

The Word of God Is Living

By Mark Jarvinen

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

*¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. **(Hebrews 4:12-16 - ESV)***

INTRODUCTION

The epistle to the Hebrews is addressed primarily to Jewish converts who were being tempted to revert back to Judaism out of fear concerning their impending persecution at the hands of Rome. The message of Hebrews is couched in dire warnings against falling away from Christ and reminders of all that they possessed in knowing Him. They were in grave danger of hardening their hearts. Last week, our text from **Hebrews 3** included **v. 12** –

“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”

In **Hebrews 4:7** we read, ***“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”***

Based on Hebrews, we see that it's possible for those who have once believed in Jesus to harden their hearts toward Him. Therefore, today

God would say to us through the author of Hebrews, ***“Listen to Me! Do you have a heart problem? Submit to surgery.”*** How do we go about letting God perform surgery on our hearts (our inner selves)? The Word of God is His scalpel that He uses to get inside us.

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I. THE WORD OF LAW REVEALS OUR NEED. (vv. 12-13).

Many years ago, a young adult woman sought my pastoral counsel about her inability to forgive her father for the preferential treatment he had shown to her younger sister throughout their childhood. She had grown quite embittered over the years. She wanted to forgive her Dad, but couldn't let go of his insensitive, uncaring words and actions. Yet, in reading Scripture, she had discovered that Jesus taught that we are to forgive even our enemies. She was troubled about that. Why was she so troubled? It was because the scalpel of God's Word was cutting into the sin of an unforgiving heart.

A. It Is A Living Word

The Library of Congress claims to be the largest library in the world, with more than 150 million items, including books, recordings, photos, maps, and manuscripts on approximately 850 miles of bookshelves. Yet, the Word of God is the only one that lays claim to being a ***“living”*** Word. I remember hearing **Pastor John Kilde** preach from this passage at Inspiration Point many years ago saying, ***“You don't read God's Word as much as God's Word reads you.”***

The Word shows us who we really are. It's no dead letter, it's a living Word.

B. It Is An Active Word

The Greek word translated “**active**” is (*energes*), the word from which we get the word “energy” and “energetic” in English. Thus, the Word of God is “**energetic,**” or we could say “**at work.**” **Bill Maher** is a liberal talk show host on the HBO program “Real Time,” now in its 16 season. He is a professed atheist. Purportedly he thinks religion is a “**neurological disorder,**” and has stated that the Bible is simply “**a book filled with prudish outdated morality used to dominate and control the lives of weak-minded people.**” (Illustration: Sermon Central).

But then there's the stories of people like the former atheist, world-renowned author of the 20th century and Oxford scholar, **C.S. Lewis**, who tells of his own begrudging conversion to Christ, before becoming a champion apologist for the Christian faith. Listen to an excerpt from his testimony:

Really, a young Atheist cannot guard his faith too carefully. Dangers lie in wait for him on every side. . . . For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion... . In the Trinity term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. . . . (Surprised by Joy [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World], pp. 226-229)

The word of God is active and able to create faith in even the hardest, most resistant hearts.

C. It's A Penetrating (Piercing) Word

“... sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow,”

In ancient Hebrew culture a short sword, called a “**machaira**” (ma-ha-rah), was a lightweight, double-edged, and very sharp weapon used in close-quarter combat situations because it could cut both ways and was particularly deadly. This would have been the type of sword Peter used to cut off the ear of the servant, Malchus, in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of Jesus’ arrest (**John 18:10**). By analogy, this provides us with a visual of how the Scripture can open our inner life and expose it to ourselves, and to others. No heart is too tough and no soul too dark for the “Sword of the Spirit,” God’s Holy Word, to penetrate. It exposes our sins, uncovers our iniquities, lays bare our excuses, and unmasks our self-righteousness to reveal the unvarnished truth – we are sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God.

D. It's A Discerning Word

“... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account”
(vv. 12d-13).

In other words, God sees everything about us, there’s nowhere to hide when the searchlight of His Spirit shines into the recesses of our hearts. God’s Word reveals to us that He understands our innermost motives, and there is no escaping His judgment. Isn’t it true that when we fear that there’s something wrong with us physically, we put off going to the doctor? We don’t want to hear bad news. When it comes to our sin, wouldn’t we rather have God look the other way?

Don't we want to avoid Him altogether? Yet, God is Holy and Just. Could He be any other way and still be God? And so when we encounter God's Word of the Law, (*kritikos in Greek*) the word from which we derive the English term "**critic**," we have God penetrating the innermost recesses of our being as a critic, or judge, to whom we must give an account. Ignoring our sin problem will not make it go away.

There you have it. The Word of the Law opens us up and exposes us, revealing the depth of our sin. Like a mirror, the Word of God shows us our sin and our need for a remedy outside of ourselves. In the new covenant of grace, the Law prepares the way for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the One sent by God to be our Savior.

II. THE WORD OF GOSPEL REVEALS OUR SAVIOR (vv. 14-16).

The Word of Law is the scalpel of God. It is the only "surgical instrument" powerful enough to cut through our layers of sinful resistance to expose our true selves. **HOWEVER**, it's only a scalpel. How many of you have ever undergone an actual surgery? I have. If you were like me, you asked plenty of questions. Martha works at a medical clinic and is surrounded by medical professionals on a daily basis, all skilled specialists in various aspects of pediatrics. She also had plenty of questions about my surgery. Do you think the questions we asked were concerned with the sharpness of the scalpel, or how often the surgical instruments had been used successfully in past surgeries? Uh, no! The only thing that mattered was "**Who will be the surgeon performing my operation?**" Tell me about his or her credentials. How many of these surgeries has he or she successfully

performed? You want to choose a surgeon about whom you feel confident... **Getting back to today's text – when it comes to our spiritual lives, God's Word is the scalpel, but JESUS is our Surgeon. It is from Him that we derive our confidence.**

That's why **v. 14** of our text begins with the word **"Since then."** In light of everything that's been said about the role of God's Word of the Law, now listen to **v. 14** turn the corner:

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

We have a **"great high priest"** who is none other than **JESUS CHRIST**. He is the One sent by God the Father, who as the fully human, fully divine, Son of God, through His death and resurrection, entered the "Holy of Holies," and provided us with access to the very presence of God. On the basis of this saving work of Jesus, the Hebrew Christians were admonished to **"hold firmly to the faith ...,"** In other words, we have a surgeon we can trust. He has provided access to God. He can take us where we need to go. He can lead us into relationship with Him and keep us there. This is the Word of the Gospel! This is the Good News that saves and keeps us!

Moreover, the Word of Gospel reveals that our Surgeon (JESUS) fully understands us. Note **v. 15** –

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus, our Savior, God's Son, yet human like us, is able to **"sympathize with our weaknesses."** **Isaiah 53:3** refers to the

Messiah as One who ***“was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.”*** He was tempted ***“in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”***

What does this description of Jesus tell us about Him? Simply that when He uses the scalpel of the Word on our hearts, His purpose is not to go in vengefully and viciously, to cut and slash as one who intends only to cause us pain. Rather He goes in as a surgeon, whose intention is to cut with precision and care in order to provide mercy and grace, in order to heal our hearts and provide us with confident access to the Father. **Verse 16** says it well:

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

CONCLUSION

In the 5th century lived a man named **Augustine**, who became one of the most influential Christians in Church history. As a young man, he was given over to a life of sin, and was the subject of his mother’s most earnest prayers. One day, while sitting on a bench with a friend, having been reading the Bible and weeping over the state of his life, he heard the voice of a child singing a song from the neighboring house, the lyrics of which seemed to repeat over and over ***“Pick it up, read it; pick it up read it.”***

Augustine wrote of this experience as follows:

“I snatched up the Apostle’s book, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell. There it said:

‘Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lust thereof.’”

Augustine continued -

“I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.” (Illustration: Sermon Central).

The Bible is the most powerful book known to man. It has the power to convict people of sins, change their hearts through the transforming grace of God in Christ, and keep them in the faith by the work of the Holy Spirit. Read it. Remain in it. The Word will speak to your deepest need and satisfy your soul! It is the living Word of God.

A-men.