

“The Milk of the Word”
(1 Peter 2:1-3)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. We've seen our need of the salvation Christ gives.
 - a. Our head, Adam, sinned and made us all guilty.
 - b. The corruption of that sin worked more sin in our lives.
 - c. Everything we do is polluted with sin and therefore sinful.
 - d. If even the least sin deserves eternal punishment, how much do the many we have committed?
 - e. Every additional sin makes it worse.
 - f. This is what we were looking forward to outside of Christ.

2. We've also seen what God requires for us to escape hell.
 - a. He requires faith:
 - (i) Saving faith.
 - (ii) Not just knowing who Jesus was and what He did.
 - (iii) Not merely believing these things.
 - (iv) But trusting in Him to save us: receiving and resting in Him alone.

 - b. He also requires repentance:
 - (i) Saving repentance.
 - (ii) Not just knowing what sin is.
 - (iii) But grieving over our sins, turning from them, to Christ, to obedience.

 - c. We need both, because both are flipsides of one another.
 - (i) You cannot have salvation without repentance.
 - (ii) We must turn from sin – repentance - even as we turn to Christ – faith.
 - (iii) And this is only possible through the Spirit's changing our heart.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we come to the means by which God accomplishes this.
 - a. How does He save those whom He wills? How does He gather His elect? How does He nurture them once they are gathered?
 - b. The answer to these questions is what we call “the means of grace.”
 - (i) They are the ways in which God gives grace/His Spirit's help.
 - (ii) They are like so many channels through which the waters of salvation flow.

 - c. Though there are more, we'll focus on the three most important:
 - (i) The Word: the Word written and preached.
 - (ii) The sacraments: the Lord's Supper and Baptism.
 - (iii) And prayer: private and public.

- d. Each of these has two functions: one to bring us to Christ, one to build us up in Christ.
 - (i) The Word – the Law and Gospel – brings us to Christ through conviction and promise, and builds us up in the same way.
 - (ii) The sacraments do both, as a witness to the unconverted, as a sign and seal to believers.
 - (iii) Prayer: to the lost a crying out for mercy, to the saved a means to get God's help.
- 2. This evening, we're going to look at the Word of God.
 - a. First, we'll want to see that it is a means of grace.
 - b. Second, how it is to be ministered as a means of grace.
 - c. And third, how it becomes a means of grace to both unbelievers and believers.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, how is the Word of God a means of grace?
 - 1. We need to see that it doesn't contain grace by itself.
 - a. We want to stay away from the Roman view.
 - (i) The believe the grace is contained in the sacrament after the word of consecration by the priest.
 - (ii) Believers and unbelievers automatically receive grace by taking the sacrament.
 - (iii) This is why some well meaning priests tried to baptize in mass.
 - (iv) In their view, salvation is through the sacraments and not the Word.
 - b. We also need to avoid the Lutheran view.
 - (i) The Lord doesn't just work through the Word.
 - (ii) The Spirit works on the Word to make *it* the means by which the lost are converted and the faithful built up.
 - 2. The Word does not contain grace, it is a means of grace.
 - a. It is an instrument, a conduit, through which God gives grace.
 - b. The Spirit works through it and with it to make it effective.
 - c. But this grace/gracious help/help of the Spirit, is only received by faith.
 - d. And He works the faith in the individual, not the Word itself.
 - 3. How do we know it's a means of grace?
 - a. Because God says it is:
 - (i) Peter calls it a holy seed that brings spiritual life: "For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23).
 - (ii) It is milk to nurture the young in Christ: "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (2:2).

- (iii) It is solid food for the more mature: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb. 5:12-14).
- (iv) It brings spiritual life and it nurtures the same: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

b. Charles Hodge shows us how reason also teaches us the same:

- (i) “‘First, that no evidence of sanctification, no indications of the saving influences of the Spirit are found where the Word of God is unknown.’ This is not to say that God could not save without the use of the Word, but ‘it remains a fact patent to all eyes that the nations where the Bible is unknown sit in darkness.’”
- (ii) “A second fact on which the testimony of experience is equally clear is, that true Christianity flourishes just in proportion to the degree in which the Bible is known, and its truths are diffused among the people.”
- (iii) “A third important fact equally well established is, that true religion prevails in any community, in proportion to the degree in which the young are instructed in the facts and indoctrinated in the truths of the Bible” (Morton Smith, *Systematic Theology*).
- (iv) We can see by it’s effects that it is a means by which God mediates His salvation.
- (v) By the way, to believe this is to be evangelical. The alternative is sacerdotalism: salvation mediated by a priest/sacerdos, through the sacraments.

B. Second, how it is the Word to be ministered for the Spirit to work through it?

1. There are really only two: reading and preaching.
 - a. Can there be any other way?
 - b. We can read the words with our eyes.
 - c. We can hear them read or preached with our ears.
 - d. I suppose if we’re blind and need Braille, we can read it with our fingers, but it’s still read.
 - e. It can’t be touched (except as above), smelled, or tasted (in a physical sense).
 - f. Reading and hearing are the only ways.
2. It must be read.
 - a. It can be read privately:
 - (i) We are blessed to have copies of the Scripture (most of us have several), in our own language, in nice print, and the freedom to read.
 - (ii) This hasn’t always been the case.

- (a) During the time it was written, very few had hand written copies: kings, scribes/lawyers, Pharisees, synagogue officials.
 - (b) From the time of the closing of the NT to the 1440, when Gutenberg invented the printing press, very few had it: churches, monasteries, universities.
 - (c) But from the time printing caught on the present, more and more have it, but still not in every country.
- (iii) But where it is, where it is read and practiced, Christianity flourishes.
- b. It can be read publicly:
- (i) In places where the Gospel has come, but there are few Bibles, it can also be read.
 - (ii) That's how those in the old days who didn't have one had to hear: such as when Ezra read the Law to the exiles in Jerusalem from early morning to midday (Neh. 8:3). You can bet they listened much more carefully.
 - (iii) We can and do read it here as well, even though we all have Bibles.
 - (iv) To read it is an act of worship.
 - (v) The Reformers believed it to be the purest form of preaching: God's Word.
 - (vi) What John said of the book of Revelation is true of all Scripture: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it" (1:3).
3. But second, it can and must be preached.
- a. The Puritans believed this to be even more effective to convert and build up than reading: When they ask, "How is the word made effectual to salvation? They answer, "The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation" (WSC 89).
 - b. Why?
 - (i) It is generally brought with more authority (it doesn't have more authority; but has God's authority if preached correctly).
 - (ii) It is conveyed, usually, with more pathos.
 - (iii) It is communicated, normally, to more people at once.
 - (iv) It is something, again generally, that doesn't require getting their prior attention or consent.
 - (v) Preaching is the primary means God has ordained that the lost would be converted, "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher" (Rom. 10:14)?
- C. Finally, how does it become a means of grace to both unbelievers and believers?
- 1. With regard to both, the Spirit is sovereignly in control.
 - 2. With regard to unbelievers:

- a. The Holy Spirit works through and with the Word on the hearts of men.
 - b. It is sovereignly in His power to bestow or not bestow salvation or blessing through it.
 - c. Through it He convicts; through it He holds forth Christ.
 - d. It is in His hands as to whom He converts.
3. With regard to believers, there are things we must do:
- a. We must listen to it: “Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts. For he who finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love death” (Prov. 8:34-36).
 - b. Prepare our hearts to receive it: “Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord” (1 Pet. 2:1-3).
 - c. Pray and ask for the Lord’s blessing through it: “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law” (Ps. 119:18).
 - d. Believe it and receive it: “For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (Heb. 4:2).
 - e. Love it: Paul says one day many will perish, “because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thes. 2:10).
 - f. Store it up in our hearts: “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11).
 - g. And practice it in our lives:
 - (i) “And the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance” (Luke 8:15).
 - (ii) “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25).
 - (iii) Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it” (Luke 11:28).
 - (iv) May God give us a hunger to read, listen and obey, that we might be built up in Christ by His Spirit through His Word. Amen.