

**THE WORD OF GOD OUR SPIRITUAL FOOD.
BY ARCHBISHOP LEIGHTON (ABOUT A.D., 1675).**

THIS IS THE END of the ministry, that you may be brought unto Christ, that you may be led to the sweet pastures and pleasant streams of the gospel; that you may be spiritually fed, and may grow in that heavenly life, which is here begun in all those in whom it shall hereafter be perfected.

As the milk that infants draw from the breast, is most connatural food to them, being of that same substance that nourished them in the womb: so when they are brought forth, that food follows them as it were for their supply in that way that is provided in nature for it; by certain veins it ascends into the breasts, and is there fitted for them, and they are by nature directed to find it there. Thus as a Christian begins to live by the power of the Word, he is by the nature of that spiritual life directed to that same Word as his nourishment.

Whereas natural men cannot love spiritual things for themselves, desire not the Word for its own sweetness, but would have it sauced with such conceits as possibly spoil the simplicity of it; or at the best love to hear it for the wit, and learning, which, without any wrongful mixture of it, they find in one delivering it more than another. But the natural and genuine appetite of the children of God, is to the Word, for itself, and only as milk, "sincere milk;" and where they find it so, from whomsoever, or in what way soever delivered unto them, they feed upon it with delight.

Desire the Word, not that you may only hear it; that is to fall very far short of its true end; yea, it is to take the beginning of the work for the end of it. The ear is indeed the mouth of the mind, by which it receives the Word (as Elihu compares it, Job 34:3), but meat that goes no further than the mouth (you know) cannot nourish. Neither ought this

desire of the Word to be only to satisfy a custom; it were an exceeding folly to make so superficial a thing the end of so serious a work.

Again, to hear it only to stop the mouth of conscience, that it may not clamor more for the gross impiety of contemning it; this is to hear it not out of desire, but out of fear. To desire it only for some present pleasure and delight that a man may find in it, is not the due use and end of it; that there is delight in it, may help commend it to those that find it so, and so be a means to advance the end; but the end it is not.

To seek no more but a present delight that vanisheth with the sound of the words, that die in the air, is not to desire the Word as meat, but as music, as God tells the prophet Ezekiel of his people. "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument; for they hear thy words, and they do them not."

To desire the Word for the increase of knowledge, although this is necessary and commendable, and being rightly qualified, is a part of spiritual accretion, yet take it as going no further, it is not the true end of the Word. Nor is the venting of that knowledge in speech and frequent discourse of the Word and the divine truths that are in it; which, where it is governed with Christian prudence, is not to be despised, but commended: yet certainly the highest knowledge, and the most frequent and skilful speaking of the Word, severed from the growth here mentioned, misses the true end of the word. If any one's head or tongue should grow apace, and all the rest stay at a stand, it would certainly make him a monster; and they are no other, that are knowing and discoursing Christians, and grow daily in that, but not at all in holiness of heart and life, which is the proper growth of the children of God.

And as we ought in preaching, so you in hearing, to propound this end to yourselves, that you may be spiritually refreshed, and walk in the strength of that divine nourishment. Is this your purpose when you come hither? Inquire of your own hearts, and see what you seek, and what you find, in the public ordinances of God's house. Certainly the most do not

so much as think on the due intendment of them, aim at no end, and therefore can attain none; seek nothing; but sit out their hour, asleep or awake, as it may happen, or, possibly, some seek to be delighted for the time, as the Lord tells the prophet, "to hear as it were a pleasant song;" if the gifts and strain of the speaker be anything pleasing.

Or, it may be, they want to gain some new notions, to add somewhat to their stock of knowledge, either that they may be enabled for discourse, or, simply, that they may know. Some, it may be, go a little further: they like to be stirred and moved for the time, and to have some touch of good affection kindled in them; but this lasts but for a while, till their other thoughts and affairs get in, and smother and quench it; and they are not careful to blow it up and improve it. How many, when they have been a little affected with the Word, go out and fall into other discourses and thoughts, and either take in their affairs secretly, as it were, under their cloak, and their hearts keep a conference with them; or if they forbear this, yet, as soon as they go out, plunge themselves over head and ears in the world, and lose all which might have any way advantaged their spiritual condition. It may be, one will say, "It was a good sermon." Is that to the purpose? But what think you it hath for your praise or dispraise? Instead of saying "Oh! how well was that spoken," you should say, "Oh! how hard is repentance! how sweet a thing is faith! how excellent the love of Jesus Christ!" That were your best and most real commendation of the sermon, with true benefit to yourselves.

How sounds it to many of us at least, but as a well contrived story, whose use is to amuse us, and possibly delight us a little, and there is an end? – and indeed no end, for this turns the most serious and most glorious of all messages into an empty sound. If we keep awake, and give it a hearing, it is much; but for anything further, how few deeply beforehand consider, 'I have a dead heart; therefore will I go unto the Word of life, that it may be quickened; it is frozen, I will go and lay it before the warm beams of that sun that shines in the gospel: my corruptions are mighty and strong, and grace, if there be any in my heart,

is exceeding weak: but there is in the gospel a power to weaken and kill sin, and to strengthen grace: **[R2949 : page 38]** and this being the intent of my wise God in appointing it, it shall be my desire and purpose in resorting to it, to find it to me according to his gracious intendment; to have faith in my Christ, the fountain of my life, more strengthened, and made more active in drawing from him; to have my heart more refined and spiritualized, and to have the sluice of repentance opened, and my affections to divine things enlarged; more hatred of sin, and more love of God and Communion with him.

