***Feeding on the Word of God

RV144-02***

We are studying Revelation 10:8-11. Our subject is "The bittersweet Word of God." This is segment number two.

The apostle John, in his vision of future events, has heard the sounding of the sixth trumpet. When this trumpet was sounded, we found that it released an army of 200 million cavalrymen from the Euphrates River to attack mankind worldwide. The riders in this cavalry were human, but the horse-like creatures that they rode were demon-possessed monsters. The animals, therefore, had the capacity to inflict death, and they did this upon one-third of the human race still left on the face of the earth since the beginning of the seven-year tribulation period. The result of this destruction of an additional third of the remaining human beings on earth has now brought the total destruction at that time to 50% of people who were alive when the tribulation began.

The surviving portion of mankind, by this time, is well aware that God is sending these judgments of death upon them. But we're told that they will not permit this to cause them to repent. They will instead refuse to repent of their sins. Specifically, John points out, the sins that they are prominent prominently practicing, namely: their sins of idolatry; their sins of murder; their sins of occultism; their sins of illicit sex; and, their sins of stealing. John no doubt himself is horrified by what he sees, and finds it incredible that people will not repent under these terrible conditions of death and destruction all around them.

However, this does remind us again that nobody goes into the Christian life because one day you decided that you'd like to go to heaven. We may put out our evangelism brochure, as in the very near future we will, throughout the city, and people will pick it up and look, and we'll say to them, "Heaven or hell, which will it be for you?" And the very title might suggest to them that they can sit down and think this over, and make a decision. From the human point of view, and from the human frame of reference, that is true, and, of course, we are responsible for making that decision. We are called upon to make that decision to believe in Christ as Savior. But we also know from Scripture that nobody will believe unless God the Holy Spirit calls him to believe. So, you can talk to people till you're blue in the face about going to heaven; how it's done; and you can give the soundest information, and it can still roll off their back like water off of a duck, until God the Holy Spirit comes in and enlightens them.

So, here you have a demonstration in the book of the Revelation that if there was any time when human beings on the face of this earth would rush into the arms of God, and would flee from the evils for which they are being judged, it would be in the time of the tribulation where they have seen these enormous disasters in nature, and have seen death all around them on a scale that the world will have never seen up to that point in time.

However, the Scriptures tell us that they will not change their minds. They will not cease and desist. They will not turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. John is horrified by what he sees. He finds it incredible that these people still will not repent. However, John very faithfully records the whole scene, and then he awaits the curtain to go up on the seventh trumpet. The judgment of the sixth trumpet is passed. He waits with anticipation: what will happen now when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet?

**A Might Angel**

However, before the seventh angel is permitted to sound his trumpet, John is given a brief respite to catch his breath by the insertion of a parenthetical section in the vision that he's experiencing. This interruption gives further details about that point in time in the tribulation, which is now well into the last three-and-a-half years of the tribulation period. John is given some further detail as background for the seventh trumpet, which is about to sound. This background information includes his seeing a mighty angel (that is, a colossal angel) who is standing with one foot on earth and one foot on the scene. This angel has been sent from God, directly from God's third heaven (God's throne room) with a message to John. What this angel does, in John's hearing and before John's eyes, is to raise his hand to take an oath by the eternal creator God. This oath swears that now there will be no further delay in fulfilling God's mysteries relative to the people of Israel. That mystery deals with the covenants that God has made with the Jewish people. These are covenants which God has never abrogated, and has never dismiss. These are promises made to Abraham and expanded over the centuries to the Jewish people, which to this day have never been fulfilled.

Well, the angel said that this fulfillment of God's plan is now to be realized. We know from other Scriptures that it is to be realized by the establishing on earth of a 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ over all the nations of the earth. He will then be indeed King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He will reign from the city of Jerusalem. The Jewish people will be elevated to the prominence of being the leading nation of the world. And they will be the great teachers of God's truth to all the nations of the world. We who form the body of Christ, the church, are a separate group of saints, and we will assist Jesus Christ in His earthly reign over Jews and gentiles. So, John is recording all of these final steps of God in the seven-year tribulation period to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant and all the promises of God.

**A Scroll**

At this point in time, we see that God from heaven speaks once more to John. He tells him to go up to this colossal, mighty angel who stands astride earth and sea, but holds in his hand a little scroll (we would call it a little book). This scroll is opened so that its contents are known. John is told to go up to the angel; to ask for the scroll; and, he is to eat it. What is within this little scroll is information from God. So, it is in fact the very Word of God. John is told thus that he is to feed upon the Word of God.

**Bittersweet**

He is told that when he eats it, it will be very sweet in his mouth, like a taste of honey. But he's told that when it hits his stomach, he's going to have a sour stomach ache. Thus John is reminded that the same point of Bible doctrine, which is sweet to the positive believer, is also bitter to that believer as he realizes the implications for the person who is negative to that same truth. What is sweet to one, because he is receptive, will be very bitter to the one who is not receptive. The same word, for example, that gives us the gospel is sweet to the positive person, but it is very bitter to the person who rejects the gospel. The Christian who rejoices over the believer in the gospel will also weep in bitterness over the person who rejects the gospel. So, what we're talking about here is eating the Word of God, and finding that it is a bittersweet experience.

Now, John understands this analogy. It's a little odd to us, unless you have read enough of the Old Testament Scriptures that deal with this very same analogy. John of course, was acquainted with the Old Testament. So, he understood what this symbolic act of eating the scroll meant. It was indeed a call to learn the Word of God, and to eat the spiritual food, thus, which Scripture is.

**Feeding on God's Word**

We have this same analogy in Psalm 119:103 where, we read, "How sweet are Your words unto my taste; yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth." This is the same concept of feeding upon the Word of God.

It was a very prominent and a very talented TV entertainer who used to close his introductory remarks as the audience applauded him and cheered him in his performance and in his words, and he would say, "How sweet it is." What was sweet? The applause; the recognition; the notoriety; and, the money wasn't bad either: "How sweet it is." Unfortunately, that entertainer was a Roman Catholic, and if he was faithful to the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation, he has now found that the good, sweet Word of the gospel was a really sweet Word, and it is now bitter in his taste as he agonizes in Hades. He has found that the sweet word of the adulation of the crowd has turned sour in his stomach, and it hasn't amounted to anything at all. It was a momentary passing misconception.

This same comparison is made in Jeremiah 15:16. It also connotes feeding upon the Word of God: "Your words were found, and I did eat them. And Your Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart. For I'm called by Your name, O Lord, God of hosts." Jeremiah was a prophet of God to whom God gave direct information. Jeremiah says that the information that God gave him was sweet food to his soul, because it was the Word of God.

We also have this analogy in Ezekiel 2:8-10: "But you, son of Man, hear what I say unto you (God speaking to His prophet). Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I give you. Here, Ezekiel is told not to be rebellious like the Jewish people were toward God, because of the attitude that they have toward the Word of God, and the way they treat the Word of God. God says, "I'm going to give you something to eat." What's he going to give to this prophet?

Verse 9: "When I looked, behold, a hand was sent unto me, and lo, a scroll was in it." We see the identical picture that you have in the book of the Revelation. I remind you again that we understand the book of the Revelation, in large part, because the images that it uses to convey spiritual ideas are found elsewhere in the Bible. So, we dig around and we find where this same analogy (this same image – this same symbol) is used, and that gives us a clue to what the meaning is in Revelation.

Verse 10: "And He spread it before me, and it was written within and without, and there was written in it lamentations and mourning and woe." Here was a book that had some very sad information, because this book told what God was going to do to the rebellious Jewish people.

Note Ezekiel 3:1-4: "Moreover, he said unto me, 'Eat what you find. Eat this scroll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.' So, I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that scroll. And He said unto me, 'Son of man, eat and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give these.' Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth like honey for sweetness." Do you see why John understood immediately the analogy (the comparison)? He knew that God was telling Ezekiel that learning doctrine is feeding upon the Word. You feed upon the Word of God, and it will strengthen you spiritually.

"And He said unto me, 'Son of man, go. Get unto the House of Israel, and speak with My Words unto them. There was something else that John was able to do. Once he had eaten the Word of God by learning doctrine, he was now capable of sharing that with others. You almost have the same comparison that you have of a mother bird who feeds upon a piece of food, and then comes to her little chicks and regurgitate it back out to them, so that they may be sustained on the food which he has eaten and partially digested.

Ezekiel 3:14 also adds to that picture: "So, the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit. But the hand of the Lord was strong upon me." Ezekiel found that the Word that he ate was sweet, and he found that the Spirit of God lifted him up, and treated him with great power because he had nurtured himself on this Word of God.

So, we come with that background to help us to understand what must have gone through the mind of John when he was told, "Go to the angel; take the scroll; and, eat it.

We come to Revelation 10:10. John said, "And I took the little stroll out of the angel's hand." He went up to the angel and took the scroll. He had asked previously for it in verse 9. The angel said, "Go ahead. Take it." He takes it out of the angel's hand, and he eats it up. He completely devours this scroll. He said that the result was that, in his mouth, it was indeed sweet as honey. It tasted terrific, just like the Word of God indeed tastes to us spiritually when we learn it – when we come to those great portions of the Word of God; something that we have not known; something that we did not connect; or, something that we didn't put together. All of a sudden, something is spiritually clarified, so we have a direction for our lives. Something falls into place. Where we've been stumbling around in our lives, and bruising ourselves, and beating our heads against a wall of God's judgment, we suddenly know how to align ourselves with His blessing. So, that's sweet, sweet information.

But John found that as soon as he had eaten it, his belly found that this was bitter food. It was sour in his stomach. The word "bitter" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "pikraino." "Pikraino" is a verb. It means "to be sour." It is in the aorist tense, which indicates that the point that John ate it, and the word hit his stomach. It is passive voice, which indicates that this bitterness is caused by the very same sweet Word of God that he had before. It's a statement of fact. So, again, we have the principle that the message of God's grace is sweet, but it's also bitter in terms of its consequences to those who will not listen to it.

John's positive volition to God's word has produced the bitterness of his circumstances in exile on Patmos. It was because the word was sweet to John, and that he was faithful to it, that the emperor placed him on the island of Patmos in exile. The sweetness of prophecy, and of God's victory over the tribulation world, is also accompanied by the bitterness of God's judgments on it.

You and I, as Christians very naturally get fed up with the world of evil. We just get tired of the mafia riding high. We get tired of people being able to get away with doing evil. We get tired of the fact that we cannot take hold, and stop it, and do something about it. We look forward with great delight that the time is going to come when righteousness will rule this world under Jesus Christ, and that people will not be able to get away with their evil acts. But when we do remember that, we also must have a bit of sadness because of the consequences that will come to them for resisting the Word of God.

So, Christians who now possess the sweet Word of God have the capacity to live the supernatural life to which Jesus Christ has called us. Unfortunately, we have Christians who know the sweet Word of God, and they choose to ignore it. Then it becomes bitter to them. They move into carnality, and they begin to pay the price. They begin to revert. Revisionism sets in, and the price of negative volition to the Word of God takes its effect. For some of these Christians among us, it is by the sheer fact that they just don't come to church services. They get very little feeding. They would like us to think that they're great Bible students and readers of the Scripture, but they don't do too much of that. They don't listen to tapes very much. They really are suffering an enormous case of malnutrition. And the more they are suffering from that kind of spiritual malnutrition, because they have not fed on the Word of God, the more disoriented they are as to what their condition is.

So, this works against us Christians – that we, who have the sweet taste of the Word of God, will find that we will suffer the bitter consequences of carnality in the rewards that we shall lose at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Christians are saddened by the sight of people sent into the lake of fire. We are saddened by the consequence of people who are going to stand at the great white throne judgment to be cast into that lake, all because the sweet Word of the gospel became the bitter condemnation of God for them.

So, it is a very terrible thing not to feed upon the Word of God. It is a very terrible thing not to digest the Word of God through positive acceptance of it, because there's no way for you to move in the devil's world with any kind of guidance and any kind of perspective unless you do this.

So, in John's case, we're told that indeed he found, upon feeding upon the Word of God, that it was sweet, but it had its bitter implications.

**Prophesy**

Then in verse 11, we read, "And he said to me." He is now speaking in terms of this angel. The angel, John having secured this information that's in the scroll, says, "Now you're going to have to do something. It is necessary." This is the Greek word "dei." This word is laying a burden of responsibility: "You must." John has to do something. What he now must yet do in the future is to prophesy. The Greek word is "propheteuo." "Propheteuo" means "to deliver God's revelation." John has received the Word of God. He has fed upon it from the scroll of information. Now he is told, "You must deliver this information." This is in the aorist tense, which means it's at the point when John receives the information. It is active voice. John has to do it, and it is the infinitive mood, which indicates that this is God's divine purpose for John.

So, John is given important information in this scroll – further details about the tribulation acts of God, including His plan for dealing with Israel in the tribulation, and he is to transmit this information in the book of the Revelation.

It is a legitimate concern on the part of Christians, when you have learned the truth of doctrine, because you have been fed upon it, that you now bear a very valuable product that the rest of the human race needs to know. You need to get up in the morning indeed and be open to the fact that God is going to lead you to someone that's going to call you on the phone, or that you're going to run into, and that your spirit will sense that they're working under some burden, and that you will reach out and raise a question that may open to you the fact that they've got a spiritual problem. It will open the door to you to move them in the right direction to the particular bit of spiritual truth they need.

It is obvious that a child grows by the food that he eats. It is also obvious that after you're grown, you can keep eating, and you'll keep growing. Food nourishes. Food produces. The opposite is also true. If you do not feed that child, the child will die. In certain areas of our country, we have had reported that this is what some hospitals are willing to do with children when his parents say, "I don't want to keep this child. He's got a problem of some kind. I want you just to not feed him. Just let him die of starvation." Or they take him home and let that happen to the child. That is because we have an era now where murder, before the child is born, has acclimated people to accepting murder after the child is born.

So, it is important to feed upon the Word of God, or you cannot have any spiritual nutrition. It's a simple thing. I don't know how to say it to alert you to the seriousness of not doing it. All we have to do is think about some of our Christian friends in the past, that we've been associated with, that are now drifting out there in limbo; that are out there now wasting their lives; and, they are out there spinning along in some marvelous, exciting thing that they're doing that isn't worth a hill of beans, wasting their lives for all eternity. And you say, "How could that happen? I remember that person when he was an example to all of us. Now, he is a sorry sight." It always began because they began to starve themselves spiritually. You cannot get away in the spiritual life with absences from the local church service.

Now, the wonderful thing about having said that is that you don't have to come to church. The freedoms of your grace enable you to stay home. But there's another wonderful thing about that – that at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will find out whether that's true or whether it was false. And at that point, we will find whether you indeed can ignore (as many people of this congregation do) being in the services Sunday morning or Sunday evening. We'll see. And you will look back, and those are the people to whom the Lord Jesus is going to go up and wipe away their tears. That is because they will see, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, when their lives are evaluated for the rewards that they'll carry for all eternity, what might have been. There are no sadder words in the English language than "what might have been."

Well, John is told in verse 11, "You fed upon the Word of God. That puts a burden of responsibility upon you. You have something to say. So, therefore you must again prophesy. You're not through yet. You must prophesy again." What the angel is saying is that John is being prepared to hear the seventh trumpet blow. When the seventh trumpet blows, out of it come seven bowls – the final bowls of the wrath of God. John is going to be told about those, and it would be his duty to tell us about that.

**Languages**

So, the word "prophesy" means "conveying information from God." This is going to deal, John is told, with many people (that is, many races); many nations (many national entities); and, tongues (that is, languages of the world). This is the Greek word "glossa." And I want to remind you that this word (in the Greek language and in the ancient world of classical Greek) was sometimes used to describe the gibberish sounds that the priests and priestesses uttered as they gave themselves over to a demon spirit. The demon spirit took over their vocal cords, and out of their mouth flowed a gibberish sound of meaningless sounds that was euphoric to the person who was saying it. It was very exciting, but it was under a demonic control. This word is used to describe that. But in the New Testament, this word is never used to describe anything but the languages that people of the world speak. So, when it says "languages" here, we know that he's talking about real languages. He's not talking about what the Charismatics and the Pentecostals do with their self-hypnotic gibberish, which does not mean anything.

John is told, "You're going to speak to people who have all kinds of different languages. Furthermore, you're going to speak to all kinds of governmental authorities. You're going to speak to various kings. So, John has information from God given to mankind concerning future events – things that people need to know about. To the extent that you have been instructed in the Word of God, and to the to the extent that you have taken the trouble to think over what you have been told, and to memorize it, and to learn it, and to absorb it, you too have information that society needs.

What John saw was past history for him, but its future for the human race to this day. Those that John would yet speak about in his book were those people upon whom would come the wrath of God in the future tribulation. When the multitudes of the nations of the world gather at the final battle on the field of Armageddon for an assault against God, who knows but what, perhaps, some of those might even look into the Bible here and read this passage, and realize that this book is telling them what was once future, but which now, in their day, has become their present. Perhaps some on that battlefield might even yet be saved.

Those of us who have eaten God's word are obliged to pass our knowledge on to the world about us.

The prophet Ezekiel of old, once more, stressed this principle in Ezekiel 33:7-9: "So, you, O son of Man, I have set you a watchman unto the house of Israel. Therefore, you shall bear the Word at My mouth, and warn them from Me." God says, "I have chosen you. I've given you My Word, and I put you up on the wall as a watchman to watch for the safety of My people. When I say unto the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die; if you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require of your hand." That's serious business. Ezekiel is told that if he does not carry the message from God that he has received, and somebody becomes injured and dies because of what he has not told them, that person's blood is on his hands, and God is going to require it of him.

Verse 9 says, "Nevertheless, if you warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, if he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your soul." So, there is an obligation to tell people what God thinks.

Assimilating Bible doctrine will make it part of your human spirit; it will nourish your soul; and, it will guide you in your thinking and in your action.

Now, all of this would be comparatively meaningless now if we did not stop and say, "Now, how in the world am I going to eat the Word of God? How in the world will I actually feed on the Word of God so that it does nourish my soul?" The Bible is very clear that we should feed upon doctrine. Let's look at a few verses that establish this.

1 Peter 5:1-4: "The elders who are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the suffering of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." Here is a statement to the pastor-teacher-elder in the local congregation. Peter says, "I'm talking to you as the leader of that local church, as the elder – I who myself am an elder." What does he tell this elder to do in the local church? Feed the flock of God which is among you. Now, how in the world does the pastor feed the people among him? Well, he runs New Year's Eve parties for them. He runs ski trips. He takes him down the Colorado River on rubber rafts. He takes him to summer camp. He runs parties. He has volleyball games. That's a wonderful time. That's a wonderful way to feed. Many churches think that their entertainment program feeds people because they cover it up with the word "fellowship:" "We're going to have fellowship playing a volleyball game. We're going to have fellowship at this party." And when it's all over, they may have fed themselves on something, but it wasn't the Word of God, and there was no fellowship with God. They may have had a relationship with one another, but that is soon dissipated.

Here is the direct command that every pastor-teacher has to take seriously, or he's going to give a very big explanation (an account) someday in heaven: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight of it, not by constraint, but willingly." Take charge as the executive head, not because somebody forces you, but because you have been called. So, do it willingly. And don't do it for the sake of getting rich (not for filthy lucre, but of already mind). Don't do it on the basis of how much money you'll make, or whether you are making what you think you are worth.

Furthermore verse 3 says, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage (not that you are the final voice instead of God), but as being an example to the flock," so that they can look and say, "Here is a pattern of walking with God in spiritual things that we may imitate to our benefit."

Then there's a big promise to this elder if he does this: "And when the chief shepherd (which is Jesus Christ) shall appear, you (pastor-teacher-elders) shall receive a crown of glory that does not fade away." Here is one of the medals of honor that are given in heaven. This one is called the crown of glory, and it goes only to pastor-teachers who have done their job.

What is this passage saying? God says, "You must study. You must learn. You must feed upon the Word of God."

This is reiterated for us in John 21:15-17: "So, when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these.' He said unto Him, ' Yea, Lord, You know that I love you. He said unto him, 'Feed my lambs.'" What on earth was Jesus telling Peter to do? Peter, who has just (in his epistle), told other pastor-teachers to feed the Lambs of Christ. He was passing on this instruction that the Lord gave to him directly. "Feed my lambs."

"He (Jesus) said to him (to Simon Peter again, the second time), 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love?' He said unto Him, 'Yea, Lord, you know that I love You.' And He said unto him, 'Feed my sheep.'" Now, we won't get into the Greek text here, which is very interesting, because in this passage of Scripture, it uses the two different words for "love." Jesus says, "Peter, do you 'agapao' me? Do you, Peter, have a total mental attitude, affection for Me, with no holds barred, with no qualifications and no resentments?" Peter says, "Yea, Lord, I love you." Peter says "phileo," meaning, "Lord, I have a great emotional attachment to You." The Lord comes back and says, "Peter do you 'agapao' Me?" And Peter says, "Well, yeah Lord, I 'phileo' you. I have a big attachment to you emotionally." He just could not get himself to say, "Lord, I love you. I'm 100% yours. I have no mental reservations. I'm not holding back anything. I am your man. I'm going to go with you."

How many Christians say, "Oh lord, I love you," but back in your mind, you have mental reservations. Those of you that have been sworn into the military service of the United States, remember that when you take your oath of office, one of the things you say is that, "I will defend the Constitution of the United States, and bear true loyalty to the nation without any mental reservations, so help me God." So, there is no question concerning your loyalty.

Well, the third time, in verse 17, Jesus said, "OK, Peter I'll talk to you on your terms: "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?'" This time the Lord uses Peter's word, "phileo:" "Do you have an emotional attachment to Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said unto Him, 'Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You.'" And again, Peter uses the emotional attachment word: "And Jesus said unto him, 'Feed my sheep.'" So, Peter couldn't quite get himself to say, "Lord, no holds barred, I'm your man. I have no mental reservations. I'm holding nothing back." Yet, Jesus said, "Peter, what I want you to do is to feed the people of God."

What was he talking about? Running annual banquets for then? Running a little covered-dish suppers for them? Having little social events where they could share interesting times with one another. No, he was saying give them doctrine. Without it, they're not going to survive: "Peter, if you don't feed the people of God the Word of God, some character is going to write a book that's going to say, '88 reasons why the rapture is going to take place in 1988.' And this guy is going to come with the credentials of having worked for NASA, and having worked with computers, and knowing about where Mars is, and where all those other things are out there. He's going to intricately weave all this together, and he's going to come on the scene and say, 'Come September 12th or 13th of 1988, the rapture is going to take place.’”

"Now, Peter, if you don't feed my sheep so that they understand the doctrine of the rapture, and so that they understand that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself made a statement which is recorded in Mark 13:32, where He said a most amazing thing about Himself, speaking about the time of the return of Christ: "But of that day and that hour when Jesus Christ returns to this earth from heaven, no man knows." It doesn't say, "No, not the angels who are in heaven." It says, "Neither the Son, but the Father." Jesus Christ, the God-man did not know the day and the time (the point in time when He was going to return from heaven to this earth)? He didn't know the year and the day?

Well, He was speaking here in His humanity. In His deity, He knew, but in His humanity he did not know. The angels of heaven did not know. Only God the Father had it. But here's a guy who writes a book and says, "I know. Jesus doesn't know, but God has revealed it to me." Do you know that six million copies of that book were sold, and it cost $2 apiece? That's a lot of bananas. What difference does it make whether the rapture comes or not? This guy is enraptured by the $12 million. And would you believe that there were churches buying these things up by the hundreds, and pastors standing out there handing these out to their people, getting them all excited and ready?

So, we have reports filtering in of people who, as they approached that Monday a week ago, put their pets to death so they would not be left behind. They pulled their children out of school. They closed their bank accounts (for whatever good that was done). I guess that they wanted to take a few bucks with them on the away, in case you stop and you need to buy something along the way – hitting that coke machine in the sky. I mean, when the crazies are crazy, they're really crazy.

It must sadness us to think that these are people who are going to heaven. These are our fellow Christians. It's unbelievable that they could have acted as such fools, and they could have been conned in that way. And of course, all the rest of the world is standing around watching and saying, "You see, fundamental biblical Christians are the greatest idiots on the face of the earth, because no unbeliever would say something like that seriously.”

"Peter, you're an elder. There is one thing that you have to do for the people of God. You have got to tell them what the Word of God has to say to them. You must teach them doctrine." But Peter could have said, "But Lord, they won't come and listen. They won't assemble themselves together. They drift in and out. They're erratic. They're scattered. Most of them don't even know that it's important to be there." Jesus could say, "I know Peter. The toughest ones are going to be those who have learned a lot, because they're going to think they can ride it now. They're going to think that they have risen to super grace, and maybe they have. And they think they're going to stay there."

It's like someone who has come to a good position physically because you've exercised, and you've had right sleeping habits and right food. Now you're in a peak condition. And the doctor says, "You've got it made." And what do you do? You stop eating, or you become erratic about it. What's going to happen? You know.

The apostle Paul understood this principle. On one occasion, he gathered from the city of Ephesus, the pastor-teacher elders who were scattered throughout the city of Ephesus in individual house churches. He stressed this very same principle to them: making it possible for the people of God to feed on the Word of God. This is in Acts 20:26. Now, get the scene. They're down here at the seashore. The apostle Paul is on his way to Jerusalem. He calls the elders of these churches together and he says something to them that causes them to weep. Hells them, "I'm never going to see you again. This is it. You and I worked in the Lord's Vineyard. We put this together, but this is goodbye for us.

In Acts 20:26, on this occasion, Paul says, "Wherefore I testify unto you this day that I'm pure from the blood of all men." What is he talking about? He's talking about what we just heard the prophet Ezekiel telling us: "If you don't tell people what they should know about doctrine, then you're guilty, and their blood is upon your hands. Terrible things will happen to them, and it's right on your back. And when you stand before God, that's going to be taken into account concerning your record."

Paul says, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." He says, "I didn't just preach the gospel to you." How many preachers are going to stand before God with blood all over them in guilt, because all they ever preached to their congregations was the doctrine of salvation again and again and again, to people who didn't need to hear that doctrine, and who had already believed? Paul says, "I gave you the full counsel of the Word of God. So, take heed therefore unto yourself, pastor-teachers, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseer's, to feed the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood. For I know this: that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock." One of those grievous wolves just told us when the rapture was going to take place.

"Also, of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." The cults are full of ex-fundamental Christians drawn off by these clever speakers because the Christian didn't know his information (didn't know his ground) to know how to evaluate false doctrine when he heard it.

"Therefore, watch and remember that for the space of three years, I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified." I commend you to what? I commend you to what I've taught you. I commend you to the Word of God's grace – the doctrine which is able to build you up spiritually to enable you to produce divine good so that you will have an inheritance in heaven.

Furthermore, Paul said, "I didn't do this to get rich. I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. I do not have a doghouse which is air-conditioned. I do not drive around an antique car." Now, Paul could say that; me – I can't say that. My 1961 Chevy, being over 25 years old, is now an antique car. But Paul never made it.

Verse 34: "Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." Paul said, "I used my own money to finance the ministry in which you took part, and were the beneficiaries of. And I got that as the result of my own efforts, I have shown you all things, how that, so laboring, you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The same apostle, in Ephesians 4, reiterates the essential role of that pastor-teacher in giving people what they need to grow spiritually. Ephesians 4:11-16: "Jesus Christ gave certain gifted men. Some of them were apostles, and some of them were prophets." We no longer have those. "Some of them had the gift of evangelist, and some had the gift of pastor-teacher." Verse 12 says, "The pastor-teacher was given for the equipping for combat of the saints," so that something else would happen for the work of the ministry – "So that they could serve God in Christian service. And the result of that would be the edifying (the building up) of the body of Christ."

That is a chain reaction. If the pastor-teacher does not feed people upon the Word of God, they will not be equipped for the angelic conflict. They're going to be little, weak reeds blown to and fro by every wind of the evil doctrine. And when he doesn't do his job of equipping them for combat, they cannot serve. They cannot get out in the field and do the service. And when they cannot do the service, the body of Christ is not built up.

His point in all this, he says, is: "So that we may all come in the unity of the faith, and unto the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man (a mature man) under the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of hand and cunning correctness, by which they lie in wait to deceive."

The man who told us the rapture was coming, I'm sure was very sincere, but he was sincerely mistaken and wrong. He has hurt a lot of Christians who now think that the rapture is Bunco, and that the Word of God is nonsense, because they think that he got that out of the Word of God.

Verse 15: "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up in Him, and in all things, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual, working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." This is so that every Christian is matured. This is so that every Christian in the local body produces what he is capable of supplying to that operation. When we have Christians who do not function in this body, we are all the poorer.

**The Value of Feeding on the Word of God**

We close with a few Scriptures that declare to us the value of the Word of God. We have been told to feed on the Word. Here is the value in doing that. 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." It is a doctrine that enables us to make correction of ourselves; to reprove those who are doing wrong; and, to give us a guideline to what is righteous conduct so that we may grow to maturity and be effective in producing divine good works.

We add to that 2 Peter 1:21: "For the prophecy (information from God – doctrine) came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke it as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Why is the Word of God valuable? 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "God breathed the information into the writers. 2 Peter 1:21 tells us that God guided these men as they wrote down the information he had given them. So, the result is an inerrant Scripture that has no mistakes in it, and which is going to be fulfilled in full, precise detail. For this reason, John 10:35 says, "The Scripture cannot be broken," and you better believe it.

When John says that he's taking the Word of God to eat it, he means he is feeding upon doctrine that he has learned. When church leaders are told to see to it that the number one thing a local church does is teach people the Word of God, he tells them that so that they can grow spiritually, because with it, they will be strengthened, and they will not be tossed to and fro by everybody's kooky idea. They will know the truth, and they will be able to function upon it. Consider yourself privileged to have been here to today to hear caution (to hear this warning) that God has a way of keeping you spiritually strong so that you go from babyhood on up to spiritual maturity. The tragedy is when we start slipping back, and we lose ground. When you find that things are not going well in your life, and when you discover that you're out of step with God the Holy Spirit, you cannot just confess your sin that has caused that, and get back in step. All you can do is set up the condition for getting back in step. Then it takes time to get the calluses and the hardness peeled off the soul, and get yourself back into development of maturity that you once have lost.

It is obvious that when the American troops came into the concentration camps of Germany, and they found these horrible, emaciated men – these prisoners, and many of these the Jewish people that were in those concentration camps (those death camps), these men had nothing but bones. They were walking skeletons with some skin over it. You know that they did not just take them into the commissary and say, "Gentlemen, sit down here and eat this meal," and then they were restored to full physical capacity and strength. It took a long time to get back up to where they had once been in their physical capacity.

The same is true spiritually. We all remember, indeed, that the Word of God is alive. It is active. It is the food upon which we survive as Christians. Without it, we're just like the rest of the world, and we're losers just like the rest of the world.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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