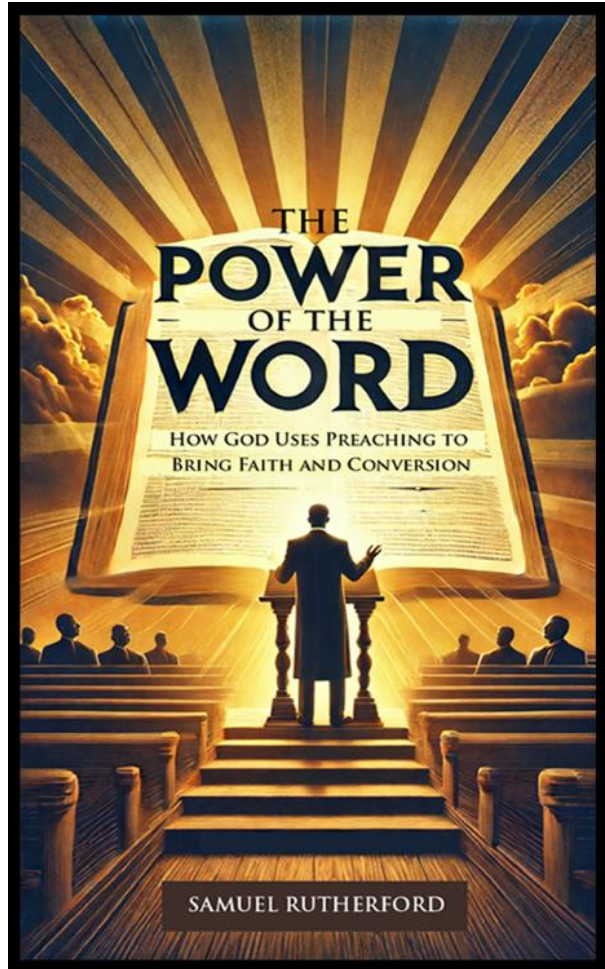


# THE POWER — OF THE — WORD

HOW GOD USES PREACHING TO  
BRING FAITH AND CONVERSION

SAMUEL RUTHERFORD



# **The Power of the Word:**

## **How God Uses Preaching to Bring Faith and Conversion**

**by Samuel Rutherford**

Professor of Divinity at the University of St Andrews in Scotland

*"Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of Antichrist,"*

— 1 John 4:3

*"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."*

— Matthew 24:24

London, Printed by J.D. & R.I. for Andrew Crooke, and sold at his shop at the Green Dragon in Paul's Churchyard. 1648.

## **The Power of the Word**

Regarding the necessity of the Word of God preached for the conversion of sinners, against the Swenckfeldians, Enthusiasts, and

Antinomians, we hold to the following conclusions, after first considering some points:

1. The spoken or preached Word is the instrument and means of the Holy Spirit in our conversion, but not its author nor its efficient cause.
2. The written or preached Word is a created thing; it is not the formal object of our faith and trust, nor the *objectum quod* but the *objectum quo*, that is, the intervening means or medium of our faith.
3. The Word, like all instruments, must be elevated above its natural function; it is more than merely a literal representation of Christ in whom we believe.
4. The writing, speaking, and conveyance of Christ to the soul in the preached Word may be human and literal, but the thing signified by the Word—Christ, faith, and the image of the second Adam—is divine and supernatural. The way it is conveyed to the soul, considering the higher operation of the Spirit beyond the actings and motion of the written letter, is divine, heavenly, and supernatural.
5. The action of the Holy Spirit in begetting faith may be said to be immediate in two ways. (1) If the Word only prepares and informs the external man in a literal sense, but the Spirit later comes in another distinct action to infuse faith, this we cannot deny. However, in such a case, the Spirit of regeneration is not said to work with the Word, but there is instead a more general operation of God which begets literal knowledge or a higher illumination. (2) The Spirit works with the Word in such a way that, in one and the same act, He opens the heart to hear and

receive what is conveyed in the letter of the Word. Thus, the Spirit works mediately, not immediately.

6. In the infusion of the new heart and the habit of the grace of God, we are purely passive and contribute no cooperation with God—no more than the dead can quicken themselves (Ephesians 2:1-2) or dry ground can make itself fertile to receive the rain (Isaiah 44:3-4). Although the Word may go before, and may be preached at the time, yet the act of infusing the new heart is not a moral action of God, but a physical, real action. It is received by us not through a subordinate literal action, a moral apprehension of the mind, or an act of the will. Therefore, in this formal act of infusion, I must confess my ignorance as to what the Word does, except by way of disposition or preparation. Nevertheless, it remains true that "faith comes by hearing" (Romans 10:17), and indeed, while Peter was still speaking, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word" (Acts 10:44).

Thus, if conversion is understood in its totality—considering the humbling and self-despairing of the sinner and all preparatory acts preceding the infusion of Christ's life, as well as the first operations that flow from this infused life—the Word is an instrument of conversion. However, I do not see how it can be an active or moral instrument when the soul is lying entirely under the Lord's act of infusing the life of Christ. Unless one calls it a passive instrument, the Word does not persuade the soul to receive new life, nor does the soul—being wholly passive—exercise any faculty of apprehension, knowledge, choice, or consent under this act of divine omnipotence while the Lord pours in a new heart.

It is true that the Word is the instrument insofar as the Spirit works in us the same habit of new life, and the same Spirit of grace and

supplication that is promised in the Word (Isaiah 44:3-4; Zechariah 12:10; Ezekiel 36:26-27). It is the same Spirit that Scripture says Christ, by His merits, has purchased (John 1:16-18; John 12:32; Revelation 1:5; Hebrews 10:19-22).

## **Conclusion 1: The Preached Word as an Instrument of Faith**

The preached Word is the means that instrumentally works with the Spirit to beget faith. Romans 10:14, 17 states, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." It is evident that this refers to the external Word, not the substantial, uncreated, and internal Word, as seen in verses 14–16. The reference is to a Word that is carried by a sent preacher.

1. It is the same kind of glad tidings that messengers bring on the mountains, yet not all to whom these messengers are sent receive the Spirit of faith.
2. It is a Word that, in verse 16, is called a "report." This is not an inward, substantial report or Word, because all who hear the Father inwardly are brought to Christ and believe the report (John 6:45). However, few or none believe this report (verse 16), as evidenced by the lament, "Who hath believed our report?" (Isaiah 53:1).
3. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:23–25: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." This demonstrates that the externally preached Word is instrumentally the power of God.

It is also clear that Paul speaks of external preaching, not the substantial Word or the Spirit itself:

1. The Spirit, when internally preached, is received as the power of God (Isaiah 59:19–20) and is a God-teaching Spirit. However, the external Word, by itself, is not such a Spirit.
2. The apostles and other men, as preachers, proclaim Christ and the Spirit, but they cannot effectually "in-preach" (so to speak) Christ and the Spirit to the hearers. If they could, they would be giving the Holy Spirit to all to whom they preach, which is contrary to both Scripture and experience (Acts 12, Acts 14, Acts 17). It is also blasphemous, for God alone gives the Holy Spirit.
3. The internal and substantial Word, when preached inwardly, effectually converts. However, Christ, as externally preached, is proclaimed only to some—to both Jews and Greeks—who then stumble at Him and do not believe (1 Peter 2).
4. This is further confirmed in 2 Corinthians 2:15–16: "We are unto God (preaching the Gospel, verse 14) a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life." The internal, substantial Word is never a savour of death.
5. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 states: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." This teaches:
  - The external Word was heard from the apostles.
  - It is an instrument of the Spirit.
  - It is not the internal Word, for it was not received by all who heard it. Verses 14–16 indicate that the Jews who heard it did not receive it.

## **Conclusion 2: The Preached Word Is Not a Dead Letter**

The preached Word, by itself, is not a dead letter, as claimed by the Swenckfeldians and Antinomians. Paul calls the Law a "dead letter" because it teaches what we should do but does not promise the Spirit of grace to enable obedience, as the Gospel does. The Law also punishes transgressors eternally, as Chrysostom notes (2 Corinthians 3, homily 7), and Oecumenius and Theophylact affirm the same.

Augustine states that the Law makes us aware of sin but does not enable us to avoid it. However, the Gospel is not a dead letter in itself, even though it remains devoid of the Spirit unless accompanied by divine power. It becomes a "savour of death unto death" and a "rock of offence" to those who stumble at it.

Some might ask: "Is the Law also, by accident and due to our sinful state, a condemning letter, just as the Gospel is? And if both are external and literal, must they both be dead letters?"

I answer: Not so. The Gospel, even in its external and literal sense, offers a means of reconciliation to those who believe. The Law, however, in no sense offers or gives life. Rather, because all have sinned, the Law's proper function for those under it is to issue a sentence of condemnation, even in its external and literal form. If the Law leads any to Christ, it is through a higher working of the Spirit than that which speaks merely in the letter of the Law.

It is true that the same infinite Spirit speaks in all of Scripture. Yet in the Law, He declares only: "Do all perfectly, or die eternally." However, when the Law is preached through the Prophets, Christ,



and the Apostles, the Lord uses it to convict and condemn so that sinners might flee to the surety of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:22).

In this sense, both Law and Gospel, as the Word of God, are not dead letters:

- "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7).
- "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Romans 1:16). It works faith (Romans 10:17) and grants salvation (Romans 15:4): "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

This refers to the written Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 1:21 states: "For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Therefore, the preached Word is a means of salvation for believers (Acts 13:26): "To you is this word of salvation sent." Yet, the Jews, to whom it was sent, blasphemed and judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (verse 46).

Acts 20:32 declares: "I commend you to the Word of his grace, which is able to build you up."

2 Corinthians 10:4 affirms: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." This applies to both the preached Word and church discipline. Since these weapons are mighty through God, the Word is not a dead letter.

The Word is likened to:

- A hammer and fire (Jeremiah 5:14).
- The sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).
- Sharper than a two-edged sword, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).
- The rod of Christ's lips, by which He smites the earth (Isaiah 11:4).
- The sceptre of His kingdom (Psalm 45:3).

All these confirm that the externally preached Word has power in itself to destroy, and, when accompanied by the Spirit, has power to convert. Therefore, it is an instrument of the Spirit both in judgment and in salvation.

## **Conclusion 3: The Lord Has Ordained Ministers as Instruments of Salvation**

The Lord has established and sanctified a ministry, and ministers are to be spiritual fathers of the second birth and instruments for saving themselves and others (1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 4:16).

2 Corinthians 3:2 states: "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, read of all men." Verse 3 continues: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart."

Likewise, 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20 asks: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and crown."

Swenckfeld denies that he destroys Scripture, the ministry, or preaching. However, in *Epistle* (1529), he states that in a Christian,

there are two aspects:

1. The new and internal man.
2. The old or external man, called the flesh.

According to him, God deals with the Christian internally by the "Word of Spirit and life" (by which he means the substantial Word), through which He reveals Himself in Christ by the riches of heavenly blessings. However, externally, God deals with the flesh of man by the "word of the letter," by preaching, and by signs and seals.

Saltmarsh, as if trained at his feet, says in *Free Grace* (p. 150): "And this Gospel fits man, who is made up of both flesh and Spirit, and so has need of a law without, in the letter, as well as in the heart and Spirit." He continues: "The law is spiritual, but we are carnal" (Romans 7). Nor, he argues, can such a state of flesh and Spirit be ordered merely by an external law, for the law and the Word of the Spirit are for a purely spiritual condition, such as the state of glory in which angels exist, living only by a spiritual law and revelation.

From this, they both agree that:

- The law is given to the outward man—the flesh, the body.
- The law of the Spirit of life is given to the inner man—the soul and Spirit.

This leads to several dangerous consequences.

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## **Dangerous Errors from This View**

1. **The law does not belong to a believer but only to civil courts.** This was the view of Islbis.

2. **The Word of God places no obligation on the inner man**—to know God, believe in Christ, love God, seek His glory, or long for heaven and Christ's return. If the law is given only to the flesh and the outward man, then the letter of the Gospel has no binding power over the heart for true Gospel obedience. *This is absurd.*
3. **There would be no sin in the spirit, soul, or inner man, because there would be no law, and thus no disobedience.** *This is most absurd.*
4. **The ministry and Scripture would not exist to create inward spiritual conformity between the soul and the Gospel**—to make us lowly and meek in spirit, as Christ is—but only to impose an outward conformity between the flesh and the law. But if this were true, how could the law be called *spiritual*?

I would argue instead that the spiritual law and the commandments of the Gospel were given first and foremost to govern our spirits, thoughts, and intentions, and only secondarily to the body and outward man—inasmuch as the outward acts of man fall under the rule of the will and the faculties of the inner man.

5. **The spirit without the Word would be the law itself**—the only rule regulating man in his most inward and spiritual actions, rather than the Scriptures. This would mean that the more spiritual a person becomes, the more lawless, loose, and carnal they would be.

## **Gospel Reformation and the Role of External Worship**

Mr. Del follows Swenckfeld even further, claiming that the completion of Gospel reformation—that is, the justification of a sinner and his conversion to Christ—is done by the Spirit alone, without any involvement of man. Consequently, he argues that this process is neither visible nor ecclesiastical (*Sermon*, p. 4).

He states that Gospel reformation "does not involve making laws for consciences" (contrary to Acts 15:22, 23, 28, etc.), through the sacred power of the clergy (the messengers of Christ and the churches), to enforce external conformity. He claims that external duties of worship and governance, confirmed by civil sanction, are unnecessary. However, Scripture teaches that it is lawful for kings like Artaxerxes to ratify and command the building of the house of God (Ezra 6:14), and that kings and queens should be "nursing fathers and mothers" to the Church (Isaiah 49:23). This should be our aim and prayer to God (1 Timothy 2:1–3), that "the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into the New Jerusalem" (Revelation 21:24). We heartily desire this, even though the Lord is fully able to build Jerusalem without the sword of sectarians or the arm of the magistrate.

Mr. Del argues that Gospel reformation does not concern itself with outward forms and external conformity, but only with reforming the heart. He claims that when the heart is right with God, outward forms cannot be wrong. He cites Christ's words regarding New Testament worship: "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). However, Christ does not say that external forms of worship are unnecessary. Mr. Del concludes that, because Christ does not mention outward forms in this passage, God's only concern in Gospel reformation is the heart (*Sermon*, p. 6).

Swenckfeld assigns slightly more importance to the ministry of the Word. He states that God deals externally with the flesh and outward man through the written Word, preaching, signs, and seals. However, Mr. Del insists that the Gospel concerns only the reforming of the heart. If this were true, the following dangerous errors would result.

## **The Dangerous Consequences of Del's Teaching**

**1. The Gospel would not require any outward duties or external worship.**

All external matters would be left indifferent, allowing people to choose whether to bow to idols or not, whether to murder or not—an accusation falsely made against us by the Council of Trent. This is one of the greatest calumnies the devil can devise: that in the Gospel, apart from faith, all other matters are indifferent and neither commanded nor forbidden.

**2. The Apostles and Elders in Acts 15 would not have been engaged in Gospel reformation.**

In forbidding fornication and uncleanness, they were concerned with holiness in both the inner and outward life—contrary to Del's claims.

**3. David's and Peter's sins would be of no concern, as long as their hearts were right.**

David's heart was right with God before he committed adultery and murder (1 Samuel 13:14), and Peter was called "blessed" before he denied Christ (Matthew 16:17). If only the heart matters, then their outward actions—adultery, murder, and

denial of Christ—would not have been wrong. This would justify the old Anabaptist sect known as *Fratres Liberi* and the Nicodemites, who claimed that as long as the heart was pure, one could break all ten commandments. According to Mr. Del's logic, false worship, lying, fornication, deceit, and oppression would not be sins.

**4. There would be no need for external worship under the Gospel.**

Mr. Del argues that if Christ does not explicitly mention something in John 4, then it has nothing to do with Gospel reformation. By this logic, because Christ does not explicitly mention faith, love, fear, hope, preaching, hearing, praying, or praising in John 4, then none of these are part of Gospel worship. Furthermore, since Christ does not mention obedience to the second table of the Law—love, mercy, righteousness, sobriety, avoiding murder, adultery, and oppression—then Gospel reformation would supposedly not concern itself with these either. This is the logic of Antinomians.

## **The Role of Ministers in Gospel Reformation**

**5. The power, wisdom, and righteousness of men would have no place in Gospel reformation.**

Mr. Del argues that human pride and loftiness must be laid in the dust in the day of reformation (*Sermon*, pp. 12–13). However, the power of preaching the Gospel, the keys of the Kingdom (to bind and loose sins), and the ministerial proclamation of forgiveness and judgment are the very means by which the Church is reformed. Preaching is the chief means by

which the Church is built up. These are not "pride and loftiness," for Christ Himself gave them to men (Matthew 16:18–19; John 20:21; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19; 2 Corinthians 10:5; 2 Corinthians 4:7; Ephesians 4:11–12; 1 Corinthians 12:28). Pride and arrogance are from Satan, not from Christ.

**6. Mr. Del claims that the Word alone reforms, but distorts its true meaning.**

He states that reformation is achieved by the Word, not by the power of the world or the sword. However, he knows that we do not argue for using the sword to convert souls. The sword was never ordained by God to turn a soul to Christ. However, when an *Elymas* perverts souls and corrupts the Gospel (Acts 13:8–11), we hold that the civil magistrate has the duty to restrain him so that he does not continue perverting others.

Yet Mr. Del follows the Enthusiasts and Swenckfeldians, for he claims (*Sermon*, p. 17) that this Word is not the Law but the Gospel—just as all Enthusiasts claim. If by this, they mean that we consider only the Law as a means of conversion while excluding the Gospel, then their own conscience should convict them that this is a false charge. The Law alone makes no one perfect, converts no one, and speaks not a word of Christ.

However, if they mean that the Law has no role at all in conversion, as they teach, then the following conclusions must follow:

**1. The Law should not be taught in the Church.**

But Christ and His Apostles taught both the Law and the Gospel.



**2. There would be no use in teaching something that has no influence on conversion.**

Yet the Law is that which reveals sin and our spiritual sickness, leading us to Christ as our physician (Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:23–24).

## **The Role of the Law and the External Word in Conversion**

1. That which shows us our condemnation, that reveals our grounds for despairing in ourselves, and that silences our mouths as guilty before God—that which exposes our debts and shows us that we are ruined and broken, so that we may flee to Christ, our rich surety—that which shuts us up under sin so that God may show mercy—is a means of our conversion. But such is the Law (Romans 3:19; Romans 8:2–3; Romans 11:32; Galatians 3:22).
2. Del and his fellow Antinomians mean nothing different by "the Word" than what Swenckfeld means—that is, the internal and substantial Word. Hear Del speak in the very language of Swenckfeld (*Sermon*, p. 18):

*"So that the Word by which Christ reforms is not the Word outside us, as the word of the Law is, but the Word within us, as it is written, 'The word is nigh thee' &c. If you live under the Word many years, yet if it does not reach your heart, it will never change or reform you."*

He further adds (p. 19) that in the Gospel, the Word and the Spirit are always joined. He therefore claims that when Christ

says, "*The words that I speak are spirit and life*," this means that they come from the Spirit and carry the Spirit with them.

From this, the following erroneous conclusions must be drawn:

1. The externally preached Gospel, according to Del and the Antinomians, is not the Word by which Christ converts souls. Faith, they argue, does not come from outward hearing as an instrument of conversion—contrary to what we have already proven. Instead, they claim that faith comes from the inward Word in the heart, which they define as faith itself.
2. The argument of both Swenckfeld and Del is baseless. They reason as follows:
  - The outwardly preached Word, unless it enters the heart, cannot convert the soul, for it is merely a sound (says Swenckfeld), or merely a letter (say the Antinomians).
  - Therefore, the external Word is not an instrument of conversion, but only the internal Word.

I utterly deny this conclusion. It is like saying:

- If a pen, well-inked, is laid on paper a thousand times, it will never write unless the hand of the writer moves it—therefore, the pen is no instrument of writing. This does not follow.
- Or, if bread, without God's blessing, is never turned into flesh and blood, then the baker's bread is no instrument of nourishment. This is an unjust

conclusion that destroys all natural and spiritual ordinances.

The only valid conclusion is this: the Word outside of us is not an *efficacious* cause of conversion, nor is it the *principal* cause; it can do nothing except when the Spirit enlivens and works with it. This we fully affirm as a Gospel truth.

## **The Word as More Than Mere Sound**

3. Some say, "*The Word is but a sound and a letter.*" I answer:

It is not an ordinary sound, like the odes of Horace or the epistles of Seneca. Rather, it is a sound filled with majesty, power, and heaven itself, so that every Word is pregnant with grace and life. Even when considered apart from the Spirit, its style, conveyance, and method exhibit so much divinity, majesty, holiness, and authority that it bears the marks of heaven and reflects its Author—God Himself. Therefore, it is more than a mere sound.

To a deaf soul, in an actual state of hardness, it may indeed be but a sound. And when the Antinomians claim it is "just a dead letter," they speak only of the paper, ink, and printed characters. But we do not take it this way. Instead, we understand the words to signify and involve the things promised—the precious promises of God. As the Lord says in Hosea 8:12: "*I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.*"

Therefore, the Word is not a dead letter, but the instrument, the chariot, and the means by which Christ and the Spirit are conveyed to the heart. True, without the Spirit, the Word does not work—just as no instrument, tool, hammer, or axe can build a house unless the mason or carpenter uses it. Yet, does it follow that they are not instruments at all?

## **The Antinomian and Enthusiast Distortion of the Gospel**

4. Del and the Antinomians, together with Swenckfeld, claim that the Gospel should only be preached to those who already have the internal Word and Spirit in their hearts. This would mean that:

- When Christ and the Apostles (Matthew 13; Acts 28; Acts 13) preached Christ and the Gospel externally, as something distinct from the Law, they were not preaching the Word of God or the Gospel—because, according to Del, it lacked the Spirit and could never change or reform anyone (*Sermon*, p. 18).
- Swenckfeld further argues that the preached Word produces only a "literal and feigned faith," and that "the Word and the Spirit are always joined" (*Sermon*, p. 19).
- Therefore, according to Del, the written, read, and externally preached Gospel is not truly the Gospel.

But this is a deception, for they mean the "internal Word," not the *verbum vocale* (the spoken Word).

5. Saltmarsh, in *Free Grace* (p. 146), claims that the "preaching of faith" is not the Scripture or the preached Word. Del argues for

the same when he claims (*Sermon*, p. 19) that only the Word always joined with the Spirit is the true Gospel. However:

- The Scripture and the external vocal Word are not always accompanied by the Spirit.
- When preached to the reprobate and to hardened, malicious souls who stumble at Christ, it is not joined with the Spirit (1 Peter 2:7; Matthew 13:14–15; John 12:37–39; John 9:39).

The Antinomians and Enthusiasts speak of a Word that always converts, and claim that this distinguishes the Gospel from the Law, which they say is merely a "dead letter" and "cannot minister the Spirit" (*Sermon*, pp. 18–19). Saltmarsh argues the same (*Free Grace*, pp. 146–147), as does Swenckfeld.

Therefore, when the Antinomians and Swenckfeldians claim that they do not reject the Word, the ministry, ordinances, or preaching, they are deceiving us.

By "the Word of God that begets faith," they mean the internal Word, not the Scriptures, nor the written and preached Word. They therefore fail to refute the charge justly laid against them—namely, that under their teaching, the Gospel requires neither Scripture, preaching, sacraments, hearing, nor any duty toward others, nor even abstinence from murder, fornication, or theft. They treat all external matters as indifferent.

## **The Preaching of the Gospel and the Power of the Word**

3. You see how false it is to claim that the Gospel should only be preached to those who are already converted, on the basis that it

cannot be received by faith by anyone else. This is directly contrary to Christ's express command to His Apostles in Matthew 28:19–20: *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations."* Likewise, Paul preached to the obstinate Jews (Acts 13) and to the scoffing Athenians (Acts 17). If the Gospel were only to be preached to those already converted, then what was it that Paul preached to them?

4. It is an improper argument of the Swenckfeldians and Antinomians to say:

*"The Word is a literal, carnal, and sensible thing; therefore, God does not work faith, which is a spiritual grace, through it."*

The only valid conclusion is that God does not work faith through the vocal Word *alone*, unless He also applies the omnipotent power of His grace.

Furthermore, their assumption is false. The preached Word, although in its sound it is carnal, literal, and bodily, yet in its power, majesty, and the divine truth it signifies—which is the new birth brought forth in the womb of the Word—it is spiritual, living, and heavenly.

5. Nor does it follow that justification originates from man simply because the vocal Word is an instrument of it—unless they argue that hearing and preaching necessarily and effectually produce justification and conversion. But this is false, for neither hearing nor preaching are parts, members, or efficient causes of conversion or justification in themselves.
6. Justifying faith and salvation are, by nature, spiritual realities, and yet they originate from the preached Word as an instrument

—even from what the world calls *the foolishness of preaching* (1 Corinthians 1:21).

The Word is not wholly bodily simply because it reaches us through the sense of hearing. Rather, when the preached Word is considered in terms of the great things of God that it declares—and not merely as letters and sounds—it is not carnal but spiritual (2 Corinthians 10:5).

- It is *sharper than a two-edged sword*, bringing both salvation and judgment (Hebrews 4:12).
- Even when it is rejected, it remains *the savour of death unto death* for those who perish (2 Corinthians 2:16–17).
- It is *the everlasting Gospel* (Revelation 14:6), remaining the power of God whether received in faith or rejected in unbelief.

## **The Role of the Word and the Spirit in Justifying Faith**

7. It does not follow that justifying faith is a work of man simply because frail men, who are but earthen vessels, bear this heavenly treasure. Nor does it mean that we believe in the Word as if it were God Himself, as though the principal author were the instrument, or the Master and Lord were the servant. For it is *the Word of God* that is the instrument of conversion, not the *Word, God*. The substantial Word, God, is the author and the only finisher of our faith.

We do not trust, hope in, or believe the Word in any way other than as a means or instrument sanctified by God for so blessed an end. God alone is the formal object of our faith and reliance.

Yet, in His condescension, He clothes Himself in His own Word and ordinances for our capacity.

Nor does it follow that because a sinful man preaches the Word, he is the one laying the first stone of the new creation. Faith and conversion do not have their first cause and origin in man or in the free will of the preacher, as the Swenckfeldians imagine. For faith, as faith, has no beginning or part derived from the mere act of preaching, nor from the letter or the bare sound of words—no more than Lazarus had his soul restored to his body by the created and vocal sound of Christ's words: "*Lazarus, come forth.*"

Faith comes by the preached Word *tali modo*, in such a way, as the breath of the Holy Ghost moves along with the vocal and literal sound of the words spoken by a sinful man. The soul of Lazarus was restored to his body by Christ's words, but those words were empowered and enlivened by the omnipotence of the Godhead, which indeed raised the dead man.

The only difference is that Christ's spoken words were not, in themselves, an active instrument in the resurrection of Lazarus, just as the blowing of the rams' horns was not, in itself, an active instrument in causing the walls of Jericho to fall. Rather, at the mere presence of these acts, the dead man was quickened, and the walls fell.

However, I hold that the preached Word—because of what it signifies, as a divine sign, and indeed as the Word of God (as Scripture everywhere calls it)—does contribute an instrumental, organic, and active influence in the begetting of faith. But this is only as it is elevated above itself, beyond the mere nature and



sphere of a vocal and audible sound, and as it is empowered by the Spirit.

## **The Relationship Between the Word and the Spirit in Faith**

Now, I consider it mere curiosity to inquire how precisely the Spirit and the Word are united in the working of faith. If anyone asks, let them first explain the union between bread that is eaten and the nutritive power that turns it into blood and flesh—how, through the process physicians call *assimilation*, bread is transformed into a part of the child's hand, foot, or shoulder, causing the body to grow to the full stature of a man.

I do not believe that the Spirit enters into the physical sound of words or is somehow enclosed within it as it reaches the hearer's soul, making him believe. Rather, I agree with the learned Pemble, who argues that the Spirit does not quicken *the dead letter of the Word* but rather *the dead man who hears the Word*.

The Holy Ghost has never so far reproached the Word of God as to call it a "dead letter" in the sense of the Swenckfeldians, Familists, and Antinomians. Their view is that the Word, sacraments, and all ordinances are merely an *alphabet* for the unconverted, just as Juan de Valdés says of images and crucifixes—that they are like books for teaching the ignorant and unlearned.

But when men are justified, called, and regenerated, they claim that they no longer need the Word, ordinances, or even the Law to lead, guide, teach, direct, or command them. They argue that a learned man has no need to go back to his first catechism to learn the ABCs and spelling all over again.

# The Dangerous Errors of Antinomianism

The Antinomians argue that the Word does nothing but prepare and dispose the outward man. Once a person is justified, they claim he is as sinless and pure as Christ Himself.

- *Honeycomb* (ch. 3, p. 25),
- Saltmarsh, *Free Grace* (p. 140),
- *Honeycomb* (ch. 5, p. 47),
- Den, *Man of Sin* (p. 9–11),

and others claim that once justified, a believer no longer needs anything that man or angel can provide.

Del (*Sermon*, p. 26) asserts that the justified need no laws except three:

1. The law of a new creature,
2. The law of the Spirit of life that is in Christ,
3. The law of love.

None of these, they claim, are found in the written Scripture or in the preached Word.

Saltmarsh (*Free Grace*, p. 240) argues that *the believer is as free from hell, the Law, and bondage on earth as if he were already in heaven*. He claims that the only thing he lacks to make him fully free is the knowledge that he already is free.

If this were true, then in heaven the believer would no longer need:

- Preaching,
- The written Scriptures,

- Sacraments,
- Prayer for forgiveness,
- Repentance,
- Faith,

nor would he need to lament, as Paul did in Romans 7, about *the indwelling body of sin*.

## **The Final Error: Annihilating the Means of Grace**

The *Bright Star* (ch. 11, pp. 108–109) teaches that all means—ordinances, light, understanding, willing, and thinking—are annihilated and made nothing. According to them, *the believer (ch. 12) beholds God without any means in this life*, and therefore, he no longer has anything to do with the Word or with growing in grace and knowledge.

These teachings fundamentally destroy the necessity of the Word, the ordinances, and the moral Law. They make the Gospel void of any means of sanctification and remove any duty to obey God. They deny the need for growing in grace, being led by the Word, or striving for holiness.

This is the height of Antinomianism—the belief that the justified have no need of the Word, the Law, or the ordinances of God. But Scripture utterly condemns such ideas, teaching that:

- "*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul*" (Psalm 19:7).
- "*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*" (Romans 10:17).

- *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).*

The true Gospel does not free us from the means of grace but binds us to them, making them effectual for our salvation and sanctification.

## **Conclusion**

The Word of God is not a dead letter, nor is it to be abandoned once we are justified. The Spirit does not bypass the Word but works through it. Just as the body cannot grow without food, so the soul cannot grow without the continual nourishment of the Word and the means of grace.

The Antinomian claim that believers no longer need the Word, Law, or ordinances is a grievous error. True faith clings to the Word, not as an idle or powerless sound, but as the living, active instrument of God's power, sanctified by the Spirit to bring life and holiness to His people.

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