

SOUTH ATLANTIC DISTRICT
PASTOR - TEACHER CONFERENCE
NORTH FORT MYERS, FLORIDA January 26, 1984
Presented by Glen F. Schmiede

"A BIBLICAL LOOK AT BIBLE STUDY"

or

"FEASTING ON THE WORD OF GOD AND ITS NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS

vs.

SNACKING ON THE WORD OF GOD AND THE RESULTING SPIRITUAL MALNUTRITION"

How many Big Macs does it take to have a feast? How enormous a steak do you need to eat to have a feast? Do you have to feast on food every day in order to have the proper balance of vitamins in your body? How often can you snack before you start seeing the effects in your work or in your physical health? It is one thing to judge the nutritional needs of one's own daily diet. It is another, as pastors and teachers and laymen who serve our Lord and Savior publicly, to understand another kind of malnutrition. We have experienced it in ourselves, in our people and in our students. Spiritual malnutrition is something like rickets. It eventually shows up in some very visible way. The malnutrition may, however, have existed over a long period of time.

The spiritual malnutrition comes from snacking on the Word of God and not feasting on it. The spiritual malnutrition shows up in discontent with material blessings, incessant worries, uncontrollable fears, unsanctified living and a dim light in sharing the light of Christ.

We may first complain about a lack of zeal for Bible study in the classroom. We may be discouraged about poor Bible Class attendance on Sunday morning. We recognize the inability of our members and students

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

Library

600 W. VAN HULST DR.
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN 53202

to cope with the daily pressures of Christianity, and yet they do not seem to go to the Word of the Lord for the needed strength and assurance.

On the other hand we also observe those with tremendous lights burning for Christ. We see people who have a good understanding of the way of salvation and see them put it into practice. Then we are seeing Christians feasting on the Word of God. As pastors and teachers it is our desire that all of us be confident servants of the Lord and that our members and students be solid Christians. Yet not everyone in our classrooms and in our congregations is feasting on the Word of God. The purpose of this conference, with its three papers, the service, and the sermon is to concentrate on the study of God's Word. The purpose of this paper is to look at what the Bible says to encourage us all as pastors and teachers and laymen to feast on the Word of God at all times.

I. WHY DOES GOD WANT US TO FEAST ON THE WORD OF GOD?

I have chosen to use the phrase "feast on the Word of God" to describe the believer who is living in the Word of God. Scripture throughout helps to define the feasting Christian. Moses told the Children of Israel: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." (Deuteronomy 6:6-9) God's plan to keep the nation of Israel faithful to Himself involved an intensive program of education in the home. The Hebrew word for teach (shanan) is used in the piel to show how the Lord expected the people of

Israel to be totally dedicated to teaching the Word of God in the home. Teaching was to take place whenever the opportunity arose. The Word was to stand out in their lives as if it were tied to their foreheads, nailed to the doorposts and written on their hands. Alfred Edersheim said, "From the first days of its existence, a religious atmosphere surrounded the child of the Jewish parents."¹

The Lord chose Joshua to lead His people into the promised land. The Lord was specific about the use of His commands, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it." (Joshua 1:8) The word (hagah) according to Gesenius means to murmur, to speak, meditate or remember. All those words give a picture of reflection or meditation. That meditation was not to be a casual meditation but a day and night occurrence. The reflection was to be upon the TORAH - God's commandments. This Book of the Law included the moral, the ceremonial and the civil law. A careful study of the Old Covenant or Sinaitic Covenant will show that the Lord depended on home education to keep the covenant alive in the hearts of His people. The burdens of the Old Covenant would drive the father to carry out his function as a priest in the home as he showed his children the purpose of the covenant and led them back to the Abrahamic covenant of grace.

The words of Paul to the Colossians are the source of the picture of a believer feasting on the Word of God. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16) The picture found in the Greek word (enoikeo)

is "to make one's home" or "dwell among". The Word of Christ is to live in each one of us as we also share that knowledge with our family, friends and unbelievers. The abundance of that dwelling is described by the Greek word (plousios) which means richly or abundantly. Don't snack on the Word of Christ. Feast on it. As you share it with others feast on it yourself. This applies to the pastor, the father, the teacher and the layman.

Snacking on God's Word is never a command of God. The Word of Christ living in each of us richly is God's command. These words of Paul show that feasting on the Word of God is not just a matter of the amount of time that a person spends in the Word of God. Feasting on the Word of God first of all is a matter of the attitude of the heart. A feasting believer will feast out of love for the Saviour. If we do not remain faithful to the Saviour we are not really feasting on God's Word.

Jesus used the illustration of a grapevine with branches to illustrate the relationship of the believer to his Lord. "I am the vine you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) This illustration of Jesus is to crystalize in the mind of every believer the need to remain in Jesus, live in Him by dwelling in the Word of God.

As pastor, teacher or layman I can never think only of the people I teach or to whom I preach. I must first think of my own need and also the need of my family. Paul made mention of the father's responsibility over against his children in Ephesians 6:4: "Fathers do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." The Greek word (ektrefo) involves the picture of feeding, nourishing, cherishing, to rear or bring up. (Paideia) according to Arndt Gingrich means training, instruction or discipline. (Nouthesia) means admonition or instruction. The important part of the father's

responsibility in the New Testament, just as in Old Testament times, is to instruct the children in a knowledge of the Lord.

When Jesus spoke to the crowds around him as recorded in John 8:31, He was quite specific about a true follower of Christ. "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples!'" The Greek word (meino) involves the picture of remain, stay, live or dwell, continue, abide, last, persist. It is to be the desire of the true disciple of Christ to definitely remain in fellowship with God and His Son Christ Jesus. II John 9a, Colossians 1:23, Hebrews 3:14, and I John 2:28 also emphasize the truth that the true disciple of Christ is a disciple to the end of his life.

In order to motivate and to be motivated and encouraged constantly to feast on the Word of God we all need to be reminded of the value of God's Word. The value of God's Word might be divided into three areas: a knowledge of sin, a knowledge of the way of salvation, a knowledge of the sanctified life God expects. The Law of God was given to make us aware of our unworthiness before God. If we do not take a look at God's law we will never be able to observe our true worthlessness in God's sight according to our natural selves. As Paul declared in Romans 3:20, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin."

However, the overall value of God's Word both in the Old Testament and the New Testament is not to crush us but rather give us hope. (Romans 15:4) John's purpose in writing his gospel was to point others to Jesus that they too might believe and be saved eternally, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31) In fact, Jesus

told the people gathered around him to search the Scriptures for that very reason, that they might possess eternal life. (John 5:39)

As pastors, teachers and laymen we need to feed on the Word of God to keep us in the narrow way to eternal life, to know the sanctified life God expects. The writer to the Hebrews told the Hebrews in 5:14, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." The purpose of continued growth in the Word is to know what is God's will and what is against the will of God. Just as Paul told the Corinthians the reason for God writing down the events of the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the desert as they constantly rebelled against the will of God, "These things happened as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of ages has come." (I Corinthians 10:11) Peter used the picture of a nursing child who desires the milk of the mother's breast. The desire for the Word of God is to be no different for all of God's leaders and God's people. "Like newborn babies, crave spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." (I Peter 2:2-3)

In our Synod we are fortunate to have people who understand that the Bible is God's Word. Yet if we do not desire the Word of God our doctrine of verbal inspiration is not really going to mean much. Verbal inspiration is still a motivating factor for our continued feasting in the Word of God. Just as Paul reminded Timothy the tremendous value of the Word he had learned already as an infant: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the

Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

(II Timothy 3:14-17)

Feasting on the Word of God is not a natural desire of man. Feasting on the Word of God is a desire of the new man, the believer. The believer will be motivated and encouraged as he is reminded of the reason the Bible was written and the author of those writings. Feasting is not an option that the Christian has; it is a nutritional necessity. Without feasting the effects of malnutrition will set in.

Encouragement for personal feasting, family feasting, congregational, and classroom feasting can be found in various examples of feasting believers in the Scriptures. An overview of the Old Testament will quickly convince us that God's way of educating His people was primarily through the home. The Lord used teaching in the home to preserve the promise of the Saviour. To help the ancients in the work of passing the promise, the Lord gave them exceptionally long lives. Ancient patriarchs were to teach scores of descendents the good news that the Saviour was coming to give the unrighteous people the righteousness they needed to come back to a holy and righteous God. Noah was such a preacher of righteousness. (II Peter 2:5) He faithfully led his family to worship the true God. (Genesis 8:20)

Abraham was another patriarch concerned about teaching the Word of God in his home. The pattern in his life was "pitch a tent, dig a well and build an altar." The Lord had these complimentary words to say about this family man, "For I know him, that he will command his children and

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

Library

POPE W. WARFIELD CIRCLE
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN 53232

his household after him, and they will keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." (Genesis 18:19)

The Word of God was richly present in the family of Jacob. Seventeen year old Joseph did not give in to the alluring vices of Egypt and the advances of Potiphar's wife. What gave him the strength to say: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9) Was it not a deeply rooted love for the Lord and an appreciation of God's grace which would send a Saviour? He learned this in the home of his father Jacob and his mother Rachel.

I previously mentioned God's command to Joshua to meditate on the Law of God day and night. That command of God certainly had an effect on his attitude toward the Lord and His desire to serve the Lord faithfully as a family, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

Later I will more thoroughly define what I mean by feasting on the Word of God. Feasting on the Word of God includes our whole devotion to God. Daniel certainly showed his willingness to continue his devotion to God in spite of the tremendous pressure placed upon him to refrain from praying to the true God. (Daniel 6:10)

Jesus in the New Testament times often went into the homes of friends, publicans and even Pharisees to teach the people about Himself. There we find the devout example of Mary who eagerly listened to the Lord teach her in her home. She is a reminder of the one thing needful in every Christian home. The home of Zaccheus became a haven of comfort for conscience torn sinners.

The early Christian church depicted in the book of Acts certainly exemplifies feasting Christians. "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship and to the breaking of bread and of prayer. Arndt Gingrich defines the Greek word (proskarterountes) as: attach oneself to, be faithful to someone, busy oneself with, be devoted, hold fast to something, continue or persevere in something, spend much time in something. In the same book of Acts we have the same attitude displayed as they met in the temple courts every day. (Acts 2:46)

The Apostle Paul experienced great difficulty as he witnessed to the people in Thessalonica. He found an entirely different attitude displayed in Berea: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11) The Bereans point out one of the assets of feasting on the Word of God as they checked out to see if Paul was doctrinally correct. False doctrine can be avoided if the Word is used richly and applied properly.

As pastors and teachers we are often more quick to quote examples of members and students who are not feasting on the Word of God. Often we are more familiar with the examples of snacking Christians. We also find some examples in the Scriptures of those who did not choose to dwell in the Word of God richly. Throughout the book of Judges we see an attitude which is expressed at the end of the book in Judges 21:25, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."

A probably more discouraging example can be found at the time of King Josiah when the book of the Law was found in the temple of the Lord

in the eighteenth year of his reign. The discovery of the Book of the Law was wonderful; the fact that it had been lost or not used was terrible. Yet how many people in our own midst spend fifty, sixty or seventy years on this earth without ever really knowing what the Word of God declares?

In Jeremiah 8:14 we have the words of the Lord which describe many a situation throughout the Old Testament, "They have followed the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed Baals, as their fathers taught them." The example of parents is the key to a family which feasts on the Word of God over against a family that snacks on the Word of God and as a result experiences spiritual malnutrition.

II. HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN FEAST ON THE WORD OF GOD?

Feasting on the Word of God can best be defined as the Apostle Paul writes to the Colossians. We are to dwell in the Word of Christ richly. Dwelling in the Word of Christ does not just mean the worship service, but public Bible study, private Bible study, personal devotion, reflection and prayer. As defined by Paul this personal devotion includes singing, psalms and the Word of God.

No one can dictate a specific amount of time a person must spend with the Word of God each day. Yet as we examine the commands of Moses and the commands of the Lord to Joshua and the admonitions of Paul we can see that God has in mind more than a weekly occurrence. Each day we need the mirror of the law that shows us the depth of our guilt and the complete unworthiness of any mercy that the Lord might bestow upon us materially or spiritually. In addition we need constantly to be pointed to the cross.

Luther in his admonitions was quite specific in the use of God's Word: "You should diligently learn the Word of God and by no means imagine that you know it. Let him who is able to read, take a psalm in the morning, or some chapter of Scripture, and study it for a while. This is what I do. When I get up in the morning, I pray and recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer with the children, adding one of the psalms."²

One of the easiest ruts for us pastors to get into is to judge the total spirituality of our people by their attendance in the Bible class. Adult Bible Class is not the only place to feast on the Word of God. I am not suggesting that skipping Bible Class is God-pleasing. However, from the standpoint of the admonitions of Scripture our main concentration ought to be to get the people into the Bible on a daily basis. Sometimes people have hangups about sitting in a "class". That does not necessarily mean they do not love the Word of God. Family altars, daily meditation, daily study and prayer are the first step in encouraging a daily walk with God. You may find that once a person has been led to discover the Scriptures on his own he may be more eager to attend Bible Class. You may now find that the individual has more questions than he did before.

The obstacles that you will meet in trying to encourage a daily use of God's Word are best described by A. F. Mueller: "In many Lutheran homes family devotion and the Bible are neglected for various reasons. Chief among these are: 1. There is no time; 2. parents are not habituated to Bible reading; 3. unfamiliarity with the content and divine power of the Bible; 4. antipathy, loathing, repugance and satiety. The real reason

is indifference. There are many Lutheran homes in which family devotion is regularly conducted. On the other hand, however, we must confess that in many of our Christian homes the Bible is the forgotten book.³

When you examine the lives of your students and members you will find in many cases the father and mother both working. You will find that the schedules are filled with many meetings, school events and other recreational activities. You will also plead guilty to taking some of that time for various church meetings.

The challenges we meet in feasting on the Word of God today are really no different than at any other time, although it does seem there are just a few more distractions than a century ago. The major problem is not always time but a matter of priorities. We talk about a waste of material possessions. The same is true concerning the waste of time. The stewardship of time is uppermost in encouraging others to feast on the Word of God.

As we are reminded of the obstacles we face we also remember the admonitions and examples which we find in Scripture. We might be further encouraged as we begin to realize the value of feasting on the Word of God in the home. The Lord has designed the home as the primary learning center for a child. 16% of a child's time is spent in school, 1% in church and 83% at home. "The home exerts the strongest and most effectual influence on the child. It does this because the influence is continuous. There is no institution that can take the place of the family, and there is no influence so effective and telling as the influence of the home."⁴

It is obvious that the teaching of God's Word in the home, or the lack of it, will have a powerful influence on a child. Vieth says: "No where

else may religion be taught so easily and with such abiding results as in the home."⁵ Another educator says, "Education goes on in every home and all the time, and that of the most abiding and effective kind. Members of the family are teaching each other constantly. The children inevitably learn from the parents, and the parents pass on to the children practically all that they have known and experienced in human living. Religion, or the lack of religion, is unavoidably passed on to the children. The home was the first school and continues to be the most vital and real school in the lives of human beings."⁶ The Word of God can be brought into the home formally and informally. Most of the religious education which takes place in the home is done in an informal way. In Deuteronomy, the Lord suggests that we make use of every opportunity to teach diligently, walking, sitting, talking, rising and whenever possible.

III. WHAT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY AS A PASTOR OR TEACHER IN ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO FEAST ON THE WORD OF GOD?

The responsibility for teaching others to feast on God's Word begins with yourself. How you personally proceed with that feasting is your Christian liberty. You may want to include your own personal feasting in with your daily preparations for class or for sermon, or for Bible Class. The question is not how you feast on the Word of God but whether you are doing so on a regular basis. We can probably all confess to feeling the pressure of time and at the same time feeling low spiritually. If you are the person that needs a regular schedule, then set up a regular schedule for yourself. But as you do think of some helpful tips that might give you some regularity and consistency. It sometimes helps to go through

the Bible on a planned basis according to one of the many daily Bible reading calendars. Don't be afraid to use a journal of some sort to record your progress and to take down some notes. If that is too rigid, then jot notes down in your Bible. Remember that Joshua took the lead by setting a good example for the children of Israel.

The pastor or teacher also has a responsibility for his own family. "If the pastor does not spend time with his family, his children may develop a loathing for the Word and for the Lord. Consider the example of one three-year old boy who resented that his father was such a busy member of the church that there was little time for him. One night as the father prepared to leave for another meeting, the little fellow blurted out with tears in his eyes, 'I hate Jesus, Daddy.' Shocked, the father asked, 'Son, why do you say that?' The boy replied, 'Because He always takes you away from us and we never see you.' Care needs to be taken that our children do not resent the many hours devoted to the flock entrusted to our care."⁷

The wife of the pastor or teacher is also a forgotten entity. She consoles us, comforts us, pampers us and loves us when we have a difficult day counseling others. Our responsibility is not done when we have spent time with our children and have ministered to others. We often forget to encourage our wife to feast on the Word of God along with us. Here is what one Christian wife said of her husband who was a professor at a Christian college: "I am concerned for my own spiritual life, but even more, I am concerned for the sons God has placed in our care. Yes, I have devotions with them and read the Bible stories. But the whole thing is left up to me. If I were a spiritual giant it would not be

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

Library

6633 W. WASHINGTON STREET
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN 53222

so bad, but I am weak and I fear for them. What chance have they to see Christ in me when my lamp is not trimmed and burning brightly? My husband is in constant fellowship with the Lord. And he has led hundreds of others to fall deeply in love with Jesus. But he could just as easily lead his willing wife and sons on the same path if it would dawn on him to try." 8

No one can legislate how you use your time. Then Bible reading and devotion time become legalistic. Our goal is not only to spend a specific amount of time in Bible reading and devotion. Our goal is to feast on the promises of God so that we can in joyful faith cope with the daily pressures that living in a sinful world entails, pressures which may appear to be greater because we are leading others at the same time.

The following is a compilation of ideas that were collected from surveys which you filled out at the Pastoral conferences last September. If you come to my congregation you will not necessarily see all of these ideas put into practice, although it is my intention to try some of them. I encourage you to try some of them also.

If it is daily Bible reading and an all around feast on God's Word that I want each member and student to enjoy then what can I do in my ministry to encourage others to feast on the Word of God? This is what some of you have tried and are doing.

1. List daily Bible readings ^{in your bulletins,} on the calendar or newsletter.
2. Prepare reading schedules for Bible study in the Gospels.
3. Use inserts with readings from the ILCW readings with questions on each reading.
4. Prepare special readings during the seasons of Advent and Lent.
5. Discuss the family altar in Bible Class.
6. Conduct mini-seminar on devotions.
7. Instruct families by personal visitation.
8. Use the program "Continue in His Word" prepared by the South Atlantic District Parish Board for Education in 1977-78.
9. Give advance reading for Bible Class.
10. Give assignments in the Adult Bible Class.
11. Give out study suggestions for shut-ins with follow up discussions.
12. Sermon encouragement.
13. Present a course on how to study the Bible with helps, concordances, dictionary, commentary.

Perhaps one more example from another man's ministry might encourage us in our own ministry. "About three hundred years ago a young British clergyman named Richard Baxter was called to serve the small carpet weaving town of Kidderminster. Few fields could be more discouraging. The impoverished people of Kidderminster were noted for their ignorance and laxity in morals. Previous worldly-minded pastors had caused the little congregation to dwindle. During the nineteen years Baxter served this humble field a spiritual renewal swept this town. An empty church had to be expanded several times to accommodate the crowds. The parish grew in size to over eight-hundred families. Before Baxter arrived few homes read the Bible. When he left, there were only a few homes on every street where the Bible was not regularly read. Why was Richard Baxter so successful in such an unpromising field? Modern church growth experts would flock to Kidderminster to discover the answer. Did free balloons and a good busing program bring in the crowd? Did the people throng to hear a famous choir or solist? Did Baxter offer the promise of a nameplate beneath a piece of glass in a multimillion dollar cathedral? Richard Baxter would have none of this. He went straight and simple, to the homes of the people and taught them to read the Bible in the home. God's promise of success through the Word held true." 9

How each individual carries out his personal feasting, family feasting, and congregational encouragement and direction to feast on God's Word is his Christian liberty. Yet the goal is the same one purported by the Apostle Paul, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

HAPPY FEASTING!!!

or

BON APPEITIT

END NOTES

1. Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah I (Wm B. Erdmans: Grand Rapids 1969), p.227.
2. Ewald Plass, What Luther Says (Concordia: St Louis 1959) p.79
3. Theodore Laetsch, The Abiding Word Vol. I (Concordia:St. Louis 1958). p.90. (Article by A..F. Mueller, "The Use of the Word of God in the Home.")
4. Christian Education p. 25 (Unable to relocate author)
5. Paul Vieth, The Church and Christian Education p. 163.
6. John Price, A Survey of Religious Education p. 351.
7. Steve Degner, "Encouraging Christian Education in the Home," (October, 1978) p. 14. AZ-Cal Pastoral Conference.
8. "A Christian Woman's Forgotten Family" Moody Monthly (January 1962) p. 35.
9. Degner, op. cit. p. 1.

