

The Two-Edged Sword

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For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

The Sharp Word

In a most expressive figure, the writer to the Hebrews compares the Word of God to a sword, an offensive weapon of war. This is a reminder that God's people are in a war, a death struggle, and our own faithfulness in combat will determine not only our own eternal victory but that of many others. Therefore, we must "war the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18) as "good soldiers of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim 3:3). In preparing for battle, we have many pieces of armor but only one weapon, the "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17). However, we need none other, for it is abundantly adequate to teach, reprove, correct, instruct, rebuke, and exhort (2 Tim. 3:16; 4:2). God's Word, under the figure of a sword, is described as to its mighty capabilities:

1. **It is sharp.** It is not merely a single-bladed instrument but one with a keen edge on both sides. Such an instrument is able to pierce and cut in all directions and to do so deeply and quickly. God's Word is even sharper than such a finely honed, double-edged combat sword. This same striking figure was seen in John's visions of Christ on Patmos: "...and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp, two-edged sword" (Rev. 1:16; Compare with 19:15).
2. **It pierces.** Its penetrating power is due to its keen double-edged "blade." Although a different word is used, the idea is the same when the Lord describes those on Pentecost and those in Stephen's audience as "pricked in their heart" and "cut to the heart," respectively (Acts 2:37; 7:54).
3. **It divides.** As a literal sword partitions the living flesh of its victim as it penetrates, so the Word of God is so powerfully effective and sharp as to penetrate and divide matters within the depths of man's spiritual nature. "Joints and marrow" are obviously not to be taken literally for two reasons: (1) They are not in contact with one another; the marrow is inside the bones which are connected at the joints. (2) The spiritual sword does not have any effect upon the physical structure of man's body. "Joints and marrow" is a figurative reference to the innermost recesses of man's spiritual nature. "The Word of God... divides and lays bare the soul and spirit even to the extent of their joints and marrows."¹
4. **It discerns.** "Discern is from *kritikos*, "skilled in judging."²
The usual New Testament meaning being "to sift out and analyze evidence." In the word *kritikos*, the ideas of discrimination and judgment are blended. Thus, the Word of God is able to penetrate into the furthestmost recesses of a person's spiritual being, sifting out and analyzing the thoughts and intents of the heart.³

The searching and judging power of God's Word is such that it penetrates and exposes the depths of the inner man. It is that "mirror of the soul" that does not deceive us when we gaze into it. It is only by knowledge of the Word of God that we have our "senses exercised to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:14).

When the sword pierces and discerns, one of two results will occur: When the sharp, piercing, dividing, discerning Sword of God's Word did its work on Pentecost, those who were "pricked in their heart" by it immediately realized their guilt and cried out, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). When the same sharp sword did its work on Stephen's audience and they were "cut to the heart" as the faithful words of the evangelist found their mark, rather than repenting of the sins of which Stephen's words convicted them, they violently seized the preacher and stoned him to death. Some who are pierced by the sword of the Spirit rebel, perhaps even violently, while others are brought to humbly seek peace with God by conformity to His will. However, in both reactions, the discerning power of God's Word in the spirit of man is clearly demonstrated. Again, if we preach a spineless and diluted message that is purposely designed to stir guilt in the vilest sinner, we rob it of its discerning power. The Lord's sharp sword does its work on man's spiritual nature. I agree with Milligan's summary of the sword's piercing and dividing work:

The separation takes place within the region of the soul and the region of the spirit, not between them. The living Word cleaves and lays bare all parts of the soul and all parts of the spirit, even to the extent of their joints and marrows, so that all the perfections and imperfections of man's spiritual nature are made perfectly manifest. And not only so, but even the thought and purposes of the heart are, by this infallible Judge, fully analyzed and perfectly classified. ⁴

The Completed Word

After summarizing how God had in earlier ages revealed His will to men, the Hebrews writer then said that God "hath ...spoken unto us in His Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). The inspired writer makes it clear that the last medium of God's revelation to man was His Son. God's Son taught and preached constantly during the last years of His earthly life, ever conscious that He was revealing the Father's Will: "For I spake not from myself, but the father that sent me, He hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49). Moreover, Christ was aware that His Word was God's final revelation. Thus, He says that men who reject His Word will eventually be judged by it (John 12:48).

In giving God's final revelation to men, Christ not only spoke much of it personally, but he also employed other worthy men through whom he spoke. The twelve apostles were granted at least some measure of inspiration to equip them for their very first preaching assignment: "It shall be given to you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you" (Mat. 10:19-20). As the Lord tried to prepare them for His fast-approaching departure from them, He promised them more specifically that "when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the Truth: "...for he shall not speak from himself; but what things so ever he shall hear, *these* shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come" (John 16:13).

Christ also empowered the apostles so they could confer the gift of inspiration as well as other miraculous abilities on certain others (Acts 8:6-8; 8:14-19; 2 Tim. 1:6, etc.). Such explains how Mark, Luke, and James could write by inspiration while not being apostles. Let it be clearly noted that the work of all the New Testament writers is quite accurately termed the work of the Son, for it was work done by His command and power. Let it also be noted that all the non-apostolic New Testament books (Mark, Luke, Acts, James) were written no later than 70 A.D., giving them ample time to have been renounced and repudiated by the apostle John had they been uninspired. Yet, history shows that they were freely accepted as inspired accounts and for this reason are incorporated into the New Testament canon.

Perhaps the most significant thing to note about the promise of inspiration to the apostles is the phrase, "he shall guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). This promise demands the following:

- (1) The spirit was going to come upon the apostles at a certain time.
- (2) From the time of the coming of the Spirit upon them until sometime before all the apostles died (Christ made this promise exclusively to them), He would guide them into all the truth.
- (3) All God's revelation through His Son was completed before the last apostle died.

There are only three other possible conclusions, one or more of which must be accepted by those who deny that revelation ends with the book of Revelation.

- (1) Christ was sincere in His promise, but He was honestly mistaken.
- (2) Christ was a false prophet and knew that He was deceiving the apostles
- (3) Christ's promise is true, but some of the original apostles are still living.

If one accepts either of the first two possibilities, then Christ is disqualified as man's savior. If one accepts the third possibility, that person is insane.

We not only have the living, active, keen-edged Word of God through His Son, but we also have His completed, final Word. Just as God did not call any of the angels "Son" (Heb. 1:5), and Moses said nothing of priests in the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14), so He mentioned nothing of Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, and Roman popes, or any others since the close of the apostolic age, as those through whom He would speak. The truth is, we have God's Word, His final Word, "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), in the New Testament. There has been no further word from God and there shall be no further word. All who deny this truth are victims of infidelity.

Conclusion

The beauty, glory and power of the everlasting Word of God make it the marvel of all time. Let us handle it reverently, study it diligently, believe it hopefully, obey it faithfully, and communicate it accurately. Only when we do so will we both save ourselves and those who hear us (1 Tim. 4:16).

End Notes

1. R. Milligan, *The New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate, 1963) vol. IX, p. 140.
2. A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1932. Vol. V, p. 363
3. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Hebrews in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956) p. 89.
4. Milligan, loc. cit.

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