

Hebrews 4:11-16

Esteeming the Word of God

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged 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 – v. 12

I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food Job said in the midst of his afflictions (Job 23:12). *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* Christ said to the devil during the time of His temptation (Mt. 4:4). *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*, the Psalmist said in Ps. 119:105.

The Hebrew Christians being addressed in this epistle stood in need of these kinds of reminders – reminders pertaining to the light and penetrating power of the word of God. You see, at the end of the day, the thing that mattered the most was not what kind of pressures they were enduring or who was right and who was wrong in terms of the various parties that were trying to influence them in their religion – the thing that mattered most was what does the word of God say and where do I stand in the light of that word?

Albert Barnes provides a good analysis of this verse and the following in his commentary. He notes: The design of vv. 12,13 is obvious. It is to show that we cannot escape the notice of God; that all insincerity, unbelief, and hypocrisy, will be detected by him; and that since our hearts are perfectly open before him, we should be sincere, and should not attempt to deceive him. The sense is, that the truth of God is all-penetrating and searching, and that the real thoughts and intents of the heart will be brought to light; and that if there is insincerity and self-deception, there can be no hope of escape. There has been a great variety of opinion here about the meaning of the phrase "the word of God." Some have supposed that it means the Lord Jesus; others the whole of the divine revelation; others the gospel; others the particular threatening referred to here. The "word of God" is that which God speaks—whether it be a promise or a threatening; whether it be law or gospel; whether it be a simple declaration or a statement of a doctrine. The idea here is, that what God had said is fitted to detect hypocrisy, and to lay open the true nature of the feelings of the soul, so that there can be no escape for the guilty. His truth is adapted to bring out the real feelings, and to show man exactly what he is. Truth always has this power—whether preached, or read, or communicated by conversation, or impressed upon the memory and conscience by the Holy Spirit. There can be no escape from the penetrating, searching application of the word of God. That truth has power to show what man is, and is like a penetrating sword that lays open the whole man. The phrase "the word of God" here may be applied, therefore, to the truth of God, however made known to the mind. In some way it will bring out the real feelings, and show what man is.

It will, of course, do much more than show what man is. It will show where man is headed – it will show how hopeless and helpless man is and how desperate is his need of Christ and the salvation that Christ provides. And it will show him Christ, who He is and

what He's done. It will take you to the cross and to the tomb of Christ. It will take you to the place where Christ ascended into heaven. It will show you as it has already shown us in this study of Hebrews that Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father having purged our sins. It will show to man the way of salvation by grace through faith in Christ and then it will show the Christian how he can commune with Christ and serve Christ.

This 12th verse in chapter 4 of Hebrews is one of those texts that stands out in its meaning even beyond the argument in which it's being used. And we should note that it is being used in the apostle's argument. Note the very first word – *for*. *For the word of God is quick, and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword*. I believe the word *for* is connecting this verse to the previous verse.

Look at v. 11 where we're exhorted to *labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*. This is an exhortation to cultivate faith and to strive to avoid unbelief. And it follows quite naturally that the word of God is the most effective tool we can utilize to do just that. *For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword*.

What I want to focus on this morning, however, is a point that a number of preachers have made who have preached from this verse. The point is really very simple. Perhaps Spurgeon says it best when he says in connection with the lessons learned from this verse that:

We Should Greatly Reverence the Word of God

In the moments that remain I would like to present to you a few points that should answer the question as to how we may greatly reverence the word of God.

We will be moved to reverence the word of God:

I. By Remembering Its Nature

Look at what v. 12 says about the nature of God's word – *It is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword* our text says. *It is quick*. The word *quick* is a word that means *living*. We are dealing with a living word. It may be for this reason that some commentators take this phrase as applying to Christ Himself. We certainly serve a living Savior. And there is a very close connection between what we may call the incarnate word with the inspired word.

I believe the phrase *the word of God* applies not just to the words that are printed on paper and then bound and covered and held in our hands. Christians are sometimes accused of being *biblioloters* – i.e. we worship mere paper and ink. We make an idol out of a book. We are not called upon to worship merely a book but we are called upon to recognize the spiritual nature of the book as well as the source from which the book comes to us.

This book does present to us the objective truths that we are to believe concerning God. Whatever we learn about God should be tested by this book and we should never harbor any notions about God that are inconsistent with this book. What I'm saying now is something so basic that you wouldn't think it would even need to be mentioned and yet in our culture it needs to be affirmed and reaffirmed often.

When we visited the Creation Museum last week I picked up a DVD that presents Ken Ham's *State of the Nation*. He's dealing with the spiritual state of the nation and presents some alarming statistics as to how many young people are turning away from the faith by the time they reach their high school years. The reason is not hard to trace – it's because the door is being opened wider with each ensuing generation to divorce faith from the word of God. He points out how intimidated Christian leaders and Seminary professors and many Pastors and teachers have become by the dogmatic claims of science. And rather than scrutinize popular science it's the Bible that scrutinized instead in an attempt to reconcile popular atheistic notions with what the Bible says.

It has ever been the devil's design to take this living word and try to kill it by rendering it null and void in terms of science and history. So we must recognize that the objective truths of this book are constant. The truth of God doesn't change nor does the Bible's teaching of the truth of man's sin and man's need of Christ. What is said of Christ later in this epistle could also be said of the word of God that it's the same yesterday and today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

But when we speak of this book as *quick* or *living* I believe the author intends much more than the permanent objective truths that are found in the book. I believe that Paul also includes the fact that the word of God has been adapted by God to bring forth spiritual life where there has been only spiritual death. This word, you see, becomes a living word subjectively when the Spirit of God bears witness to the truth of the word of God and makes the application to our hearts. The Spirit of God certainly makes the application of the truth of the Gospel to lost sinners. The truths of God's law come alive in the conscience of the Christ-rejecter. Try as he will he cannot escape the truth that he's a law breaker and a rebel against God. He cannot escape the truth that at his best he fails to measure up to the standards of God's law.

And so the living word serves God's purpose by slaying the sinner in a sense so that life for the sinner may follow when he learns of Christ who is the true and living God. This word serves much the same purpose in the life of the believer. How often do we feel ourselves becoming dead to God and alive to the world. When our faith is not tended to it grows weak and carnal reasoning then becomes strong and we find ourselves in need of quickening.

My soul cleaveth unto the dust the Psalmist confesses in Ps. 119:25 and then he goes on to pray *quicken thou me according to thy word*. Make me alive again – that's what he's praying in effect. Apart from thee, O God my soul becomes stuck to the dust of this world. Quicken or revive or bring forth spiritual life again in all its vitality in accordance with the

power of thy word. A little later in v. 50 of that same Psalm the Psalmist says *This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me*. Just as God's word brought forth light out darkness so His word brings the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to our darkened souls. And just as the word of Christ brought forth the life of Lazarus from the tomb in which he lay for 4 days so the word of Christ brings forth life to our souls when they become weak to the point of spiritual death.

This is why we must ever keep ourselves exposed to the word of God. It is a living word which means that it brings forth and sustains our spiritual vitality. It doesn't merely impart information to our minds – it does do at least that – but it does so much more than that. It upholds us in our spiritual walk with God. The Hebrews, to whom this epistle was originally addressed, stood in need of remembering the truth of God both in terms of its objective truths and in terms of its life-giving truths. May we keep ourselves exposed to the word that we may in turn keep ourselves exposed to the life that it imparts through Christ.

In close connection with the word being a living word we also note concerning its nature that it is powerful. *For the word of God is quick and powerful* our text tells us. The word *powerful* here is the same word in the Greek from which we get the word *energy*. This is why I say the connection is so close between the word being a living word and a powerful word. Energy is the power by which we live. This is true in a physical sense – how much more is it true in a spiritual sense.

It takes energy – supernatural energy to live the Christian life. It takes supernatural energy to pursue holiness and to wage war against sin. It takes supernatural energy to perform our spiritual duties – to worship, to pray, to read and meditate, and to endeavor to extend the Kingdom of Christ.

The Hebrews felt the power of their afflictions – they felt the power of their persecutors – they felt the power of the world and the devil. And it appeared that these things were on the brink of choking the word of God and making it unfruitful in their lives. How often do we feel the same things. It might not be so much the power of persecution but who among us can deny that the cares of the world seek a powerful dominion over our souls and if left unchecked such a power will bring us to despair and keep us there.

It is at such times when we feel the world to be so strong and our faith to be so weak that we need increased exposure to the word of God and to the means of grace. But such is the world's power of delusion that it will do all it can to convince us that the word of God is a dead letter that cannot do us any good. It's no wonder the expression is often used that the Bible will give us victory over sin and that it will be sin that keeps us from the Bible.

And so we note that the word is quick and powerful. We add also that it is sharp – sharper than any two-edged sword. The idea is that of piercing, or penetrating; and the meaning here is that the word of God reaches the heart—the very center of action and lays open the motives and feelings of the man. It is through the word of God, you see, that we not only find our way to God but God also finds His way to us in such a way that we

ourselves become aware of His searching and discerning of our actions, words, and motives. As we consider the nature of the word of God, therefore, let me leave with you the lessons that Spurgeon draws from these character qualities of the word. He writes:

“Let us, whenever we feel ourselves dead, and especially in prayer, get close to the Word, for the Word of God is alive. Whenever we feel weak in our duties, let us go to the Word of God, and the Christ in the Word, for power; and this will be the best of power. If you need as a minister, or a worker, (I would add – as a parent) anything that will cut your hearers to the heart, go to this Book for it. If we want to discriminate at any time between the soul and the spirit, and the joints and marrow, let us go to the Word of God for discrimination. And lastly, since this Book is meant to be a discernor or critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart, leave yourselves open to the searching power of the Book. Submit yourselves to it’s discerning power to criticize us.”

Recognizing as we do, the nature of the word of God, let us esteem this book very highly as a precious treasure given to us by God Himself. It’s especially appropriate during the month of October in which many of our churches recognize our Protestant heritage that we remember the price that was paid by many in order for this treasure to be handed down to us in our own language.

So we see something of the nature of the word of God and how the character qualities of that word should move us to reverence it and to use it. Would you consider with me next that we’ll reverence the word of God:

II. By Reminding Ourselves of It’s Source

You’ll notice again from our text the phrase *the word of God*. The "word of God" is that which God speaks—whether it be a promise or a threatening; whether it be law or gospel; whether it be a simple declaration or a statement of a doctrine – the source for all these things is God Himself.

I said earlier that there’s a close proximity between the incarnate word of God and the inspired word of God. The Incarnate Word is, of course, Christ Himself. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God*. “The Word” is a proper designation for Christ because He represents to us all that God Himself would say to us. Christ is the expression of God’s will and God’s love.

And when it comes to the inspired word of God we confess what Paul wrote to Timothy that *All scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2Tim. 3:16). The word *inspiration* is a word in the Greek that means *God-breathed*. So while we recognize the part that men played in committing the word of God to writing we also recognize that it was God Himself who in a mysterious and supernatural fashion oversaw what fallible men wrote so as to render it infallible and inerrant.

We recognize, therefore, that God is the author of this book and we see in this book the marks of Scripture. We think of those marks as the necessity, the authority, the perspicuity and the sufficiency of Scripture.

We speak of the necessity of Scripture because God is beyond us. He transcends the universe. I made mention earlier of my visit to the Creation Museum. What is considered one of the main features of that museum is the planetarium showing. The planetarium showing is a multi-media production that attempts to show you how small our world is in comparison with the vastness of the universe. By the time you've zoomed out from planet earth more light years than you could imagine you're able to see how our sun becomes but a tiny speck among thousands of other tiny specks. There's a vastness to our universe that defies comprehension and yet all this vastness is but the echo of God's word. He spoke the universe into existence.

How can a God that is so far beyond us be known? And the answer is, of course, that He can only be known by revealing Himself. He can, to be sure, be known through nature – psalm 19 tells us that the heaven's declare His glory. But in terms of being in a right relationship to the One who is not only the Creator but the judge of all the earth we can only know Him through His written revelation. This is what makes the word of God necessary. We may learn some things about God through nature but we can only learn about salvation through God's word.

So we find the mark of necessity attributed to God's word. We also find the mark of authority in God's word. This word asserts it's own authority. It comes to us with the often repeated phrase *Thus saith the LORD*. And the authority of God's word has been vindicated many times over through the fulfillment of prophecy concerning Christ and concerning Israel and the nations. The fact that this book conveys to us the history of mankind from the creation and fall of man to the final consummation of redemption which will bring in the new heavens and the new earth further vindicates the authority of this book.

We also find in this book the mark of perspicuity. God has made this book understandable. There are things, to be sure, that are hard to be understood but when it comes to the essential message of God book Paul could write to Timothy *that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus* (2Tim. 3:15).

And then there's also the mark of the sufficiency of Scripture. I love the line in the hymn that reads – *What more can He say than to you He hath said, To you who for refuge, to Jesus have fled?* Nothing more needs to be added and we are warned with very solemn warnings in Scripture that nothing better be taken away from what God hath said.

All of what we've considered, therefore, adds to the argument that we should reverence the word of God – that we should hold it in very high esteem and utilize it often for our spiritual well-being. As a living word it makes us aware of the true and living God and the fact that we are completely exposed before Him. There is no hiding from Him. We may

succeed in fooling ourselves but all things are naked and open before the God of this book. And so we're taught to invite the Spirit of God to search our hearts and to apply to our lives those things that need to be put under the blood of Christ.

As a living word it also conveys to us a living hope by teaching us of a living Savior – a Savior who by His power atoned for our sins and rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God. As a living word it conveys to us practical guidance that teaches us how to live and know the presence of God day by day in our lives. It teaches us how to pursue holiness and how to pursue communion with God and Christ – it teaches us how to function in all our relationships in this world and it teaches us how to be ready for glory.

What a powerful appeal Paul makes to the Hebrew Christians, then, when he appeals to the word of God and recommend to them that same word. This was how those Hebrew Christians could fortify themselves against the onslaught of their peers. This was how they could gain assurance that they were not following cunningly devised fables.

It's the same for you and for me. This book enables us to fortify ourselves against the wiles of the devil and it serves to minister assurance to our souls that we've committed the well-being of our souls to the right person by committing our souls to Christ. May the Lord help us, then, to reverence His word. May He help us to establish the spiritual discipline of reading and studying and memorizing and meditating upon the truths of His Word.

The Bible, you know, really does us little good if we allow it to be a book that merely sets on our shelves. This word is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. May we appreciate what we have, therefore, by utilizing it daily in our lives to guide and to cheer us.