

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eighth Sunday After Trinity, July 25, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 291, 283, 284, 264, 292: 1-4.

Lessons: Psalm 122, James 3: 1-12, John 3: 1-21.

Text: 1 Peter 2:1-3.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed:

Jesus tells us in his Word, *“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit,”* John 3:6. *“Flesh”* refers to our natural, physical birth. We were conceived and born in sin because our parents were also sinful, and their parents, and so on back to Adam and Eve. To be born in sin is not just a slight spiritual defect. The seriousness of the situation is brought out in these words which we read in the Order of Holy Baptism:

“We learn from the Word of God that all men from the fall of Adam are conceived and born in sin and so are under the wrath of God and would be lost forever unless delivered by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

To be born of *“the Spirit”* means to be born again in a spiritual way. Jesus told Nicodemus, *“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit”*. John 3:5. Jesus was speaking of Holy Baptism. To be *“born again,”* John 3:3, is also called regeneration or conversion. This can be accomplished only by the Holy Spirit through the use of the means of grace, that is, through the Gospel in word and sacrament.

Note the great difference between a person who is not converted and one who has been spiritually born again. One who is not converted is described by Saint Paul as being *“dead in ... transgressions and sins,”* Ephesians 2:1. A person who is physically dead cannot do anything. So also a person who is spiritually dead cannot serve the Lord and lead a Christian life, but can only serve Satan and end up in hell. But Paul describes the regenerated person in these words: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come,”* 2 Corinthians 5:17. The regenerated person lives to serve the Lord. Though his sanctification is far from perfect, yet the Lord for Jesus’ sake takes pleasure in him, daily forgives all his sins, and in the end takes him to everlasting life in heaven.

Our text for today gives us:

ADMONITIONS ADDRESSED TO NEWBORN CHILDREN OF GOD

1. **They are to put aside all evil that can destroy their soul; and,**
2. **They are to have a sincere longing for the pure Word of God that nourishes their faith.**

The evil things we are to rid ourselves of include *“all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”* The first evil mentioned is *“all malice”*. Malice simply means wickedness. The thought of doing wickedness in any form should be repulsive to a Christian. All wickedness should be forsaken. We should also rid ourselves of *“all deceit”*. What is forbidden here is craftiness or cunning in trying to deceive our fellowman or mislead him so that he is physically or spiritually harmed. Instead of malice and deceit, the Lord commands, *“Love your neighbor as yourself,”* Matthew 22:39. We are also to rid ourselves of *“hypocrisy.”* This refers to every form of falseness in our conduct or speech. We should not try to cover up our weaknesses or failings because the Lord knows our inmost thoughts and desires. *“Envy”* is something else we are to be done with. We should not be envious of the good things our fellowman has been blessed with. We should rather rejoice with him and thank the Lord on his behalf. The last thing Peter mentions that the believer in Christ should rid himself of is *“slander of any kind.”* In the Book of Proverbs we read, *“There are six*

things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers,” Proverbs 6:16-19. Two of the seven sins refer to sins of the tongue. If God hates such sins, so should we as his children also hate them. The Apostle James writes, *“Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ... no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.”* James 3:5-6, 8-10. According to these words we should cease to speak every evil word, not slander our fellowman, and not spread vicious gossip or make any derogatory statements about him. Our prayer should be: *“Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips,”* Psalm 141:3.

We should understand, then, that believers in Christ are truly different from others who do not believe. They are not different by nature, but they are different because they have been born again in a spiritual way. As truly reborn children of God we should not commit the sins mentioned in our text. We should pray for God’s help and strive to avoid these evils, for they can destroy the soul.

If we are to live a life that pleases the Lord, the strength to do so must come from the Lord and his Word. Therefore, we learn from our text that **Christians are to have a sincere longing for the pure Word of God that nourishes their faith.**

2.

Peter writes in our text, *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”* Speaking to new-born believers in Christ, Peter says we are to be just like newborn babies, like sucklings, that are always hungry for good and pure nourishment. A newborn child needs pure and wholesome milk in order to live and grow. So also the newborn believer in Christ needs the precious Gospel Word to nourish his soul. It is to be emphasized that pure, unadulterated nourishment is needed. No loving parent would think of giving a little baby some watery drink that looks like milk, but does not have the food value of real milk. So also newborn believers in Christ need the pure Gospel, with nothing foreign added and nothing of the truth taken away. Luther writes, *“It is verily of great importance and highly necessary that to new-born and young Christians the milk is given pure and unadulterated; and the milk is nothing else than the Gospel.”*

Surely then, we should be very careful in this important matter. There are people who profess to be Christians but are careless when it comes to matters of doctrine and teaching. They do not care, it seems, whether or not they are fed with good, wholesome food for their soul. Most people are strict when it comes to their physical welfare. They will remember that it is wrong to sell milk that is not pure and will lodge a vigorous complaint to the milk company or the grocery store. But they care little or nothing if they are harmed spiritually by preaching and teaching that is contrary to God’s Word. Even as every believer in Christ was *“born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God,”* 1 Peter 1:23, so also the believer’s faith must be strengthened and nourished by that same *“living and enduring word of God.”* Jesus warns us, *“Watch out for false prophets,”* Matthew 7:15. Don’t let them do spiritual harm to your soul by their false teaching. Jesus assures us, *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,”* John 8:31-32.

In our text Peter emphasizes how much we should be concerned about getting the pure Word of God to nourish our soul when he says, *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk.”* Just as babies cry until they are satisfied by good milk, so Christians should have a sincere longing for the pure Gospel. It is not saying too much to declare that anyone who is truly a believer in Christ will have this longing for God’s Word. It is the unbeliever who does not care about the Word of God. But, we also know that Christians are often weak and need to be strengthened in their faith. That’s why our text gives the admonition to us to encourage us to always

be like a newborn baby in craving the pure spiritual milk of the Word. Though we have heard or read the Word of God many times, we should always have a craving for it and receive it with eager anticipation.

This craving for the Word does not come of itself. It is a result of making use of the Gospel Word in a diligent way. The more we use the Word of God, the more we want it and long for it. Then also we can say with David in the psalm, ***“One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple,”*** Psalm 27:4. In God’s house of worship we can hear his Word and we should say, ***“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’”*** Psalm 122:1.

Peter also tells us in our text why it is a great blessing to crave the Word of God and diligently make use of it, ***“so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”*** Have we not as believers tasted of the grace and goodness of the Lord? Surely we have. Think of all the blessings we have received through the Word of God. The Lord has brought us to a knowledge of the truth by using his Word. Daily he assures us of the forgiveness of all our sins for Jesus’ sake. We have this assurance because Jesus died and rose again. ***“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification,”*** Romans 4:25. So we may live in the blessed hope of everlasting life in heaven. We can say with Paul, ***“I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far,”*** Philippians 1:23. However great our distresses and tribulations may be, we can always say, ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us,”*** Romans 8:35.37. This assurance we have in the sure, certain, and powerful Word of God. Should we, then, not want to make faithful use of the Word?

Finally, we also have the blessing of growing up in our salvation. Spiritual growth is even more important than physical growth. If a child does not grow physically, it can become sick and die. But if a believer in Christ ceases to grow spiritually because he does not make faithful use of the Word, he is in danger of dying in unbelief. The sad end of such a person is damnation in hell. If we make faithful use of the Word of God we can by God’s grace remain in the true faith and then enjoy heaven after this life is ended. May we, then, all our life eagerly look forward to hearing and learning God’s precious Word.

*“Oh, grant that in your holy Word
We here may live and die, dear Lord,
And then when our journey ends here,
Receive us into glory there.” Amen.*
(Adapted from The Lutheran Hymnal 292:9)

Reprinted from the Ministry By Mail for the 15th Sunday after Trinity, August 31, 2008.