

Hebrews 4:12-13

The Power of God's Word

Josh McDowell said recently that most evangelical Christian youth in the United States no longer believe in "absolute truth."

"In 1991, 52 percent of our born again church kids said there is no absolute truth. In 1994, 62 percent said there is no absolute truth. In 1999, 78 percent of born again church kids said there is no absolute truth. In 2002, 91 percent of our born again church kids said there is no absolute truth."

The cause of this problem is the influence of secular education and secular media since the 1960's. This adverse effect upon moral authority is also reflected in the beliefs and attitudes of these teens' parents.

Until recent years, Christians throughout history accepted the classic evangelical doctrine of the absolute authority of God's Word. The Bible is the Word of God, and it is infallible and inerrant.

The author of Hebrews in chapters three and four has been admonishing his readers to be diligent to enter into God's rest. In order to enter into that rest they must claim the promises of God which are found in His Word. They must hear the word and believe in it. They must trust in the good news of Jesus Christ and embrace it. If they do not mix the promises of God with personal faith they cannot enter into His rest.

Are you trusting in God's promises?

The living and active word of God (Heb. 4:12a)

"For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

"The Word of God" is the revealed truth. The Bible is not a collection of ancient religious writings. It is God's recorded self-revelation of Himself. The expression "Word of God" occurs at least thirty-nine times in the New Testament and refers to the spoken or written Word of God. Henry Alford noted in Hebrews Jesus is called the Son of God, but never the Word of God. Bengel noted that Christ the incarnate Word is never said to be a sword, but wields the sword (Rev. 1:16; 2:12; 19:15). The sharp, two-edged penetrating sword comes from His mouth and accomplishes His will. "So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11).

The Word of God is living. It is constantly alive (*zōn*). It is like a grain of corn planted in a field. In the original text the word "living" stands at the beginning of the sentence and receives all the emphasis. God's spoken and written Word is alive. The apostle Peter wrote, "for you

have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:24-25).

The word of God is active. The Greek word is *energes* from which we get our word *energy*. It is powerful, dynamic, full of energy. It does things no human being can possibly do. It touches where nothing else can touch and brings life. It is energizing. It is the power of God. It is the most powerful weapon in the universe.

News articles and television may inform us. An excellent well written novels may motivate us. Poetry may captivate us, but only the living, active, Word of God can change us.

The essential character of the word of God is its inexhaustible vitality and dynamic efficacy. The vigor and the potency of His word are seen in its operation as his creating word (Heb. 11:3), His sustaining word (Heb. 1:3), and His regenerating word (2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:23).

There is nothing sharper than the Word of God (Heb. 4:12b-c)

The Word of God is sharp (*tomoterous*). It cuts. How sharp is it? "Sharper than any two-edged sword?" The double-edged sword was the sharpest in the ancient arsenal. Here the Word of God is described as "sharper than the sharpest sword." It has an edge to it. It is not blunt. It cuts its way into the innermost recesses, where no surgeon's scalpel can go. M. R. Vincent said, "This word of God has an incisive and penetrating quality. It lays bare self-delusions and moral sophistries." It is a picture of the stern, righteous judgment of God.

"There is no creature hidden from His sight." We may conceal our inner most being from others, but there is nothing concealed from God.

The Word of God deals with the "heart" (*kardia*), the central seat of the human personality with its spiritual, intellectual, moral and emotional life. It is the center and core of the human personality.

The Word of God is "piercing" (*diikneomai*) meaning "to go through." The sword pierces through the heart. It pierces through the inmost recesses of our spiritual being. Nothing remains untouched by the Word of God.

The Word of God "judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart." It "judges" (*kritikos*) from *krino* "to divide" or "separate." It analyzes the evidence. *Kritikos* blends the idea of discrimination and judgment. The Word of God penetrates into the depths of a person's spiritual being, sifting, analyzing, judging the intentions of the mind and heart. It deals with the realm of our thinking. "Thoughts" (*enthumesis*) are the cognitions and inner reasoning that takes place in the mind. Our secret sins are uncovered and laid bare before God's eyes.

"O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139:1-3). John Calvin observed, "There is nothing so hard or firm in a man, nothing so deeply hidden that the efficacy of the word does not penetrate through to it."

Nothing is hidden from the Word of God (Heb. 4:13)

"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13).

The believer has good reason to give special attention to his spiritual condition because the precious Word penetrates to the depths of our inner most being and illumines and convicts and brings healing when we submit to its truth. It is living and active and operative. It is like a two edged sword that cuts both ways into the deepest recesses of the heart bringing conviction and regeneration to the believing soul. The Word of God uncovers everything. Absolutely nothing can be hidden. It is impossible to hide sinful thoughts and attitudes from God. We cannot hide our hidden motives from Him. He even knows what we are thinking before we open our mouths, and if we do not verbalize them He already knows what is in our thoughts and motives. He discerns our inner silence.

Everything is "open" and "laid bare" (*trachelizo*) to the eyes of God. The verb has the idea "to seize and twist the neck or throat" in the sense of taking by the throat and was used by wrestlers taking a strangle hold on another wrestler. The idea is to take a hold on the neck and bend it back to lay bare and expose by bending back to slit the throat. Hence, to lay bare, expose, and uncover the inner most secrets of the heart. The Word of God compels us to see ourselves as we are because we are laid bare before a holy and righteous God. Nothing can be concealed from his presence. The metaphor of the victim's throat being open and laid bare to the sacrificial knife is a powerful image of the total exposure of the human heart to the all seeing eyes of a holy God. The living active powerful Word of God is that two-edged sword that exposes the reality of our inner being. Everything is naked and laid bare to a holy God through His Word. We have to give an account to God. The words "with whom we have to do" reveal this accounting to God. The auditor is coming before whom we must open all of the books of our life, and the auditor is God. Nothing escapes Him. On that day sinners will cry out to God, and say "to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb'" (Revelation 6:16). There is nothing, and will be nothing in the universe that is unexposed to Him.

The Word of God is gives life. But in the giving of life there comes obligation to receive or reject it. Where will you spend eternity?

The Word of God is effectual. It is powerful and efficient. It will always fulfill its intended purpose. It will never return to God void; it never fails to accomplish its eternal purpose. Again, it will not happen automatically. It is our responsibility to trust and obey or we become like the people of Israel who wandered around in a spiritual desert of their own making.

The Word of God is penetrating. It pierces to the innermost being of a person's desires and intentions. It probes our emotions as well as our thinking. Everything is stripped away and naked before God. The word reveals what men are on the inside. They cannot hide from it.

Every impression made on the heart by the preached word is an effect of the power of Christ. The power of Christ in His word is irresistible as to whatever purpose He has for it. It will not return to Him void. It will always accomplish His purpose.

The Word of God brings conviction of sin and guilt. It causes us to flee to the grace of God. "This can never happen unless the Word penetrates to the depths of the heart," notes Calvin. "We must not be gently pricked or scratched, but we must be deeply wounded, to that we are laid low by the sense of eternal death and learn to die to ourselves. We shall never be renewed in our whole mind until our old man has been slain by the edge of this sword of the Spirit." Again he notes, "God has therefore endued His Word with this power, to search out every part of the soul, to scrutinize the thoughts, to decide between the affections, and indeed to show itself as the judge."

God-breathed Scriptures

The Holy Spirit initiated and controlled the process of giving us the written revelation of God. The Scriptures were not merely man's own thoughts, nor divine thoughts in their own words, but "the words of God," as the writers were impelled or "born along" by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit enlightened the mind and superintended for both the spoken and the written word (2 Peter 3:15; 1 Peter 1:3-25). Even the very language is "God breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). It "breathes out the Spirit." It is the product of God's creative breath. God breathed through man the words that make up the Scriptures.

The word "plenary" means "full, entire, complete." It is the way theologians speak of the fully or completely inspired Bible. It is God-breathed in all of its parts. It is also "verbal," i.e., it applies to the words. God-breathed Scriptures consists of God-given words. It was not "dictated" to the witnesses (1 Kings 22:8-16; Neh. 8; Psalm 119; Jer. 25:1-13; Rom. 1:2; 3:2, 21; 16:26).

The authors did not write like robots. Verbal inspiration does not imply mechanical or dictatorial inspiration. It does not efface the writer's own personality. The human writers were not passive in the process. They were God's penmen, not merely His pens. They used their minds, personalities, individual characteristics and expressions as they wrote.

The language of the Scriptures is human. They wrote in the language of the people. Some wrote in Aramaic, others Hebrew and Greek.

However, the message these men wrote down came from God. God is the true author of the Scriptures. That is why we understand the Bible to be the Word of God.

When we say we believe in the "verbal" inspiration of the Scriptures we mean that the very words the authors used were inspired, not the thoughts only. The Holy Spirit guided the writer in the choice of words he chose from his vocabulary. God enabled them to choose the very words they used in the original manuscripts.

If there was not this governing by the Holy Spirit the Bible would be less inspired. We believe in the "full, complete" inspiration of the Bible and therefore no part of the Bible is omitted. The words are the words God wanted in the text. It is the verbal, plenary, infallible and unlimited inerrancy of the Bible that I trust to be the Word of God for me today. The authority of the message is guaranteed in the accuracy of the words. You cannot have errors in the Bible and authority too.

The Holy Spirit influenced control over the sacred writers as they wrote, including their expression of thoughts in language, as well as the thoughts themselves, and the choice of words they wrote. What God had to say is conveyed with infallible accuracy. The words and the thoughts they convey are God's revelation to us (1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Thess. 2:13; Jn. 14:26; 16:13).

When plenary inspiration is denied all Christian faith is undermined.

God revealed truth to the Bible writers by means of the Holy Spirit uncovering it to them, but they were not left to make a permanent record of it by themselves. It is one thing to know a certain fact, and quite another to find the exact words in your vocabulary to give an accurate understanding of that truth. The words they used were not dictated by their human reason or wisdom, but "in the words taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13). The Holy Spirit taught them the words because He revealed the truth behind the words. Thus we have in the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Biblical manuscripts the very words that God taught the writers to use as they recorded the truth which they had received by revelation. This is what is meant by verbal inspiration.

By divine revelation the Holy Spirit unveiled or revealed the spiritual truth to the writers. Moreover, He also led them to choose the right word out of their own vocabulary to communicate the exact truth God wanted them to understand.

The Holy Spirit took those writers as he found them and used them infallibly. Luke's Greek is the purest and most beautiful. Paul's Greek was far more involved and difficult than John's. John often uses words with double meaning to draw out contrasts, and his thoughts soar to the windows of heaven. Mark races through his gospel with words of action. There was a difference in their education and this is often seen in their writings.

The authors of the Scriptures were led by the Holy Spirit as they searched their vocabularies for the exact words which would accurately express the truth they wished to communicate.

They compared the word in their vocabulary with the truth they wished to write down. They did not choose to use the words which the Holy Spirit showed them would not correctly express the thought. The words they used were those which the Spirit led them to use as they wrote.

The Holy Spirit freed them up to express their own individual personalities, vocabulary, and education while at the same time guiding them to make an "infallible record of truth infallibly revealed."

Absolute Truth

Jesus taught the authority and complete reliability of the Bible in everything it teaches. Whether our generation accepts or rejects it or not, the Bible is still God's Word and is inerrant in whatever it teaches.

Jesus affirmed the Bible's total inspiration, inerrancy, and utter indestructibility when he said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

There are teachers in our day who foolishly play Jesus against the inspiration and infallibility of the Word of God. The Bible is about Jesus and demonstrates that He is its fulfillment. Jesus perfectly fulfills the Law and the Prophets. They point to Him, and He is their fulfillment (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). Jesus fulfilled the moral laws by His obedience, the prophecies by specific

events in His life, and the sacrificial system by His own substitutionary once for all atoning death on the cross.

When people reject the unique, divine character of the Bible, they reject its authority, too. God stands behind His Word.

For the last half century, the church has bought into the world system of beliefs instead of the divine authority of the Word of God.

Second Peter 1:21 tells us the men whom the Holy Spirit chose to record the Scriptures were carried or born along with their writings to produce the words that God intended to be recorded. The word in the original text meaning to be carried, or borne along was used of a ship carried along by the wind (Acts 27:15, 17). Here it is a metaphor that the prophets raised their sails and the Holy Spirit filled them and carried their craft along in the direction He wished. Men spoke; God spoke. These men wrote as men, but as men moved by the Holy Spirit. "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Men wrote but God the Holy Spirit was the inspiration of the writings. The men used their literary style, vocabulary, and personality, but the Holy Spirit guided them in the final choice of the words and guaranteed the accuracy of the original manuscripts.

We need have no reserve in regard to the Word of God, recognizing its full authority. Second Timothy 3:16 tells us the Scriptures are "God-breathed," "breathed into by God," hence inspired. Holy men spoke and wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This was the unanimous view of the early church.

John Calvin wrote, "This is the principle that distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God has spoken to us and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak of themselves but as organs of the Holy Spirit uttered only that which they had been commissioned from heaven to declare – all those who wish to profit from the Scriptures must first accept this as a settled principle, that the law and the prophets are not teachings handed on at pleasure of men or produced by men's minds as their source, but are dictated by the Holy Spirit. We owe to the Scriptures the same reverence as we owe to God, since it has its only source in Him and has nothing of human origin mixed with it" (*Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, Vol. 10, p. 330*).

John Wesley said, "In all cases, the church is to be judged by the Scriptures not the Scriptures by the church." The Bible is still the supreme authority for the Christians in all matters. It is not what we think Jesus would do or how we feel He would interpret the Scriptures, but "Thus says the Lord."

In their original form, the books of the Bible are free from factual error, and they possess absolute, binding authority. "If the Bible is inspired at all, it must be inspired verbally. And verbal inspiration means infallibility." "Is not My word like fire? And like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces" (Jeremiah 23:29). God has spoken infallibility in His book.

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

It has the ability to pierce deep into our souls and bring conviction of our need to trust Christ as

our Savior. It speaks to our deepest depravity and brings conviction of our guiltiness before God. The word means "to go through something." It pierces the soul, the attitudes, and motives.

No surgeon can correct a bad attitude, a closed mind, a rebellious spirit, a lustful heart, hypocrisy, greed, hatred, or an unforgiving spirit. These are spiritual problems and must be dealt with by spiritual means.

The Word of God has the ability to judge. *Kritikos* means lit. "to sift out, to analyze, to scrutinize." Our English words critical and critic come from it. The Word of God functions like an X-ray machine. It pierces through the deep, penetrating depths of our soul. Woman at the well said, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done" (John 4:29).

The Word of God has the unique ability to open our hearts to the truth by its piercing revelations (Heb. 4:13).

Have you ever been around someone who identified with you so closely you felt they could read your thoughts? God's Word is like that. It pierces to our deepest feelings, and desires, and instincts and passions.

It deals with our motives. "All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (v. 13). The word for "laid bare" is the word from which we get our word trachea, the throat. Wrestlers would get a throat hold on their opponent. The term means to pull back the head of a sacrificial animal before slitting the throat, and of a criminal being led away to execution. A sharp knife was fixed to the criminal's throat with the point touching his chin to force his head up.

The Word of God has to be believed. "But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching" (Romans 10:8)

"However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:16-17).

What will you do with Jesus Christ? One day we will all stand before Him as our Judge. "If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:47-48).

"Whenever His Word is set before us, we must tremble, because nothing is hid from Him" (Calvin).

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