

## MILK & MEAT

### MILK:

**Hebrews 5:13** *For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.*

### MEAT:

**Hebrews 5:12** *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*

In these Scriptures we find that the Word of God is referred to under the emblems of milk and meat. In other words, they are sustenance for the needy and hungry soul of man. Milk and meat are the very staples of human life and the Word of God is the spiritual equivalent.

If the Word of God is so necessary to our spiritual welfare then it is important that we feast upon it daily ourselves, as well as in church services. Too often believers allow their "study" of the Bible to be dependent upon a brief devotional from the *Days of Praise* guide or the *Baptist Bread* or some other packaged presentation. Obviously there is no real studying taking place.

Also, when the believer goes to church to be fed from the Word he is instead often cheated. A passage of Scripture is read which whets his or her appetite for some in-depth treatment (meat) to be offered. Instead, often what happens is that the passage which is read in never referred to again in the "message." The believer simply closes his Bible, yawns and goes away hungry. ***"My brethren, these things ought not so to be."***

In the above passages of Scripture there seems to be two basic classes of believers in view; the spiritual "babe" and the more healthy and stronger meat eater. Concerning the baby's diet of milk the Bible is clear. I Peter 2:2 speaks of ***"newborn babes, (which) desire the sincere milk of the word..."*** But that is just the beginning of their spiritual growth. There is nothing wrong with a baby being bottle fed on milk, but it is pathetic to see grown-up believers being bottle fed. However that is often the case in many churches. Either the pastor/preacher doesn't do his homework and prepare meaty meals from the Bible, doesn't take the time to do so, or is just too lazy to study. What he serves up in the services are often three points and a sob story instead of a full course meal, including meat, from the Bible to starving saints. That same preacher often bemoans the fact that his people remain spiritual babes.

**Topical Preaching/Teaching:** We as preachers are command to ***"feed the flock."*** Thus we are guilty of starving the flock instead, if we fail to do so. As every preacher knows there are basically three types of sermons: topical, textual and expository. Often many preachers content themselves with only the first method. The topical type of preaching is the easiest to prepare; select a text, glean some supporting points and voila, you have an instant meal. *(Unfortunately I have never tasted an "instant" anything that I enjoyed!)*

No doubt there is a place for topical preaching; but even then the message must be properly researched, and the Scripture used as a jumping off place needs to be in harmony with the usage of that topic elsewhere in the Word. As someone has noted, a text without a context is a pretext. A steady diet of topical preaching is serving milk to saints who desire and desperately need meat!

There comes a time in every believer's life when he needs to be weaned away from milk and be fed meat. Most churches are filled with saints who have been saved for quite some time and need to grow up. So their diet has to be changed accordingly. It is a shame that most of the members of the congregation have to put up with preaching designed with babes in mind. Usually the topical milk message is given for the very few "babes" while the many mature saints long for meat.

**Textual Preaching/Teaching:** Preachers are commanded to *"preach the word..."* not their ideas about the Word, their philosophy, their pet hobbies, their views, etc. Textual preaching and teaching focuses on the Word in its context. It can nourish the saints! It can be augmented with appropriate illustrations, objects, etc. Jesus, Paul and Peter all used common items in their environment to illustrate their sermons or lessons. *"Consider the lilies of the field..."* *"A certain man..."* Of course the Savior and His apostles also had miracle working powers which we no longer possess to call attention to their preaching. Thus it behooves use to work harder to captivate our audience, using whatever means are available to us. We need to use technology, objects, illustrations, stories and whatever other legitimate means are at our disposal. (I personally rarely preach or teach without Powerpoint, or some other visual. I learned in college that we retain more of what we see and hear, than what we hear alone.)

Textual preaching and teaching will ultimately focus on every subject in the Bible to the benefit of our hearers. *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches..."* It is the Spirit of God using the Word of God that the church needs to hear. There will be no need for the preacher to repeat himself or to search for appropriate preaching material. It is "in the Book!" We need to expound what is there. Nearly all the truly great preachers who were God-blessed used this method of preaching to feed their flocks, Spurgeon being the classic example. (Have you read any of his sermons lately? They are masterpieces of textual preaching!) Believers were exposed to every doctrine of the Bible using this method. There was no need to harp on pet subjects, or to scratch to find subject material. Granted, this method is more difficult to prepare messages than the topical method. It will take diligent study, research, "digging in the walls," and much prayer to do justice to what God is trying to tell His people, but it will be worth it to the preacher and to the flock.

**Expository Preaching/Teaching:** Too often believers sitting in the pews of our churches are really "babes" when it comes to their knowledge of the Bible overall. They no doubt have read through the Bible, but do not have the resources, training, time or expertise to *"rightly (divide) the word of truth"* the preacher has. Consequently they are biblically ignorant and cannot think through the Scriptures. Of course they know something of the doctrines of Scripture, but usually their knowledge of how the Bible progresses is sadly lacking. Sometimes even the preacher himself cannot "walk through the Bible" in his mind with a clear concept of scriptural progress in view. Key men and women in the Bible, historical events, special periods, etc. can help us in this regard. It is this writer's view that the dispensational approach to the Scriptures is vital in getting an overall understanding of a panoramic view of Bible progression. Of course the literal method of interpretation is a necessity!

J. Vernon McGee, W.A. Criswell, Oliver B. Greene and many other very successful men of God fed their flocks using this through-the-Bible approach. Any preacher worth the powder to blow him up needs to devote himself to a verse-by-verse exposition of books of the Bible from time to time in lengthy series to educate his flock on Bible content. Now each message should nonetheless stand alone so that if there are visitors or folks on vacation, etc. will not feel as if they missed out.

Please allow me a personal testimony at this juncture. In my own 43 year pastoral ministry the textual and expository method of teaching and preaching was a mainstay. I would regularly be in a verse-by-verse study of a Bible book in Sunday School, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. Of course I did other types of preaching/teaching as well, but this was my main menu and I would have stacked up the believers in the churches I was privileged to pastor alongside most others regarding their knowledge of the Scriptures and I believe they would have given a good account of themselves.

Certainly I dealt with pressing issues and holidays and topics from time-to-time but that was not the steady menu for the flocks I was honored to feed. I truly believe that that is the reason God so richly blessed the churches I pastored with explosive growth. It surely wasn't because I was an orator, or especially gifted as a preacher. It was all about God's Word and His Spirit using His Word. I was simply the delivery boy. God has promised to bless His Word and has even magnified it above His holy Name! Thus when we are faithful to it, God is faithful to us. *"Preach the Word!"*

