

The Milk of the Word

By Jeremy Lucas

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:" I Peter 2:2

In The Present Hand of God, Part Two, I introduced this verse because it aims at the heart of there being an essential basic need for milk. Most of the time we do indeed speak, as Bereans, of the things that we can chew on. And for our present state, that's where we're at in our season of age. But in the context of an infant (a newborn babe in Christ), milk is an absolute necessity for the growth of their small bodies, minds, and standard of life. Certainly when they are born, they do not have the physical capacity to take steak, beef, chicken, or tough products and thrive on the nutrients provided. Neither will their mouth provide them teeth to chew or their stomach provide them the acids ready to digest. They're too young. They're too little.

So the nourishment given to an infant. That's what I'm focusing on. What IS the basic "milk of the word?"

Last night, as we engaged some occasionally awkward (as Paul noted) users of our new chat room, one of the very profound, but overlooked notes given was by our regular member, wyoman (i.e. Phil). In response to "what is the milk of the word," he offered the following passage:

"Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we [him] no more." II Corinthians 5:16

And perhaps what had never crossed my mind as a connecting and obvious truth was why, in fact, Peter would be the one to speak about the milk as something desirable. Does anyone else see it?

To know Christ after the flesh... in His human reference, in His physical representation, in His earthly mission, is to know Him in terms of "milk." Yet, apart from knowing Him in that fashion, one cannot truly know the other side... that being the meat.

Let me elaborate on these thoughts.

A young woman that I've known for several years grew up in dispensational circles all her life but upon coming to know the Lord, she was bombarded with depth, insight, and meat that was not in her frame of need for the time. In fact, the church she attended rarely, if ever, spoke about the humanity of Christ. Thus, never really presenting to her, as a child (or perhaps in certain terms, as an infant in Christ) the PERSON of Christ Jesus. Clearly many of us would admit that we can't quite remember the last time a Sunday morning sermon or a Sunday school lesson illustrated the milk of the gospel. And why would it when we all consider ourselves Bereans in search of something to chew on?

What's unfortunate, in the backwards direction that this young woman was taught, she left dispensational circles in search of milk. And as a result, became more profoundly moved by the things that are not chewable... rather, by the things that only satisfy basic needs. She now wants very little to do with anything dispensationally related because the nourishment was given to her in a backwards fashion.

This is not necessarily to say that a spiritual infant cannot grow more rapidly than a physical infant. But in many and most cases, let's be fair... levels and patterns of growth aren't always a choice. Truly, if you're not being fed the right nutrients, you won't grow properly. If you're starved of the basics, why would you get strengthened on the things that aren't?

Often, I've heard it said with regard to missions that people need to hear of Christ more than they need to have their basic needs met. For instance, going into an area of Rwanda where children are starving and being trampled... what comprehension will they have of Jesus Christ, salvation, or theology if we do not spend weeks, months, and years restoring their bodies with the most basic nutrients they need to survive and thrive as a healthy human being?

Here we draw some automatic parallels to spiritual infancy and the growth of little children. The "milk of the word" is not simply an option, it is THE basic essential for strong comprehension of things that will later be chewed upon. Note the comparison that Paul makes with the Corinthian church.

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, [even] as unto babes in Christ." I Corinthians 3:1

Carnal, of course, being fleshly. We often think of this in terms of their unrighteous behavior and ungodly sin in the flesh, but for a moment, I encourage you to think a bit larger. Take into consideration the previous verse in II Corinthians 5 and Paul's insightful moment of asking the same audience to move forward in their minds and comprehension to things beyond the flesh. Was he purely thinking of their tendency to sin? Not exclusively. The context addresses the manner in which they perceived the Lord. For they only saw HIM in terms of carnal characteristics.

The term "carnal" (sarkikos) carries the simple meaning, "having the nature of flesh." When most believers think of Christ, the tendency is to think of His having overcome that carnality by way of His sinlessness. Yet, that connection to His humanity is what takes an individual into basic milk. Is it necessary to comprehend His humanity? Absolutely! To know that He was without sin having overcome the flesh? Absolutely! But what of these things gives us chewable meat? Nothing at all.

These are points of reference by which we are able to move forward. If there was not a basic absolute by which we all agreed that our Lord was "without sin" in His flesh, then we would not be able to dig into the depths of our sanctification and our righteousness IN He who accomplished such in His flesh.

For now, I'm simply getting the ball rolling in terms of what part "milk" plays in the life of believers. Even greater, the belief and suggestion of conversation that the same milk is absolutely ESSENTIAL for all believers.

So when Peter says to his audience, "desire the sincere milk of the word," the reference, as I understand it, is pointing to a knowledge of Christ in the flesh and all things earthly.