Book” to dispense with memorization as a mark of devotion to its sacred text?

In this debate, there is a faint echo of Tertullian’s “what indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Academy to do with the Church?” Indeed, what does memorization have to do with Biblical studies? It turns out that it has quite a lot. Here is just the tip of the iceberg: memorization of an entire book gives the student a solid, thorough knowledge of the biblical text, something that cannot be achieved at this intense level by any other exegetical means. The primary cognitive benefit of memorization is a mastery and intimate grasp of the biblical text in its canonical form. Issues such as vocabulary and style of the author, themes deemed important by the author, the overall message of the book, the atmosphere of the writing, particular theological nuances, the structure of the argument, and many others are revealed by book memorization with more ease and precision than by any other ways of exploring a book. During the memorization process, no doubt due in part to the activity of human memory, the analytic and synthetic processes of thought bring together, in a unified and coherent message, the apparently scattered details of the text. Both the panoramic view acquired on the book as a whole, as well as the limitless possibilities for zooming in on any of the details of the book (from individual words to overarching themes, from stylistic features to discourse analysis), are supplied by memorization with unrivalled aptitude.

There is a second possible explanation for the low ranking status that memorization bears. It is perhaps limited to the Western world, the electronically savvy world, where computerized biblical studies have become beneficiaries of the digital revolution. When computer software in specialized biblical studies can do the type of analyses that no mind can duplicate, let alone surpass, why would anyone waste their time by devoting themselves to memorization, an antediluvian approach to biblical studies? Again, the argument has considerable strength on the surface. Indeed, no mind can compete with the power of digitized databases and search engines. It dissipates, however, when one realizes that having the Scripture stored on a machine is not the same thing as having the text inscribed on the tablets – no pun intended – of the heart and mind of the believer. The internalization of Scripture, the assimilation of the text resulting from memorization, is in a different category altogether than anything a machine can do. In fact it would not

be too far-fetched to say that the ability to acquire the text by memorization is a *sui generis* aspect. A computer could never transfer by osmosis its abilities and performance in working with the biblical text to the owner of the program. Whatever the computer does, it is still on the "outside". Not so with memorization. Once a book is very well known, its riches are assimilated internally, and they are assumed as one's own in the most direct, unmediated way.

One close parallel of this process could be found in the world of musical performance. A programmable computer can play the preludes and fugues of Johann Sebastian Bach's Well Tempered Clavier with unmatched precision and technical perfection. But it would be an austere and lifeless performance, incomparably inferior to the execution of the same pieces processed by the artistic prowess of the master pianist. In a similar way, having the Bible on a preferred i-Gadget should not and could never be a substitute for having God's word in one's heart and mind. To meditate on God's law day and night (Ps 1:2) or to be filled with the word of Christ (Col 3:16) is the task of the believers, not of their electronic devices.

For those unconvinced by the above argument, I propose the following challenge. Choose any two books similar in size, genre, and preferably not by the same author, for example Ephesians and James. Take the first book and memorize it to perfection, staying with it for several months as you daily go over the routine of reciting the entire book in one setting. Then devote as much time to the meticulous investigation of the other book, using any approach, any exegetical tool, or any resource available, no limits imposed. When the process is completed, do an honest evaluation of the level of mastering the two books, the one memorized compared to the one ploughed with the chosen tools of the exegetical and hermeneutical process. There is no doubt in my mind of the outcome of the challenge: the memorization would yield substantially better results.

This leads me to a third reason why memorization is neglected or, worse still, discouraged. There might be a psychological factor involved: people are afraid of memorization. Presumably it is a difficult task, and since there is little personal experience and consequently very little palpable results, there is little incentive to stick with it, let alone to pass it on to others. This is in my estimation one of the most unfortunate aspects, because it is diametrically opposite to the actual reality. In most

cases memorization of large portions of Scriptures is abandoned before it is even tried. What is even sadder is that many who give up on this kind of memorization do it without realizing how achievable the task is, and, more importantly, how totally rewarding the experience is. To substantiate this point, I shall insert below a sample of the evaluative comments from students in a D. Min. seminar who had as one of their requirements the memorization of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians in its entirety. Understandably, to undertake the memorization of an entire book as an assignment for a doctoral seminar was a daunting task, since most students in the program were in their forties or early fifties. A look of terror could easily be read on their countenance when we went through the syllabus. And yet, after being gently persuaded by my unwillingness to change the assignment, those who opted for the assignment succeeded in doing it. It took them no more than three months in the unaltered routines of their lives and ministries. Here are some evaluations of the task received from them at the end of the process:

Dr. G.,

Thank you for your encouragement and help in our Scripture memory. Though this task has certainly been challenging, it has proved to be one of the best things I have done. Thank you for leading us in this direction. It is making a difference in my life.

Dr. G.,

Attached you will find the Ephesians memorization assignment from the Integrating Christian Faith and Practice doctoral seminar. I chose the HCSB because this is the translation I preach from. This has been an enriching experience. I plan to continue memorizing other books of the Bible as part of my ongoing devotional practice. Thanks for the challenge!

Dr. G.,

Thanks for the additional time. The task has been both easier and more difficult than I expected. Getting to a place of general memory was much easier than I expected. However, taking it to the final level of being able to write it without any reference to the text has been very difficult, although it has brought a deep

level of understanding also. The amount of time required has been a surprise - it has consumed much more time than I had planned. However, I now know the book in a manner that I have never come close to in the past. This extension will enable me to enjoy the final phase without so much pressure. I will consider book memory again in the future as it brings a comprehensive view that is impossible through any other method. I also believe that the next time would be easier, knowing how to approach it, and what to expect.

Dr. G.,

I am sending the Ephesians memory work now. This has been both a beneficial and intensive effort (for an old guy). It would have been easier if I had not been in the text previously in so many translations. However, without doubt memorizing a book provides a tremendous tool for both spiritual benefit and as a tool to be able to study and teach a book. I intend to preach through the book now that I have such an extensive grasp of it. Thanks.

Dr. G.,

Attached is my corrected Ephesians memory assignment. It was a very hard but rewarding assignment. I really think I will try to tackle other books of the Bible. Thank you for your investment in our education and spiritual growth.

Sir,

To tell you the truth, in some ways I did better than I thought I would but in others I left out parts I should have known but they just escaped me at my time of need. Thanks for challenging me to do this, it has been a great experience I expect to continue. I will spend some more needed time with Ephesians before I try to tackle another book.

Dr. G.,

Attached is my herculean effort at memorizing Ephesians for DR 30060. Thank you for the challenge--it has helped me to become a more consistent and serious student of the Word.

Dr. G.,

Thank you for issuing this challenge to us. I have been greatly encouraged by this project.

Dr. G.,

Thank you for the challenge. I would have never thought that this was really attainable.

Dr. G.,

Today I was driving in heavy traffic in Memphis. Something made me think of Ephesians and I began to quote it in Spanish ... I could not have done that if you had not given the memorization assignment. Thanks for showing me that I can.

I believe the quotes speak for themselves. The most encouraging aspect of their effort is that if students in their forties and fifties can do it, then anybody can do it. In fact, in more than two decades of giving book memorization assignments in my classes, there were very few students who, once they opted for the assignment, were unable to finish it.

I can think of no better way of closing the first part of this article than to tease out an idea, which I hereby put in print for the first time. It has been a personal burden for some time, and one that I believe it is worth exploring, though I am aware that would be neither easy to make a persuasive case for it, nor easy to be implemented. Yet, it is a novel and intriguing proposal, one that I am hopeful could be tried in the not too distant future. In essence the idea is to design and implement a program for a biblical studies designed entirely on Scripture memorization. What student of theology today would not enroll in a seminary that would have Paul, Moses, David, and Isaiah on their faculty? Who would not want to study the Pentateuch with Moses, Hebrew Prophets with Isaiah and Jeremiah, or the Psalms with David? Who would not sign up for a class on the earthly life of Jesus taught by Mark, or on the sermons of Jesus with Matthew, or the history of the early church with Luke? Who would miss a chance to take Paul's course on the use of the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament, or study eschatology with John the Revelator? You get the picture. Such a seminary would have no problem recruiting

students. But this is precisely what the Bible is and does. The Bible is an open forum of instruction in which these men of God, their ideas, theology, ministry, and life experience can be encountered as a firsthand account. They emerge from the Scriptures as the ones who teach us, mold us, and challenge us; they expect from us to study them, to scrutinize them, and to follow their lead in the ultimate adventure of knowing God. And they do it by means of their words, God's Word, our Scriptures. Memorization of their words is one approach that can offer an intense, direct, unmediated access to their thought, life, and ministry. This might sound simplistic or naïve, but it is neither. All one needs to do is try it.

If such a program would be implemented, what might it look like? Here is a proposal envisaged for a three year program with concentration on the New Testament. This should be completely attainable if the students would give the same effort and time demanded by their regular program of 12-14 credit hours a semester. What can be memorized in three years? Surprisingly much. Here is the list I would recommend, and which I truly believe is within the reach of anyone trying it.

1. *First year - Pauline studies*
 - a. Paul the Younger – Galatians
 - b. Paul the Senior – Ephesians
 - c. Paul the Systematic Theologian – Romans
 - d. Paul the Counselor – 1 Corinthians
 - e. Paul the Pastor – 1 & 2 Timothy

2. *Second year – the Gospels*
 - a. Gospel of Mark
 - b. Sermons of Jesus in Matthew and John

3. *Third year – the Apostolic witnesses & Revelation*
 - a. James
 - b. 1 Peter
 - c. 1 John
 - d. Jude
 - e. Hebrews
 - f. Revelation chps. 1-5, 21-22.
 - g. (bonus 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John)

Memorizing these texts would lead not only to an unmatched grasp of their content. That would be only the beginning. The depths of the theological thought of each writing, the distinct perspective each biblical author brings to the apostolic roundtable, and the nuances of their individual contribution to the canonical corpus of writings will all form an incredibly rich experience and knowledge of God through His Word. Think of the depth of their understanding of the Scriptures and how meaningful their insights would be. Think of the profundity of the sermons that would emerge from their effort. Think of their joy of storing and treasuring God's word in their hearts and mind. Think of the amount of material the Holy Spirit will have at his disposal to radically change their minds, hearts, and lives. May I be as bold as to suggest that no classic format of a M.Div. program, regardless of which school might offer it or who the instructors might be, would prepare the students as thoroughly as this program? Seminary professors have been increasingly complaining about the alarming level of biblical illiteracy among today's students. Here, I suggest, stands a cure that would not only solve the issue of students' biblical illiteracy but would prepare them for ministry and life better than any alternative program that can be conceived. My prayer continues to be that the Lord would raise up a courageous seminary which would dare to implement such a program. I believe that the results would be nothing less than absolutely spectacular.

This challenge brings to an end of this section, which advanced the thesis that serious Scripture memorization is a worthy tool among the instrumentarium of the exegete, both for the seminarian as well as for the seasoned scholar. Where absent, it needs to be promoted; where present, it needs to be intensified; where dormant, it needs to be revived; and where challenged, it needs to be defended. No defense of these ideas would be more efficient than showing several results of the method applied to Paul's second epistle to Timothy.

The best advocacy for Scripture memorization's aspirations to receive a place among the exegete's instrumentarium is to let it speak for itself. This part of my contribution will test the method of book memorization by presenting some of its results when applied to Paul's second epistle to Timothy. It might be useful, in the beginning, to include a brief presentation of the methodology employed in memorizing a book. The methodology presented here claims no universal validity since an

approach that works for some might be completely unproductive for others. This is, however, the approach I have used in my own memorization program and have encouraged the students in my classes to use, and so far it has proven to be successful.

Once I have chosen the book for memorization, that portion of the Scriptures becomes the focus for the following several months. The process of memorization is comprised of four distinct phases.

The first phase, the acquisition, has as a goal the ability to recall and recite the entire book with the aid of a prompter. I set the goal of memorizing 10-12 verses a day, always reviewing what had been memorized to that point, and proceeding to the next group of verses. If done faithfully, reaching the goal is achievable for anyone. By the end of the acquisition phase, the entire book can be recalled from memory, glancing at the open text whenever needed, regardless of how often this would be necessary. It is important to underscore the obvious: the book is not yet known by heart at this stage. In fact it is not known very well at all, but at least each paragraph was memorized separately and reviewed daily.

The second phase, the consolidation, extends anywhere between three to five weeks. The goal for this phase is the ability to recite fluently the entire book from memory, without the help of the prompter. During this phase, the daily objective is to recite the book at least once, preferably in one, but no more than two, sittings. Both the speed and the accuracy of recalling the content increase from day to day. By the end of this phase, after the book has been recited daily for this interval of time, the book is safely stored in the memory.

Once the book is known this well, the third phase starts, the elation, a phase which I continue to consider the most scintillating stage in book memorization. During this phase I spend three or four months on the book, not doing much more than reviewing it daily. The primary goal is to enjoy fully the nourishment that comes from a text perfectly known by heart. By this stage, the fluency of recitation has reached its peak, and total attention can be devoted exclusively to the text itself. The joy of discovering God's truths in the written text reaches its highest intensity, unsurpassed in my experience by any other spiritual disciplines. The last phase, the hibernation, starts when the book is no longer reviewed daily, allowing the exegete to move to the next book.

Memorizing the Scriptures Book-by-Book 2 Timothy Test Case

Before turning the attention to the results of memorizing 2 Timothy, it is helpful to recall one of the axioms of biblical hermeneutics, *Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*, the Bible is its own interpreter. The tenet “Scripture interprets Scripture” is arguably the most fundamental interpretive starting point in Protestant hermeneutics. As a heuristic principle, it had long been observed and practiced, under a variety of names, throughout Jewish and Christian Scripture interpretation. The Reformers made it the cornerstone for establishing the *Sola Scriptura*, one of their distinctive theological pillars. As it will become evident, this principle is directly relevant to the practice of memorizing an entire book since, both during the memorization process as well as after its completion, the book memorized stands as the sole focus of interaction with the Biblical text; no commentaries, no studies, no monographs, no encyclopedias... just *sola Scriptura*, in the most real sense of the syntagma. From this axiom spring forth two other corollaries that should be mentioned here: “the Bible clarifies itself” and “the Bible complements itself.” Both of them are equally operative and useful during memorization.

Given the space considerations, only a sampling of the results from memorizing 2 Timothy will be discussed in this article. The investigation limits itself to three aspects, and though they are similar in some respects, it is still beneficial to treat them separately. All three are directly relevant to the work of memorization.

a. Intratextuality

One way of observing the aforementioned axiom is through the phenomenon of intratextuality. Linguists define intratextuality as the literary phenomenon in which similar parts within a text were intended by the author to be read in light of each other. Exploring the phenomenon of intratextuality ranks among the most efficient activities for acquiring a fuller understanding of the book’s message, as well as among the most enjoyable components of memorization. More than any other exegetical tools, memorization enables a heightened capacity to

investigate and to appreciate the inner texture of ideas and themes in the book, providing not only a holistic picture of the writing, but also a detailed understanding of each constituent passage.

Many examples of intratextuality are easily noticeable during the earlier stages of memorization, either because they are in close proximity, or because they have a distinct resonance. The expression “that day”, for example, is employed three times in this brief epistle:

2 Tim. 1:12, “That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day”;

2 Tim. 1:18, “May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus”;

2 Tim. 4:8 “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

The nature of “that day” could be profiled by noting what each verse discloses about it. It is the day of the consummate disclosure of God’s grace, either in damning judgment or in rewarding vindication. “That day” is invariably and unambiguously linked with the parousia, the appearing of our Lord and Savior. Once this designation is made, it is easy to see how the thought becomes embryonic as it interlocks with several other topics that are part of the theological fabric of the epistle. In 2 Tim 4:8, “on that day” is linked to “appearing of our Lord” a clear reference to the second coming. Yet in other passages, “the appearing” is a concept referring not to the “second coming” as in 2 Tim 4:8, but, using the same verbiage, to the “first coming” as in 2 Tim 1:10. Instantly several layers of meaning pulsate together clarifying and complementing each other.

Similarly, intertextuality can be noticed with regard to the phrase “good work.” Although it is used only two times in the epistle, it plays a role inverse proportionally to its frequency. The phrase denotes the distinct outcome of salvation:

2 Tim. 2:21, "If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."

2 Tim. 3:17, "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Pauline theology, in fact the entirety of New Testament theology, champions the idea that salvation is granted on the basis of God's grace (1:9), through faith (3:15b). Yet, this salvation has "good works" as one of its most important outcomes. In fact, the good works are just as much one of salvation's intended results as they are one of its clearest evidence. The Christian then is someone saved not by good works, but for good works. Both passages above advocate this truth, each of them focusing in turn on the two distinct facets of the same reality. The first looks at man's responsibility in the process ("[i]f a man cleanses himself" then "he will be ... prepared to do any good work"), while the second looks at the role and function of the Scriptures ("[a]ll Scripture is God-breathed and is useful ..." so that "the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"). The complete gamut of good works triggered by our salvation is suggested by the accompanying adjectives "any" and "every/all."

Examples of intertextuality that can be detected with ease can be readily multiplied. It is evident in the prepositional phrase "away from the truth," which alerts of the constant danger of drifting away, as did Hymenaeus and Philetus "who wandered away from the truth ... say[ing] that the resurrection has already taken place" (2:18); so, too, did the many unnamed ones, who "will not put up with sound doctrine, ..., but turn their ears away from the truth" (4:4). Intertextuality is also seen in the recurrent accent on "faith and love," cardinal among other virtues. Timothy is to keep the sound teaching "with faith and love" (1:13), all the while fleeing the youthful desires as he pursues "... faith, love, ..." (2:22), as it was modeled unquestionably by the old apostle, "you know all about my ... faith, ..., love" (3:10). No one memorizing the epistle can miss the deep sadness of the apostle, reflected in the phrase "(all) have deserted me." Incredible as it may sound, by the end of his ministry, many had parted ways with the apostle. Some were from his beloved Asia

“everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes ” [1:15]), others were in Rome (“Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me” [4:10]), while still others parted at the neediest time in Paul’s captivity (“at my first defense, no-one came to my support, but everyone deserted me” [4:16]). These and similar examples of intertextuality surface effortlessly as the book is reviewed, adding richness to the emerging grand picture of this remarkable apostolic testament.

Other cases of intratextuality, however, are more subtle. They tend to emerge only after spending considerable time in the epistle. A case in point is Paul’s references to the will (of someone):

2 Tim. 1:1, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,”

2 Tim. 2:26, “and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

The first usage of the collocation “the will of” is in reference to God, while the second is with regard to the devil. By juxtaposing the two verses, a truth, consistent with the tenor of the whole Scripture, emerges: human beings are not endowed with nor able to acquire a status of absolute independence. While often desired or pretended by them, independence from the will of a higher power or authority is impossible. Humans are positioned at the very center of the confrontation between the will of God and the will of the devil: they must either conform to the will of God (Paul being a worthy example [1:1]), or submit as captives to the will of the devil (as those in “the trap of the devil” have [2:26]). It goes without saying that both references to “the will of” may be developed further, supplemented by other relevant information available in the epistle.

A similar case of an intertextual connection not immediately obvious in the early stages of memorization is found in the dual, complementary roles of the Scriptures and the preacher.

2 Tim. 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped"

2 Tim. 4:2, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage, with great patience and careful instruction."

The role of the Scriptures in rebuking and correcting (besides, of course, teaching and training) is paralleled by that of the preacher, who, as he preaches the Word, also corrects and rebukes. Herein lies the solution for a balanced spiritual life: believers are to be exposed to the words of the Scriptures as well as to the preaching of the Scriptures. This intratextual clue also casts light on the crucially important role of the preacher who, through the Word preached, contributes to steering God's people in actions similar to those of the Scriptures. God uses both the written Word and the preached Word to accomplish his work in his people. In Paul's understanding, both sides are equally indispensable for a healthy spiritual life. Timothy's own life stood as an example of this synergy. He was exposed to the Scriptures "from infancy" (3:15), no doubt helped by his grandmother and mother (1:5). At the same time, he also benefited from the teaching given by Paul, the minister of the Word (3:14).

b. Thematic Soundings

Another benefit of book memorization is acquiring the ability to detect the main theme(s) and primary theological interest(s) of the writing. Searching for the major themes of any given biblical book always leads to several potential contenders. Memorization of an entire book is arguably one of the most effective ways to collect, assess, and decide on these potential contenders. There is a degree of overlap between thematic soundings and the intratextuality discussed above. Yet, thematic investigations deserve separate treatment because themes are broader constituents of the writing's theological fabric and they encompass more than mere words or expressions used by the author.

No reader of 2 Timothy would fail to identify Paul's intense preoccupation with the transfer of the apostolic kerygma to the next generation. This process is primarily referred to by means of a specific group of cognates ("teaching, teacher, to teach") used in no less than eight verses in 2 Timothy:

2 Tim. 1:13, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus."

2 Tim. 2:17, "Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus ..."

2 Tim. 3:10, "You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance ..."

2 Tim. 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,..."

2 Tim. 2:2, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

2 Tim. 2:24, "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful."

2 Tim. 1:11, "And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher."

2 Tim. 4:3, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear."

The sheer number of occurrences, as well as their uniform distribution throughout the epistle, indicate that the concept behind the words of this semantic domain is especially important to Paul. The book needs not to be reviewed many times before this aspect becomes very clear. Each recitation from memory of the epistle usually garners a

similar cache of words or semantic domains with prominence in the texture of the writing (e.g., “endurance, perseverance, and suffering” or “grace, salvation, faith and love”). What memorization accomplishes quite well in addition to simply determining these words/themes is also helping to build an intricate matrix of meaningful interconnections between them.

It might be suggested that the process outlined above is not dissimilar to using a concordance. In fact, it could be argued that making use of a concordance might be more time efficient. The objection seems fair enough to require an answer. Time permits only three short considerations for a rebuttal, though each one could be developed more fully. First, a concordance is as good as the user’s ability to know what to look for. Second, there is a vast difference in the net results: while a concordance when used properly can supply the same raw data, the words identified through memorization emerge not as independent lexical units mechanically looked up in the concordance, but rather they come as part of a network of intricate lexical ties with multiple resonances within the text. Third, one should always decide on the more efficient of the two approaches by trying them both and assessing them. I believe that the matter will be settled in favor of memorization.

c. Discipleship: One Thematic Dominant

The remainder of the paper traces one of these prominent themes in the epistle to a deeper and fuller exploration. Each of the facets presented below were first identified during the daily recitation of the book. As it usually happens, ideas that seem unrelated at first accumulate slowly and perceptively to form a growing cluster, reaching semantic critical mass, around which grand ideas of the book (and of Paul) crystallize. Not infrequently, just from sheer thoughtful recitation a grand, architectonic structure becomes noticeable and begins to dominate the perception of the book’s theology. These moments of “personal encounter” – for lack of a better term – with God’s Word are the ultimate goals of daily recitation. It is during these moments of theological crystallization that the elation linked earlier with the third phase is markedly present. David refers in his Psalms to this phenomenon of absolute delight:

Ps. 1:2, "... but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."

Ps. 19:7, 10, "The law of the LORD is perfect ... More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb."

Ps. 119:72, "The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."

Ps. 119:103, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

These moments are indeed the greatest incentive to book-by-book memorization. One such grand theme in 2 Timothy is discipleship. While a complete biblical theology of discipleship in Paul's writings must include all his letters, the goal here is to limit the considerations to only this epistle (which is, in reality, a very representative model as far as discipleship is concerned). This self-imposed limitation, however, is actually very useful in several ways. First, it gives evidence to just how much information about discipleship is amassed in 2 Timothy. It is often the case that jumping to other books to complete the contour of a theme prevents one from mining deeper into what one book has to offer. Memorization of a book is a good safeguard in this respect. Second, it helps the exegete to relive the experience of many first-century Christian congregations who might have had available only one apostolic writing, or at most a very limited number of them. Their weekly meeting on the Lord's Day exposed them repeatedly to this apostolic word, which, by reading and exposition, would end up being ingrained in their hearing and memories. It is only by the second century that Christian congregations had the benefit of using the entire collection of the New Testament canon. Third, and yet foremost, it gives the clearest evidence in support of book memorization and the benefit of focusing on one book at the time. The question to ponder, then, is what does 2 Timothy have to say about discipleship?

It might be useful to start with a working definition for biblical discipleship, one that emerges from direct textual observations on the way Paul describes his relationship with Timothy: Discipleship is a special

type of relationship intentionally and purposefully developed between followers of Christ in which more mature Christians help, at manifold levels and in a variety of ways (e.g., teaching, guiding, training, exhorting, leading, helping, commissioning, assisting, encouraging, rebuking, etc.) less mature Christians to grow in their spiritual life and in their ministry of the Gospel.

Several comments are in order for unpacking the definition. The use of the term “relationship” to describe the genus proximum of discipleship is justified on the basis of Pauline parlance. The metaphor in Paul’s writings most often used in conjunction with discipleship is that of spiritual parenting (fatherhood), a distinctive terminology which Paul frequently employs: “Paul ... to Timothy my true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2); “Paul ... to Timothy, my dear son” (2 Tim. 1:2); “You, then, my son...” (2 Tim. 2:1). The similarities between natural, biological parenting and discipleship are extensive and are often invoked to shape a better understanding of the latter. It is also important to remember that the relationships forged within the boundaries of discipleship are not identical to nor superimposed on blood or kin relationships – in fact, this is alluded to in 1:5 where Paul mentions Timothy’s grandmother Lois and mother Eunice. Similarly, neither are they to be confounded with the de facto relationships established between believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, while discipleship at times may involve either familial or ecclesial relationships, it cannot be reduced to or be confused with them; discipleship is a distinct type of relationship. It is *sui generis*.

Although discipleship is not to be confused with the relationship of Christian brotherhood within the body of Christ, it is important to underline that Christian discipleship is possible only because of a commonality of faith. Christian discipleship according to Paul is built on the foundation of shared spiritual realities and truths. The prevalence of this aspect, traced here in a limited but representative sample, cannot be overemphasized:

2 Tim. 1:2, “Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2 Tim. 1:14, “Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”

2 Tim. 1:8, 9, “by the power of God,⁹ who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”

2 Tim. 1:9, “This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time...”

2 Tim. 4:8, “... the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Though Paul repeatedly insists on his God-given appointment as herald, apostle, and teacher (2 Tim. 1:1, 1:11, cf. 1 Tim. 2:7), he does not fail to remind Timothy, as well as his readers, about the wealth of spiritual realities that they share in common. Christ is “our” Lord, not Paul’s Lord only; the Holy Spirit lives in “us,” not in Paul only; God saved and called “us,” not only the apostle; the grace was given to “us,” not to Paul only; the crown of righteous is not for the apostle only but for “all” who long for the appearing of the Lord. This is the solid foundation on which discipleship is built. Its ethos is not that of an elitist society. The privilege as well as the responsibility of participating in it are within the reach of all who belong to Christ, based on the wealth of shared spiritual realities.

Just as important as its foundation, mention must be made of the very essence of discipleship, to which Paul often alludes. Discipleship consists of entrusting one’s spiritual authority and heritage to the next generation of believers in a personal, direct, unmediated way, by instruction and by example. This “passing on of the authority” was a complex process, often accompanied by external symbolism mirroring the deeper spiritual truths of discipleship:

2 Tim. 1:6, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”

The act of laying on of hands, unmatched in importance in the economy of NT leadership, is corroborated throughout the epistolary corpus of the NT (cf. 1 Tim. 5:22). The complexity of this act practiced by the early church, as it is represented both in the epistles of the NT as well

as in the post-canonical writings of the Church Fathers, prevents a fuller analysis here. Behind this act, however, stands a condition of the discipling relationship that is often forgotten or undervalued. The transfer of spiritual authority was done through a process characterized foremost by unmediated, physical presence. What Paul handed down to Timothy was not done in writing (as important as his pastoral letters are), nor was it done by proxy agents: it was transferred by direct presence and example. This reality is reflected in several passages:

2 Tim. 3:10, "You, however, know all my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, ..."

2 Tim. 3:14b, "... because you know those from whom you learned it ..."

2 Tim. 1:18b, "... you know very well in how many ways he helped me..."

Here is the textual evidence that discipleship was done in direct contact. Paul did not simply communicate information to Timothy: he modeled it, he displayed it, and he lived it out. In the most profound sense of the word, he incarnated it. "You know my way of life" means that Timothy saw it first hand, observed it, participated in it, and assessed it; and all this was done in direct, unmediated contact with his disciple maker. Discipleship cannot be done in a mailman fashion by handing down the truths of Christianity as a transfer of information. This is hardly surprising, since this master-pupil relationship has been ingrained in all human societies and activities that involved discipleship. One cannot become a good pianist, tennis player, master painter, carpenter, engineer, politician, preacher, theologian, or evangelist just by receiving a set of information. Discipleship is so much more than just transfer of information; it involves the transfer of passions, skills, and experience—a transfer of one's very life—and all was done in close proximity: discharging all the duties of ministry together. Discipleship was serious business for Paul. It required openness, vulnerability, disclosure, and sacrifice of time and energy. The very future of the Gospel and of the Kingdom depended upon it. One cannot but remember Jesus' words "... he appointed twelve that they might be with him!" (Mark 3:14, NIV).

How exactly did this process take place? Here is, in closing, an extensive list of dimensions entailed in the process which surface in 2 Timothy. Each one of them has been noticed at one time or another during the recitation of the book.

Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel / Timothy is summoned to not be ashamed:

2 Tim. 1:12, "Yet, I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed,..."

2 Tim. 1:8, "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner ..."

Paul suffered for the Gospel / Timothy is summoned to join in the suffering for the Gospel:

2 Tim. 2:8b, 9, "This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained"

2 Tim. 1:8, "But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,"

Paul endured every possible hardship / Timothy is called to endure in the same way:

2 Tim. 2:10, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they too may obtain the salvation ..."

2 Tim. 2:3, "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

Paul suffered persecution / Timothy, as one who will live a godly life, will tread on the same path:

2 Tim. 3:11, "You know about ... persecutions, sufferings--what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured..."

2 Tim. 3:12, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,"

Paul was strengthened / Timothy will have to be strengthened:

2 Tim. 4:17, "But the Lord ... gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed ..."

2 Tim. 2:1, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

Paul was in chains / Timothy will most likely end up there. The information in Heb. 13:23 informs us that the potentiality became reality in Timothy's life:

2 Tim. 2:9, "... I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal ..."

Heb. 13:23, "I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been set free."

Paul kept the faith to the end / Timothy will have to keep the faith and love:

2 Tim. 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"

2 Tim. 1:13, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith ..."

Paul fought well the faith's battle / Timothy is to do the same:

2 Tim. 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"

1 Tim. 1:18, "... you may fight the battle well,..."

Paul was appointed / Timothy is appointed to ministry:

2 Tim. 1:11, “And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.”

2 Tim. 1:6, “... the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”

Paul was summoned to the ministry of the Gospel and of the Word / Timothy is summoned to a distinct ministry of the Gospel and of the Word:

2 Tim. 1:11, “And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.”

2 Tim. 4:2, 5, “Preach the Word, ..., instruct, do the work of an evangelist, ...”

Paul entrusted the good deposit, the teachings of sound doctrine, to Timothy / Timothy must continue the process with other faithful men:

2 Tim. 1:11, “...what was entrusted to me, for that day.”

2 Tim. 2:2, “And the things you have heard me say ... entrust to reliable men ...”

Paul reminded Timothy of his responsibilities / Timothy is to remind those following him of their responsibilities:

2 Tim. 1:6, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God...”

2 Tim. 2:14, “Keep reminding them of these things ...”

Paul remembered realities of the life of faith / Timothy is to remember essential truths:

2 Tim. 1:4-5, "Recalling your tears, I long to see you,... 5 I have been reminded of your sincere faith..."

2 Tim. 2:8, "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David..."

Paul laid hands on Timothy / Timothy is to lay hands, after careful consideration, on the men under his spiritual authority:

2 Tim. 1:6, "... which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

1 Tim. 5:22, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, ..."

If all these facets were to be reduced to one verse, this would certainly be 2 Tim. 2:2. What Paul received, he entrusted to Timothy / what Timothy received from Paul, he must entrust to the next generation:

2 Tim. 2:2, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

What Paul received from the Lord, he entrusted to Timothy; what Timothy received from Paul, he is to entrust to the next generation, which is to continue the process. The list above is evidence of the many-faceted nature of the discipleship endeavor. Behind each individual item on the list, however, there seem to be two operating principles which can sum up biblical discipleship, or at least how it was perceived and how it functioned in Paul's relationship with Timothy.

Rule One

The discipler can never ask the disciple to do what he himself is not practicing. As evidenced in the verses above, Paul disciplined Timothy by example, not by mere instruction. This is a paramount rule of discipleship all too often forgotten. In fact, throughout the history of the Christian Church the situation has deteriorated so much that it lead to

the concoction of many cynic aphorisms that ridicule discipleship. In the Eastern Orthodox Church prevalent in Eastern Europe, there is the saying: "Do what the priest says, not what he does!" Paul would have shivered at the reality behind the cliché and would have anathemized any so-called disciple maker not himself walking on the path he expected his disciples to tread. The very status of a disciple maker demands that the instruction given to a disciple is an overflow of a way of life in which that instruction is consistently and genuinely lived out. Paul could legitimately instruct Timothy in matters of discipleship because he himself was practicing them. This is foremost a matter of integrity: because Paul practiced it, he also had the moral authority to demand it from others. The responsibilities of this rule are directly laid on the disciple maker. Paul could not have urged his disciples to a vibrant prayer life, if he, the master, lacked one. And that stands true for all the other disciplines that he was eager to pass on to his disciples.

Rule Two

The discipler always summons the disciple to do what he himself is practicing. The second rule is equally important, and lays the responsibility upon the disciple. The disciple maker does more than just suggest possible actions for the disciple: he expects them; even more, he demands them. Once the disciplines are present in the life of the disciple maker, the responsibility of following rests with the disciple. No reading of Paul's letters would suggest that he would have been satisfied only with giving Timothy a set of instructions and his own example and then leaving it up to him to follow or not. The text suggests more the verbiage of a command: "I, Paul, am doing it; you, Timothy, have to do it too." There is not a hint of volunteering involved in discipleship. By virtue of the grace of God given both to the disciple maker and to the disciple, the way of discipleship with all that it entails is compulsory. There is no leeway attached to it which would allow the disciple to sign in or out, as he pleases, from the responsibilities of teaching, preaching, evangelism, pastoring, discipling, or many others which the disciple maker is practicing. No expression captures this aspect better than Paul's qualifier "in season and out of season" from 2 Tim. 4:3.

There are many other facets of discipleship that transpire in Paul's correspondence with Timothy. The ones outlined above are just snippets of the complex master-pupil relationship, plenary illustrated in their relationship. What has been listed above is a token of the richness of Paul's theology of discipleship. More importantly, for the theme of this article, is the fact that each one of them surfaced in the process of reciting the book: they are the direct result of memorizing the epistle. The mind has an incredible capacity to make connection, to see implications, to trace similarities, to assess contrasts, to see multiple levels of interdependence of the text, and so on. And when that God-given capacity is let loose on the Word of God, the inexhaustible fountain and repository of divine truths, elation is the guaranteed outcome. One only has to "taste and see."