

HEBREWS 17
(Hebrews 4:12,13)

THE WORD OF GOD (PART II)
By Ron Harvey

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

INTRODUCTION

Several weeks ago I handed out index cards before one of our worship services and I asked the congregation to write out several qualities that they most desired in a pastor. And much to my delight, the number one answer by an overwhelming margin was, "We want someone who preaches the word of God." I would say that almost one hundred percent of you had that answer in some form. And most of you were emphatic that this was the most important function of a pastor and this was what you were looking for above all else.

And though there are many qualities to be desired in a pastor, I would suggest that the Scriptures also put heavy emphasis on the absolute and indispensable business of preaching the word of God.

Now you would think that this goes without saying. To us it is so central to everything that we do. The proclamation of the word of God is the centerpiece of our worship. It is the principal means by which we honor and glorify God. We read his word and we teach his word and we preach his word. And if we would exhort one another and counsel one another it is on the basis and the authority of the word of God.

If you will notice, we place the pulpit in the most prominent and central place in our sanctuary. We raise it up where all can see. And when anyone comes in our doors they will not mistake that the pulpit is the

central focus here.

Example: There was an article on the front page of the Commercial Appeal last week. And the article was about a woman who was being disciplined at a local church here in Memphis. And as I was reading the article, a quote from this woman jumped off the page at me. She was telling how she just wanted to come back to the church and sing in the choir. And she made this statement. She said, "After all, the choir is the heart of the church."

And as much as I love singing and as much as I love our choir and our loyal choir members, the choir is not the heart of the church. We could have church without the choir. We could have church without singing. We could have church without piano music.

But we could not have church without the teaching and preaching of the word of God. It is the word of God that is the heart of the church. The preacher is not the heart of the church. The teacher is not the heart of the church. But the word of God is the heart of the church.

And I would say that if the church has gone wrong throughout the centuries since Jesus established his church, it has gone wrong when it has departed from the word of God.

The word of God is the rule of life for every Christian person and it is the rule of life for the church. It is everything to us. It is not a part, it is the whole. The word of God, it is life.

Example: Brother Mark is a commercial pilot. And when there is a storm and when his sight is blinded by clouds or darkness, he watches his instruments and those instruments tell him which way is up and which way is down and which way is east and which way is west.

And the word of God is our compass to show us up from down spiritually. We are blinded by the storm clouds of our fallen nature. Our hearts are darkened by Adam's sin. And we cling to the word of God as are compass and we depend on it to land us safely.

You know what I love about the word of God? It is absolute truth.

When I read it, I may not fully understand it, but I know it is truth. It is truer than any encyclopedia. It is truer true than any science book. It is absolute truth because it is spoken by a God who is true. We can hold onto the word of God with absolute conviction because it is the truth by which all other knowledge is judged. I love the confidence that we can have in clinging to his word. I love the authority that we can have when we proclaim his word. We can speak with all authority because it is the very word of God.

Wednesday night we considered Hebrews 4:12 and 13 and I want to review that with you briefly before we take a look at 2 Timothy this morning.

We saw from Hebrews 4:12 that,

1. The word of God is quick.

Now this word quick does not mean fast. It means alive. God's word is alive. If you understand nothing else about the word of God, I hope you understand that God's word is alive

There is something about the word of God that is very unique and special and that something is that it is alive. The Word of God is not simply intellectual dogma. It is not mere words spread across a page. But it is alive with activity and it does the works of God. You see, God sends words into the air and those words themselves run about here and there doing the will of God.

The word of God is a living force. The word of God is capable of bringing worlds into existence. The word of God is capable of all manner of good work. And in fact, it is the word of God that brings to pass the whole of God's sovereign plan. Whatever it is that God has decreed - his word brings it to pass.

God's word is that living force that brings about salvation in the hearts of men. It is the word of God that brings forth fruit.

Listen to what Paul says about the Word of God.

*For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;
Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth*

fruit . . .

Col.1:5,6

And we also saw that,

2. The word of God is powerful.

The word that is translated powerful in verse 12 is the greek word meaning energy. And that's a very good way to look at it. The word of God is a bundle of energy

A physics expert will tell you that energy is the capacity to do work.

And the word of God is a living force that has infinite capacity to do God's work.

Is not my word like as a fire? Saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?

Jeremiah 23:29

Here is a lesson that we must learn. God's Word is a great worker. It accomplishes something. And it accomplishes something because it is alive and it is powerful. Let me just give you a couple of examples:

Example: The word of God was the cause of creation. God opened his mouth, words came out, and the worlds came into existence.

Example: The word of God is the cause of that new creation which we call regeneration.

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

I Peter 1:23

By its living power, the word of God operates on a dead soul – a soul that is without hope in the world. It is a soul incapable of faith or obedience. And it is the word of God that powerfully makes a soul alive.

Such is the great power of the word of God that it can overcome the

stone deadness of the fallen nature of man and make it new.

The word of God is that force that breathed life into Aaron's rod and caused it to bring forth buds of new life. And it is the word of God that can breathe new life into a heart of stone.

Never doubt the ability of the word of God to do such things because our text says the word of God is quick and powerful.

But our text also says,

3. The word of God is piercing.

The word of God is alive and powerful and it is like a two-edged sword. That is, it is capable of piercing. Now a sword pierces into the physical parts of man. And it can cut your joints apart and it can pierce the bone and even penetrate into that soft matter in the bone which is called marrow. That is what a two-edged sword can do.

But that is just the picture of what the word of God can do to the immaterial parts of man.

The Word of God, being alive and powerful, pierces into the very heart of man. The Word of God is not an idle spectator but it is sharper than a sword and cuts deep into the inner man. This is what it means when it says it pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.

So, if the word of God is alive and powerful and piercing, what is it that it can do? And the answer is that it can make heart alive unto God and bringing about faith and repentance.

This is the most amazing thing about the word of God – it can regenerate. Nothing else can make a man alive. Eloquent words can't do it. Strong persuasion can't do it. Psychology can't do it. But the word of God can do it.

Nothing can save a man but the word of God. An altar call can't save a man. We don't ask someone to come down to the front of the church to receive Jesus because Jesus isn't down here he is seated at the right hand of God in the heavens. And you receive Him by looking toward heaven with

your petitions. And it is the word of God that changes your heart and causes you to look up.

There is not a power on earth that is capable of turning a wicked heart into a pure heart except the word of God.

That's why it says,

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

I Peter 1:23

So the word of God is alive and powerful and piercing but our text also says,

4. The word of God is discerning.

The word of God, like a surgeon's knife, lays bare the soul and spirit of man. It cuts to the very thoughts and intents of the heart of man. The word of God exposes man's sin in such a way that a man is said to be naked before God. And the word of God takes all of your secret sins and opens them up to the light so that all things are manifest before God. And it opens you up and exposes you to the righteous wrath of God which the book of Romans says is stored up in heaven against all those who do not believe.

The word of God is an irresistible force for salvation upon those whom God has called. And it is an irresistible force of judgment against those who are unrighteous.

I want you to take a look at another place in the Scripture where the two-edged sword is mentioned. And it is in the book of Revelation. Now whatever our viewpoint is on the book of Revelation, it is first and foremost a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ . . .

Revelation 1:1

And John's vision in the first chapter of Revelation is a vision of that great Christ. It is Jesus who has been resurrected and who is in heaven in

his glory. And I want you to look at the picture of Christ in these verses.

Look at Revelation 1:16 where John is describing his vision of Christ.

And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword:

And then in Revelation 2:12.

*And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write: These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.
I know thy works . . .*

And in Revelation 19:15

And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

So you see that the sword speaks of the word of God which issues out of the mouth of God and works a work of judgment.

The message of Hebrews is that God is able to discern if you do not believe and the sword with two edges will lay you open to God's fierce judgment.

It is your gravest and most pressing duty to believe God because that is the only way to be saved from the word of God which is living and powerful and piercing and will bring God's fierce wrath on unbelievers.

Jesus has made a way for sinners to come out of condemnation. And it is a simple way. It is called faith.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

Acts 16:31

But we should all know and the book of Hebrews makes it clear that faith is not merely an offer it is a command. God doesn't merely ask us to believe, he commands it. It is our chief duty unto God – to believe Him. And if we don't believe Him, then the Word of God will cut us to shreds.

There is an interesting passage in John. There Jesus said,

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

John 12:

Application of our text to the Church

1. We need to preach the Word of God.

The gravest error of churches today is that by and large they have abandoned the Word of God as being the power behind salvation. For whatever reason, churches no longer believe that the preaching of the Word of God will bear fruit. And once churches abandon faith in the power of the Word of God, then they have abandoned the only power that is sufficient unto salvation.

I am very afraid that in our own country, our churches have to a large degree abandoned the preaching of the Word of God in favor of gimmicks and programs and entertainment and things that appeal to the unregenerate. They have abandoned the word of God in favor of things that appear to successfully draw people into the church. They have abandoned the word of God and have adopted methods that produce large numbers.

No longer do we see that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, but marketing strategies and programs that appeal to the unregenerate heart are the power, not unto salvation, but unto bigger churches.

But our text says that,

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Let me say on the sound basis of the word of God itself, that what we need is a return to preachers who preach the bare, naked Word of God –

word by word and line by line. The power is not in the preacher and it is not in the delivery but it is in the message itself. The preacher is not quick and powerful and piercing and discerning, but the Word of God is.

And secondly, by way of application, let me say that,

2. The Word of God will judge the church.

That very word of God which churches are abandoning wholesale will judge them.

Never think that because we have united in a church membership, that we escape the eyes of Him that searches all things. Revelation 2 and 3 make it clear that God judges and disciplines His churches.

I saw somewhere that fifty percent of all Americans claim to be born again. And if that were true, you could be sure that we would see a massive effect on our culture.

But I would suggest that the percentage of true believers is a mere fraction of those who actually profess Jesus Christ. And this book of Hebrews is a stern warning to people just like that. Putting on a charade on Sunday morning does not confuse the Word of God.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

My goal for every one of us in this church is that we would be true believers. My hope is that when the Word of God opens us up and lays us bare, that it will find among the bone and marrow and among the ligaments and sinew and in our soul and spirit a healthy dose of saving faith. And this will only come by the preaching and hearing of the pure and perfect and powerful word of God.

Now let's turn to 2 Timothy 4 and let's look briefly at verses 2-5. And the great exhortation to young Timothy is,

Preach the word

What a grand and glorious charge this is. He didn't exhort Timothy to sharpen his organization skills or to take classes on human relationships or counseling or business. But he said, "Preach the word."

This is the great business of ministers and pastors. It is the preaching of the word of God because the word of God is the power of God unto salvation.

This is a most high calling, to serve as a preacher of the word of God. And I want you to see first that,

I. The preaching of the word involves a most solemn duty.

And so, I want you to see how Paul charges Timothy.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ. (v.1)

Paul in effect brings Timothy before Almighty God and before Jesus Christ and charges him there and says, "Preach the word."

It would be a most serious charge even if Paul, as apostle to the Gentiles, would charge Timothy to preach the word. But Paul brings Timothy to a higher authority - that is the great and awesome God and his Son Jesus Christ and says, "Preach the word."

And look Timothy, you are charged to preach the Word in the presence of Jesus who will judge the living and the dead when he returns. Preach the word Timothy and in this do not fail!

All I can say is, "Woe to those ministers who put on their robes and stand behind a pulpit and who do not preach the word of God.

Paul put it this way.

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

I Cor. 9:16

The eye of God and Jesus Christ himself is on the preacher and woe to the preacher if he does not preach the word of God. There is nothing else to preach. There is nothing else worthy of the pulpit. There is no power in anything else. And so, preach the word!

But also see here that,

II. The preaching of the word must be done in season and out of season.

What does this mean? It seems that “in season” means when the gospel is well received. When the circumstances are favorable to preaching as when the people are disposed to receive it. Does your congregation long after the word of God and do they receive it gladly, then preach while the season is in.

This is a most agreeable pulpit from which to preach in this church because you are a most receptive people. From all I can tell, you receive the word with gladness and it is a pleasure to preach the word of God here.

But there are other times and other places where the word of God is not received gladly. They stoned Stephen when he preached the word. And many other preachers have been dealt with treacherously when they preached the word. Yet, the minister is under an equally compelling duty to preach the word when it is out of season.

I hope the preaching of the word of God will always be in season in this church and may it never be out of season. But by God’s grace, may the preaching of the word be instant under any circumstances.

I want to hurry on and show you that,

III. The word of God will sometimes involved reproof, rebuking and exhortation.

That is, it is sometimes necessary for a preacher to tell the people their faults. Particularly is it necessary to convince the wicked of their sin and their evil ways. It is necessary to call them to account and to expose the evil nature of their heart and to thus lead them to repentance.

But notice that the rebuking and the reproofing and the exhorting are to be done with longsuffering. Sometimes it is necessary to bear long with people. We will not revive everyone in one day. It may take many days and perhaps many years for sinners to come to repentance and so the minister must be longsuffering. This implies a large degree of patience and gentleness on the part of the preacher. He must bear with sinners and he must wait on God for results.

But notice also, that the reproofing and the rebuking and the exhorting is to be done by the preaching of doctrine.

Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. (v.2)

It always comes back to that simple command, "Preach the gospel." That's how a preacher exhorts, he lays the word of God out with clear and convincing proof, such that the word of God cannot be denied except by obstinate unbelief.

But I have a sad note for you, And that is,

IV. The word of God will not always be endured.

This prophecy has been borne out in the long history of the church. And in 2000 years all manner of heresies have come in and led people astray.

And it says,

And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables. (v.4)

There is only one way to avoid such a fate, and that is to engage in the preaching of the word of God. When we fail to preach the word, then we will turn to fables.

If we ever grow weary of that old gospel of Jesus Christ, then we will turn away from true preaching and we will turn to fables and fancies and soon we will not know the truth any longer and worse than that, we won't care about the truth any longer. And we will get a preacher who has no idea what it means to preach the word.

And Paul says, "Woe unto that man who preaches not the gospel."

It is the word of God that is our glory. If our church were a dining room table, our glorious centerpiece would be the word of God. All that we are is because of the power of the word of God. All that we do is dictated by the commands and principles of the word of God. And therefore, all we preach is the word of God.

God help us in this solemn duty.