



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 18 Issue 30

August 18, 2019

Feasting on the Word of God

We live at a time when food allergies exist in epic proportions. Most of you have heard of conditions such as

- Lactose Intolerance,¹
- Gluten Intolerance,²
- Celiac Disease,³
- Crohn's Disease.⁴

These conditions are grouped under the heading, “Malabsorption Syndrome.” In extreme cases, a person can consume a healthy diet and yet be undernourished because they can’t absorb enough nutrients. This obviously is a serious condition when it comes to food. Yet how much more when it comes to the word of God?

Job 23:12b, “...I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

If that is how important God’s word ought to be to us — “more than our necessary food” — it most certainly is a serious thing to approach the word of God and yet get little if no nourishment from it!

And yet that is a description of so many today! For a variety of reasons, a large majority of Christians find Bible reading and study quite difficult. They think it is boring, unprofitable, and, if they were honest, worthless. And yet it doesn’t need to be this way. Just as there are predictable elements which accompany success in the realms of education, sales, physical fitness, and the like, so also there are crucial elements to feeding effectively on the word of God. And those elements are identified by Peter. This section of Scripture which if implemented will NOT ONLY enable us to feed on the word of God, BUT to Feast on It!

Life is Housed Exclusively in God

1 Peter 2:1, “Therefore, putting aside all malice...”

Peter’s exhortation is rooted and so based on the point he just made in 1 Peter 1:22-25. That is the role of the “therefore” in our text; it draws us back to what Peter just said. And what is it that Peter just said as it pertains to the word of God? Notice, God’s word:

- Gives life (“born again”), 1 Peter 1:23.
- Is the “seed which is imperishable,” 1 Peter 1:23b.
- Is “living and abiding,” 1 Peter 1:23b! **and therefore**
- Will never be “out-of-date” or “irrelevant”— that is the point of 1 Peter 1:24-25a!

Truly, when it comes to that which only matters in this life as well as a resource that will never lead you astray, you and I have it in God’s word! We learn from the Bible that God’s word is:

- The source of salvation, 2 Timothy 3:15.
- The means by which God brings about new life in a sinner, James 1:18; cf. John 20:31; Romans 10:17.
- That by which the Holy Spirit brings about spiritual transformation as well as growth in grace, Ps 119:105; John 15:3; 17:17; Romans 15:4; Eph. 5:26; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; cf. Deuteronomy 17:19–20; Joshua 1:8.
- Is organic in the sense that through the work of the Spirit of God, the word literally can

transform the way we think, what we want, and how we live, Hebrews 4:12-13.

It was based on this that Peter exhorted his persecuted brethren to understand that the word of God is the only power by which they can live their Christian life and is the only means by which they will endure and survive the miseries of this life!

Isaiah 55:10-11, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.”

Based on all of this, I ask you the question implicit in Peter’s description of God’s word from 1 Peter 1:22-25: What is the word of God to you?

- Is it a lucky charm? (*If I don’t read the word of God, I won’t be blessed!*)
- Is it as a drug that gives you a pick-me-up when you are down? (*If I don’t read God’s word my day is shot as my mind will be frazzled!*)
- Is it nothing more than the source of good theology... fun facts?

For so many, this is what God’s word means to them! No wonder they find it difficult to feast on the Word — when the temporal is not placated, we grow bored! In contrast, Peter would have us understand and view the word as nothing less than the fountain of Life!

Don’t Miss It! Those who feast on the Word — who gnaw on the bones and suck out the marrow — do so because they have a simple conviction: God’s Word Truly is Life!

Disciple’s Response to a Difficult Sermon

In John 6 Christ gave a lesson which offended most everyone in His presence such that even His committed disciples abandoned Him — all except for the 12. And Peter’s response after Christ turned to them and said, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” (John 6:67b) was this:

John 6:68b, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.”

In other words, there is only one place we can go in this world to be fed spiritually, it is Christ and so His word! Again, those who feast on the Word are those who understand that that is what we have in our hands this day!

Yet don’t take it from me or Peter! Listen to the testimony of so many spiritual giants in Scripture. Why is that God’s word played such an important part of their lives? Behold their valuation of God’s word; David, speaking of the commands of God’s word:

Psalm 19:10-11, "They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

Solomon wrote:

Proverbs 20:15, "There is gold, and an abundance of jewels; but the lips of knowledge are a more precious thing."

Job wrote:

Job 23:12b, "...I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

Jeremiah wrote:

Jeremiah 15:16a, "Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart..."

The opening Psalm of the Psalter says of the blessed man:

Psalm 1:2, "...[his] delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night"

Paul said this of the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:32, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

And to the Ephesians, through Timothy, Paul said this:

2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

This is the conviction of any and all who feast on God's Word: It is the source of life! When this is what you believe, you will be one who supps long on God's word!

Active Rejection of the World

Notice secondly, that feasting on the word of God involves an active rejection of the life offered by the world.

1 Peter 2:1, "Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander."

This is a rather interesting exhortation. “Putting aside” is an aorist participle (ἀποτίθημι [*apotithēmi*]) which in the Greek means that the action described occurs prior the action of the main verb. As such it is something that is to occur NOT ONLY AS we approach the word of God, BUT ALSO BEFORE we approach the word of God! In fact, the word for “putting aside” was used in the garment industry of the stripping off of soiled garments and so speaks not only of an action, but a state (as having removed the garment).

That means what Peter wrote is NOT something we simply do in the prayer we offer just prior to studying God’s word (again not to say that you shouldn’t confess your sins as you approach the word of God, cf. James 1:21). RATHER, it is something we commit to as Christians with regard to how we will live our lives. Are we going to allow our flesh to have influence over what we think, do, or say? Or are we going to “...make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Romans 13:14b). Peter here says, “Once for all lay these wicked acts and attitudes aside” of which he mentions five...

- All malice: κακία (*kakia*); this is a general term for evil or wickedness. It is the opposite of excellence. It signifies ill-will that originates in our sinful nature. In brief, “malice” is a desire for pain, harm, or injury on our fellow man. It’s not wanting the best for them, but their ill!
- All guile: δόλος (*dolos*); this is a mariner’s term. It was used for the bait placed on a hook to catch a fish.⁵ As such, it is speaking or acting with ulterior motives. “Guile” takes on the appearance of truth so that the unwary may be tricked. This is how opponents treated Jesus (Mark 14:1; Matthew 26:4) and Paul (Acts 13:10).
- Hypocrisy: ὑπόκρισις (*hypokrisis*); here it is a plural and therefore a repudiation of every form of “hypocrisy.” The word was used in the theatre of Peter’s day of the mask that was held before the face while acting on stage. Accordingly, the word can be translated as “play acting.” It essentially is the masking of inward evil by a positive outward show.
- Envy: φθόνος (*phthonos*); this too is in the plural. It references the feeling of discontent or displeasure produced by witnessing/hearing of the advantage or prosperity of others. As such, “envy” goes one step beyond “malice”. Where “malice” expresses itself in ill-will, “envy” adds the element of wanting what the other person has. And this naturally leads to...
- All slander: καταλαλία (*katalalia*); the word literally means “evil speaking” and references any kind of talk which has as its goal the harm of another individual. It was an onomatopoeic word sounding like the whispers and tattles reported behind someone’s back in gossip and backbiting.

Ironically, those to whom Peter wrote this epistle knew the pain involved in this as they at that

time were being slandered by the non-believers of their day (cf. 1 Peter 2:12; 3:16)! Now if there is a universal that unites these five words — and there is — it is seeking from others or this world that which only can be found in God. James put it this way:

James 4:1-2a, “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel...”

Note this well! Relational sin almost always is the result of seeking from others or this world that which can only be found in God! It is this that we are to lay aside once and for all!

In this regard, don't be duped! So many in Christ live in this world thinking that it actually has something to offer them! And because of this, we can become enslaved to the opinions of man, the cares and worries of life, and so the risk of loss if we don't conform to the world's standards. In fact, there are purportedly two sources of life that can be found in the world, yet only one actually gives it. We can look horizontally within or without hoping to find fulfillment from the things of this life:

- People.
- Positions.
- An activity.
- A drug.

These will continue to be “broken cisterns which can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2;13)! That is why Christ exhorted us this way:

Matthew 6:25, “For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, *as to* what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?”

That is why Peter called upon his brethren to reject the lies, temptations, and promises of this fallen world, “Put them aside” — take them off like a soiled garment! Anything and everything it offers will only lead to ruin!

The Christian who feasts on the word is one who recognizes that no person, activity, position, or valuable can give them anything of substance in this life. It is all vanity! That which only lasts, remains, and can fulfill is Christ! And so, they go to the word. This brings us to a third element that accompanies a passion to feast on the word: it encompasses a commitment to be in God's word on a regular basis.

Commitment to Be in God's Word on a Regular Basis

1 Peter 2:2a, “Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all

slander, like newborn babes [lit. ones just out of the womb], long for the pure milk of the word...”

The picture here is vivid. It is of the newly born child who immediately cries for its mother’s milk. In this regard, it is interesting to consider the simplicity of the world in which the newborn lives. They don’t care about money, power, position, or privilege. They are single-minded in what they want: food! And when do they want it? Frequently- which is the focus of Peter’s reference here! As that is the case, we take this as an exhortation on the part of Peter for you and me to be in God’s word frequently! Dr. John MacArthur wrote:

That sole and desperate hunger for milk is the newborn’s first expressed longing designed by God to correspond to their greatest need, and it illustrates how strongly believers ought to desire the Word. It is singular and relentless because life depends on it. (MacArthur, 2004, p. 98)

Now in a life fraught with persecution and difficulties, this commitment is NOT difficult to attain, for trial, discomfort, and want level the playing field revealing that which only is important. And so, persecuted people don’t have as much a struggle when it comes to being in God’s word. But in a land of peace and plenty, it is quite a different matter altogether. Christ warned of the perils of prosperity.

Mark 10:23b, “...how hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!”

Agur wrote this:

Proverbs 30:8b-9a, “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, lest I be full and deny *Thee* and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’”

As Christians living in the world we do, we understand that prosperity is our biggest liability when it comes to being in God’s word! For we don’t really NEED God’s word on a day to day basis.

We might think otherwise if we saw ourselves the way God does. But that requires us to be in God’s word which is the point at hand. That no doubt is why Peter gave this very simple command.

1 Peter 2:2b, “...like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word...”

The word for “long for” is ἐπιποθέω (*epipothēō*) which is a strong word in the Greek. It denotes a massive craving! It is akin to the word for “lust” in the Bible (ἐπιθυμία [*epithumia*]) without the negative connotations. For example, Paul used ἐπιποθέω (*epipothēō*) in his writings⁶ to denote drastic circumstances, such as these:

- The strong desire a husband or wife might have for a spouse.
- The physical craving that accompanies extreme hunger.
- The poignant longing one has for a deceased loved one.
- The intense desire a Christian parent has for a spiritually wayward child to repent and return to obedience.
- The desires believers might have for the salvation of an unbelieving family member or close friend.

These examples illustrate the all-consuming desire Peter wanted his readers to have for Scripture. Culminating in the example of the FREQUENCY that the newborn feeds on his mother's milk. And so, a third element to feasting on God's Word is the commitment to being in God's Word on a regular basis!

I can't exhort you strongly enough here. Like the bumper pads installed in a bowling alley for the children's lane, establish spiritual disciplines in your life which will help to keep you in the path you would want if you were in your right mind. One of those disciplines is the daily reading/studying of God's word! And listen, it doesn't matter if...

- You don't get anything out of it.
- At times you find it boring.
- Your time is short.

...cultivate the discipling in your life of daily Bible reading/study!

In this regard, listen to the law of the King. What makes this exhortation so important is that in Christ we all have become royalty! In this regard, listen to the words given by God to any and every king:

Deuteronomy 17:18-19a, "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life..."

I love this passage! As someone who has been called by God to co-reign with Him, we are indeed Kings and Queens! Now, that we might walk in a straight path, the Lord gave the command to the King to be in His word daily. Should our standard be any less?

You say, "*But it is so difficult! I wouldn't know where to begin!*" Let me encourage you in this regard, begin small. A Chinese proverb says, "The greatest journey begins with one step." It is tempting to think back to those times in your walk when you spent an hour fellowshiping with God each morning. Don't think of that standard. Rather, think of your current standard where you spend NO time in God's word. In comparison to nothing, ten minutes is an eternity!

Secondly, your immediate goal is not facts, but the adoration and the appreciation of Christ. Young Christians, which at one point we all were, in their reading of God's word are motivated by the discoveries frequently made when they read. In time, this sets them up to approach God's word in order to learn something new. This was Paul's criticism of the false teachers of his day.

2 Timothy 3:7, "Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Our goal is NOT learning new things about God (although there is nothing wrong with that), BUT loving Him, knowing Him, adoring Him! As that is the case, make the focus of your daily quiet time the enjoying of God! In this context, learning is frosting on the cake!

Make us of a commentary. One of the things I like doing is working my way through a book of the Bible using a good commentary. This is perfect for those times when your schedule is tight. For example, if the passage you are studying is six verses, after you pray, read one of the verses and then read what the commentary has to say. This will result in quick discovery of what God is saying in the text. Then, spend time in prayer, adoration, and supplication, and then walk away. Yet don't be as the man who "forgets his image in the mirror" (James 1:23-24); rather as you go keep the radio or social media off, and rather meditate/think about what you read, what it says about God, and what it means in your life.

Always strive toward Implementation. Of any text you might read, don't leave it (by that I mean don't move on to the next pericope) until you answer a simple question, "If I was living in light of this truth last week/month, what difference would it have made?" When you discover a difference, now you have something to pray or praise about!

It is my hope and prayer that what we've seen from Peter has inspired and/or moved you to make feasting on the Word of God a daily practice!

Bibliography

MacArthur, D. J. (2004). *1 Peter MacArthur New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series)*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

End Note(s)

¹ This refers to people whose bodies can't process lactose which is found in dairy.

² This refers to people who can't handle gluten.

³ This is where the body has a violent reaction to the presence of gluten which then triggers an immune response which over time damages the small intestine.

⁴ This is where the entire digestive tract is inflamed on account of a food allergy.

⁵ That is what the word δόλος [dolos] means.

⁶ Romans 1:11; 2 Cor. 5:2; 9:14; Phil. 1:8; 2:26; 1 Thes. 3:6; 2 Timothy 1:4.