

Jesus Has the Better Word

The Word of God does not merely communicate truths about God; it is the direct communication of God. Therefore, we must heed His Word and confidently enter into His favor lest we, through unbelief, become condemned by His word and enter into His judgment.

Hebrews 4:12-16

BIBLE VERSE

Heb 4:11-16 NKJV – 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. 14 Seeing then that 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 cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

PRAY

INTRO

When I was a teenager, my dad (who is a great songwriter/worship leader) recorded a fantastic worship album. The title song was called “Pierce My Heart.”

- As a teen, I remember loving the song but thinking (in my still very limited understanding of the Lord), “that feels a bit gruesome.”

- Piercing the heart. I saw an image of a knife or a dagger going into a heart. It seemed somewhat painful, yet at the same time necessary.
- The lyrics of the verse went, “Pierce my heart Lord, change my way. May each moment that I live reflect your grace. Pierce my heart Lord, help me see. More and more of You each day inside of me.”

It’s true that sometimes the thing we need the most in order to be transformed into the person God created us to be is a piercing of our hearts. Something from God that gets through any callousness or hardening of our conscience that sin has created.

Paul, in writing to Hebrew believers that were being tempted to move from Jesus back to the religious system of Judaism with all of its laws, regulations, and sacrifices, makes a strong case that Jesus is better. He is better in that he has done what the law and sacrifices of the Old Covenant could not do.

- But the picture he paints comes with a stern warning. All the facts in the word don’t mean anything if your heart refuses to listen to the voice of God in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the Living WORD of God. His life, death, and resurrection speak. He lives today and His voice is still calling, still convicting, and still leading.
- We concluded with the repeated emphasis of chapters 3-4, “TODAY, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” Why? Verse 12 tells us...

BIBLE VERSE

Heb 4:11-16 NKJV – 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

INTRO/CONTEXT

Before we talk about the characteristics of God’s Word, we need to define it. When the author of Hebrews placed the phrase “Ha Logos Theos (The Word of God)” what was He referring to?

- When we hear that phrase, we think of the Bible, the 66 books that were canonized and preserved by God to communicate His heart, nature, and plan for humankind.
- This is right of us to think this way because it's true. Within this book is the divinely inspired communication of God to mankind, through mankind as the Holy Spirit spoke.

In Ephesians, Paul says that we are the household of God... “[Eph 2:20 NKJV] **20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone...**”

- The Old Testament (law and prophets) and the New Testament (apostles doctrine) are one cohesive communication of God that can only be understood and comprehended through the person of Jesus Christ (cornerstone). You will never accurately and spiritually understand the Bible apart from Jesus Christ taking residence in you in the person of the Holy Spirit, actively speaking to you through the preserved Word.

So, you see, the WORD of God is more than an academic study of words on a piece of paper. Scholars can (and have) study the Bible for their entire lifetimes and never be transformed by it, never hear its message, and never understand how it applies to their life because they don't read it through the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ.

John 1 tells us that Jesus is the Word of God who was with God in the beginning, and who is God, the creator of all things.

QUOTE

The written Word (The Bible) is animated by the Living Word (Jesus Christ) who actively communicates today by the Holy Spirit.

Bible ➡ Jesus ➡ Holy Spirit ➡ Mind/Heart

Pastor Josh,

BIBLE VERSE

[1Co 2:13-14 NKJV] 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned.

APPLICATION

This word in Hebrews is given directly to the believer who has the Spirit of God but is on the verge of destruction because they have stopped listening to His voice through the WORD. The WORD in this case was the Old Testament that spoke of the wilderness wanderers who came out of Egypt but heartened their hearts through unbelief. Jesus was actively speaking through their example.

CONTEXT:

The theme has been, "entering the rest of God." God's rest, or promises of eternal life in heaven and abundant life on earth, must be diligently sought after by faith. ***Ancient Israel failed to inherit God's REST due in large part to their unwillingness to heed God's VOICE (or God's WORD).***

- Therefore, the word of God (Which was designed to lead them into God's rest) became Israel's judge and jury. Because they would not allow God's Word to lead them, God's Word exposed them and judged them.
- The picture painted at the end of Hebrews 4 begins as a gruesome one and ends as a hopeful one.

THE PICTURE

The author displays the "Word of God" as an instrument of war, execution, and death.

- The word's sharp blade is that of a sword that would be used at the **execution block, or in a battle.**
- Verse 13 tells us that all things are, "Laid bare and exposed to Him..." This statement speaks in terms used for a prisoner's neck being exposed before the blade of a sword at the execution block.

- The only hope we have of escaping that sharp sword is heading to the “Word of God” rather than ignoring it. For right next to the execution block is a throne of grace, where one can receive mercy and grace in time of need, but only through the mediator and High Priest, Jesus Christ.
- ***The Word of God will either save you or condemn you depending on how you respond to it when you hear it. It will either cut away (by way of surgery) the hardness of your heart, or it will be the judge that pierces you through.***
- At the end of chapter 4, the author places the strict judgment of God next to His grace and mercy. It’s the same throne, but the deciding factor of which one a person receives is how they respond to His living and powerful Word, ***“Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts!”***

1

The Nature of the God's Word

BIBLE VERSE

12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword,

A. THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING

BIBLE VERSE

Jhn 6:63 NKJV – 63 “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

LIVING

The words that God has conveyed to humanity have the unique quality of being alive. Unlike any other ideas or words that enter the human mind, the word of God can renew, convict, and bring spiritual life into a person.

EXAMPLE: There have been many Sundays when someone tells me, “That sermon was exactly what I needed” as if I knew what was going on in their life, or as if it was my preaching or

personality that gave life to the words. It's not the preacher that makes the Bible alive; the preacher only communicates already living material!

BIBLE VERSE

Dad's Bible – danger explosive material

[2Ti 4:2 NKJV] 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

CONTEXT

Living – ZAO – Fresh, strong, efficient, active, powerful, and efficacious.

- If your Bible is boring to you, there's a good chance that you're not actively engaging the living word, but simply reading words on a paper.

In ancient times, there were certain laws that were referred to as, "Dead laws." Dead laws were laws written to intimidate the populous without the resolve to follow through on the consequences of breaking it. These laws were outdated and practically useless even though they were officially still on the books.

- **Today there is even a legal term "Dead Letter" – a law that is still on the books but is outdated and not enforced.**
 - EXAMPLE: For instance... In Alaska, it is still illegal to get drunk in a bar.
 - In Arkansas, it's illegal to mispronounce the word Arkansas.
 - In Gainesville, GA, it's still officially illegal (since 1961) to eat fried chicken with anything other than your hand! Takes finger-licking good to a whole new level!
 - In Maryland, you can get a \$100 fine for swearing or cursing while driving and in Wyoming, you aren't allowed to buy anything from someone who is drunk.
- A "living law" was the opposite. It's one that if not obeyed, you would face the full force of the legal system.

God's Word is a living law. It's not a set of antiquated, outdated rules that aren't relevant or applicable for your life anymore. God's Word is still living. It's active, it's still convicting real issues in real life. **And most importantly, we are still held accountable to what God says.**

- *One cannot ignore God's Word without consequences.*
- *God doesn't turn a blind eye to those who hear His word and willingly decide to ignore, disobey it or rebel against it.*
- *His word governs the universe.*
- *One could no more jump off a roof and escape gravity than they could ignore or dismiss God's Word and expect to escape the temporal and eternal consequences.*

APPLICATION

God's word is also living in the sense that it is active in the hearts and minds of those who are willing to hear it.

Seven times in the book of Revelation, Jesus uses this phrase, "He who has an ear, let Him hear what the Spirit says..."

B. THE WORD OF GOD IS POWERFUL

APPLICATION

God's Word is not merely powerful in that it moves a person emotionally:

- Some might say, "that movie was powerful." They mean that it emotionally moved them.
- Some might say, "That book was powerful." This observation means they were challenged, provoked or moved by it.
- God's word is powerful in that way, but there is even more to it! It is powerful in that God's word has inherent authority over that which it is spoken.

The Greek word here for powerful is where we derive the English word "Energy or Energetic." It's the idea of being active and effective.

Isa 55:11 NKJV – 11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

In a positive sense:

- If a storm hears God's Words, it will stop. If a sickness hears God's Word, it's healed. If a sin hears God's word, its power will be broken.

[Psa 119:11 NKJV] 11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.

[Psa 119:9 NKJV] 9 BETH. How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

This power can also manifest in a negative sense:

- If God's word pronounces one guilty, they stand convicted. If God's Word declares light, it automatically exposes darkness.

C. THE WORD OF GOD IS SHARP

ILLUSTRATION

Two-edged Sword – A sword that has a blade that cuts both ways.

When the author introduced the picture of a **Roman sword, be it a short dagger or a longsword**, there's only one thing the ancient readers thought about—death. A sword was never used as an instrument of help, but war, wrath, and judgment. The longsword was for combat against multiple enemies, the dagger would be drawn for hand-to-hand combat. And here we are told that the Word of God is even sharper than the deadly dagger!

- Four times in the book of Revelation, Jesus is portrayed as having a double-edged sword coming out of His mouth (**1:16, 2:16, 19:15, 19:21**) and He uses it to fight against those who hold false doctrines, strike the nations, and destroy the armies of the beast.
- Why do you think the apostle Paul, when speaking of our warfare against the satanic forces, calls God's Word, **"The Sword of the Spirit?" (Ephesians 6:17)** Because it's a weapon that will bring about swift destruction on all who oppose it.

If God's word is heeded, it can bring life and peace, but when it is resisted, it comes out of its sheath and sets God's judgment against those who oppose it.

2

The Operation of God's Word

BIBLE VERSE

piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

A. THE WORD OF GOD PIERCES

CONTEXT

This phrase, “**piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow...**” is often explicated and explained to mean that God’s word can separate the spiritual from the carnal; that it can remove and destroy the flesh and strengthen the spirit. These statements are true, but it’s not really what the author is getting at. Here, *the author is offering a poetic way of describing death by the sword.*

- In the Hebrew thought, **the soul (*psyche*) represents the physical side of our being, and the spirit (*pneuma*) represents the inner man or the spiritual side of our nature. These two are intertwined to create a living person. They are inseparable. What happens when the spirit and the soul become separated? It means you died.**
- Only traumatic, excessive, blunt force can separate your joints and marrow. A knife that is inserted into the body and is tearing the bone from the marrow is designed to kill you. When the word of God encounters a hardened heart, it becomes an instrument of spiritual death to those who are opposing it.

CONTEXT: If people hear the word of God calling them into His rest through continued faith in Christ and they reject it, then that same word of God, like a knife, will become their eternal death sentence.

B. THE WORD OF GOD DISCERNES AND EXPOSES

ILLUSTRATION

A couple of months ago during hunting season, I got a nice buck (that's provided our family with some amazing meals). When I found the buck in some timber I pulled out my hunting knife, flipped that thing upside down, and went for it. Let's just say that there's a lot more inside a deer than you imagine from looking at it externally!

CONTEXT

Just as a knife can expose what's hidden underneath the skin, God's word reveals what's hidden in the deepest realms of the human heart, motive, and mind.

DEFINITION

Discerner – Kriticos (Greek)

"A skilled judge who pronounces a sentence."

God's Word weighs the evidence it sees on the inside of a person and convicts accordingly.

God's word holds no biases and shows no favoritism. If you've ever come out of a church service, or a time of personal devotion and prayer, and you feel exposed and convicted, it's because the Word of God has cut you open and convicted you of inconsistencies or falsehoods in your life.

ILLUSTRATION

I was playing around with Google Earth a couple of days ago. It reminded me that no matter what I do in this world today, someone is always watching! ***Facebook is tracking my internet activity, Google and Apple are tracking my travel and eating habits, the government is tracking my financial transactions, apps are contract-tracing your COVID activity!***

- There is hardly an area of life that is not under constant surveillance. The only things the human being seems to have total privacy control over are their thoughts and intentions, right? Well, God has full monitoring there too! Nothing is hidden from His sight!
- Google, Facebook, and the government may be interested in your private info for all the wrong reasons, but not so with God. God is our creator. He is the rightful judge of the

universe. We are told that every thought, intent, action, and word is going to require an accounting when we stand before Him one day.

- I don't highly recommend the amplified Bible for your main source of study, but I enjoyed how it paraphrased this verse:

13 Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it – no matter what.

Quite frankly, we should be grateful for this. Accountability in hidden areas of life is helpful, especially when there are things hidden in us that are ticking time bombs, and we don't fully see them yet.

ILLUSTRATION

EXAMPLE: Finding the rusty **barbed-wire in the weeds** as I was weed-whacking the yard.

When dangerous things are lurking in the weeds, it's helpful to have something that can expose them; and this is the nature of the Word of God.

all things are naked and open...

It doesn't matter if you say you love God, His word reveals whether or not you do by examining your obedience. It doesn't matter if you come to church, raise your hands in worship, or know all the correct Christian lingo. **It won't take long for God's word to penetrate your facade and give God a clear window into the true state of your heart.**

QUOTE

He requires of us conformity of mind and heart to Him; and if we do not yield it, He is perfectly aware of this, and can and will deal with us, not according to what we appear to be, but according to what we really are, and what He knows us to be.

John Brown, Commentary on Hebrews

TO WHOM WE HAVE TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT...

This is clearly talking about God, be it the father or the son, or both. The point though is simple:

- We won't have to give an account to the prophets, or the angels, or even Moses, but Jesus.

BIBLE VERSE

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 (NKJV) 9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. **10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things [done] in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

3

The Opportunity of God's Word

QUOTE

The Word exposes our hearts; and then, if we trust God, the Word enables our hearts to obey God and claim His promises.

Warren Wiersbe, Commentary on Hebrews

APPLICATION

The good news is that the author doesn't stop at the language of conviction and exposure. God's intention of revealing our guilt, exposing our errors and inconsistencies, and showing us our spiritual nakedness is not to destroy us, but to give us an opportunity to run to the Living Word, Jesus, and find mercy and grace at His throne.

A. HOLD FAST OUR CONFESSION

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

CONTEXT

Jesus isn't just another high priest in the order of imperfect human priests that have gone before. Jesus is "The Great High Priest." His title indicates that God has elevated Him above all others that bear the title of priest. He alone is qualified to intercede before God on behalf of human beings.

- ***He passed through the heavens*** – Once when He came from heaven to earth, and a second time when he ascended from earth to heaven. This "passing through" is the same way that the high priest would pass through the veil to offer the blood of the sacrifice upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant.
- ***Let us hold fast*** – this is the opposite of drifting; this indicates that we recognize the current that will take us away from Christ and cling to our anchor and hope.
- It is our confession that declares we are trusting and heeding the word of God as spoken through the person of Christ!

APPLICATION

A long as you stick with Jesus, God's Word will never be used to judge you, only to help you.

Like a surgeon's scalpel, it might still bring pain through conviction, but only to heal, never to condemn. But again, this is only when you hold fast to Jesus. Move outside the protective covering of Christ, and God's Word will come against you!

B. BOLDLY APPROACH HIS PRESENCE

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

CONTEXT

As we discussed before, the requirements of the high priest were that they had to be faithful to God, but also be empathetic to man. Jesus represented both of those qualities perfectly.

- Jesus knows what it feels like to be human. He knows the temptation to worry, the temptation to be afraid, and the temptation to question God's intentions. Everything we've been tempted in as humans, Jesus knows the pull of it. As a man, Jesus was subjected to every temptation of men, yet he never caved in.

- When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, His victory came through using that powerful sword of God's Word against the enemy.
- Now, having gained complete and total victory, we now have hope for ourselves in Him.

I've met people who doubt Jesus's ability to empathize. How can the Son of God really understand the temptation I face? Jesus never sinned, how can He understand the lure of darkness and the pull of sin.

QUOTE

C.S. Lewis answers this important question, *“Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. You find out the strength of an army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives into temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later... We never find out the strength of an evil impulse... until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means.”*

In other words... Jesus knows more than you think because when you gave in, he kept fighting!

CS Lewis, Mere Christianity

ILLUSTRATION

Rubberband test – thin rubber band vs. thick rubber band. Which one experiences the greater tension?

Jesus not only senses the difficulty of your struggle, your struggle is very small compared to what he endured and overcame, so yes—Jesus does understand you and is available to offer an

unending resource of help!

BIBLE VERSE

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

APPLICATION

And we end with an amazing hope, for that same word that can judge, condemn and destroy us if we neglect it, can offer us free access into the grace and mercy of God if we receive it. God's word can be a sword that strikes against you, or it can be a bridge that connects you to unimaginable grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

Note the word Throne – Some ancient rabbis had trouble reconciling the fact that God is just and at the same time merciful. Their theological response was that God must have two thrones, one where He judges and one where He forgives. In reality, it's one throne. To all who reject God's Word, His gospel, it will be a throne of judgment, but to all who receive it, it becomes a throne of grace and mercy. When can the believer approach that throne and take advantage of its benefits?

"In time of need" – I don't know about you, but that's most of the time for me! Yet, why does it come so naturally to us to reject God's free offer of help and resort to figuring it out ourselves? Instead of believing God's Word for whatever it is we need help with, we doubt him and take matters into our own hands.

BEAUTY: The beauty of Jesus – it doesn't matter what sin you're dealing with, what fear your wrestling against, or what need or despair you find yourself facing. If you take heed to Jesus and His word, you will both obtain mercy and find grace.

QUOTE

"God's mercy tanks never run dry, and there is a deep flowing spring, sourced by eternal love and goodness, which continually fills the wells of His grace."

At God's throne, through Jesus Christ, we find mercy for the sins of the past, and grace for future struggles.

Josh, Quote

APPLICATION

And how are we supposed to approach this throne? ***With confidence and boldness!***

Interesting Greek translation here. I looked it up in several Greek dictionaries. The preposition "meta" modifies the word translated into confidence from the Greek. The word meta means, **"To go after (succeed) someone or something."**

The priest and the people could only approach God in the temple "after the sacrifice."

Our confidence in approaching the throne of God is not in ourselves or our performance but comes from the fact that we are coming after Jesus, the Great high priest, and the more excellent sacrifice who has gone before us on our behalf.

CONCLUSION

The Word of God can hurt you or heal you, judge you or justify you, destroy you or deliver you. It all depends on what you do with it and how you respond to it. Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts! Today, if you have not surrendered to the good news of His death and resurrection on your behalf, stop whatever you're doing and make it your greatest priority!

There is abundant grace and there are depths of mercy available for you, but you have to come according to God's Word, through His son Jesus Christ.