

“A Sharp Two-Edged Sword”  
Hebrews 4:12  
(Preached at Trinity, December 31, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citation will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 4** has a primary focus upon entering God's rest. This was the focus of the Gospel that had been preached to them—to both those in the Old Covenant and in the New. But not everyone who heard the Good News received the benefit of it. It had to be received by faith. This still remains true.  
**Hebrews 4:2 NAU** - "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard."
  2. The problem with lost humanity is our fallen condition has left us unable to receive the Gospel. We can't comprehend it as good news. The Word of the Gospel must be accompanied by Divine power.  
**Verse 12** describes this power.  
**Hebrews 4:12 NAU** - "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."
  3. This verse is rich in essential truths. These will be the focus of this sermon.
    - I. It is the Word of God
    - II. It is the Living and Active Word
    - III. It is the Powerful Word
    - IV. It is the Searching Word.
    - V. We also have a brief statement on the composition of man.
- I. It is the Word of God
    - A. The Book of Hebrews reveals how the early church viewed the Scriptures.
      1. The author calls it the Word of God.
      2. **Psalm 95** is quoted extensively in **Chapters 3-4**.  
They were well aware that there was a human author. David authored most of the psalms. The Bible is the work of some forty different human authors. They wrote using their words. Their personalities shine through. But the human authors were only secondary authors. Scripture is the Word of God. The author affirms this: **Hebrews 3:7 NAU** - "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice,"
    - B. The Bible recognizes the dual authorship of the Bible.
      1. The Bible was written by men under the Divine inspiration of God. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy.  
**2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU** - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

3. This dual authorship of Scripture is called the “concurrent theory” of inspiration.  
B.B. Warfield writes: “*The Holy Spirit* works in, with and by them, elevating them, directing them, controlling them, energizing them, so that, as His instruments, they rise above themselves and under His inspiration do His work and reach His aim.”<sup>1</sup>
4. J.I. Packer wrote: “Scripture is not only man’s word, the fruit of human thought, premeditation and art, but also, and equally God’s Word, spoken through man’s lips or written with man’s pen. In other words, Scripture has a double authorship, and man is only the secondary author; the primary author, through whose initiative, prompting, enlightenment, and under whose super-intendance, each human author did his work, is God the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

## II. It is the Living and Active Word.

- A. The author is personifying the Word of God.
  1. It is alive. It is active. It is working.
  2. It is alive because the Holy Spirit accompanies it. He is working in and through His Word.
- B. The living Word is the means by which God creates faith in the heart of sinners.
 

**Romans 10:17 NAU** - "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

  1. God spoke the world into existence – “let there be . . . “  
He likewise speaks life into dead sinners.  
**2 Corinthians 4:6 NAU** - "For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."
  2. God continues to work through His Word.
    - a. God works through the preaching of His Word.  
**James 1:21 NAU** - "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."  
**1 Corinthians 1:21 NAU** - "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."
    - b. The Word is the chief means of our sanctification as God uses it increase our knowledge and grow us in holiness.  
**1 Peter 2:2 NAU** - "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,"

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<sup>1</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, (Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), Page 95.

<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, *The Origin of the Bible*, Philip Wesley Comfort, Editor, (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Page 95.

### III. It is the Powerful Word.

- A. In ancient warfare there were few weapons as feared as a two-edged sword.
1. The author describes it as two-edged and sharp.  
In a skillful hand such a weapon was most effective as the wielder could produce lethal strikes from both directions.
  2. Of course, the Holy Spirit is infinitely skillful in wielding His Sword. It cuts and exposes. In Ephesians Paul refers to it as the "Sword of the Spirit."
- B. The Word of God is infinitely powerful. It is able to accomplish the will of God.
1. Isaiah described God sending forth His Word with unstoppable power.  
**Isaiah 55:11 NAU** - "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."
  2. God decreed all things by the Word of His power and is now working His will effectually.
- C. In the salvation of the elect God uses His Word powerfully and effectually.
1. The Word of God has the power to cut through the heart of the most hardened sinner - God can save even the worse skeptic and scoffer.
  2. God makes the preaching of the Word effectual  
**1 Thessalonians 1:5-7 NAU** - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup> so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."  
**1 Corinthians 2:1-5 NAU** - "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. <sup>2</sup> For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. <sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. <sup>4</sup> And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."  
**1 Corinthians 1:18 NAU** - "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."
- D. The Holy Spirit takes the Word of Truth and illuminates our minds enabling us to perceive and comprehend spiritual truth.
1. This is an essential aspect of the new birth. We become spiritually alive and able to perceive spiritual truths.  
Jesus told Nicodemus:  
**John 3:3 NAU** - "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (ὄρω)
  2. On one hand the Bible is perspicuous – the Bible can be understood.  
The Bible is a plain book. It is intelligible to the common man using the normal faculties of reason.

3. On the other hand the Bible cannot be known or understood by the natural man. He is incapable of discerning spiritual truths without the help of the Holy Spirit.
  1. It isn't just knowing the Word. It demands a new heart – a heart of faith. Paul told Timothy:  
**2 Timothy 3:15 NAU** - "from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."
  2. This is clearly seen in the case of Lydia  
**Acts 16:14 NAU** - "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."
  3. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians  
**1 Thessalonians 2:13 NAU** - "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted *it* not as the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."
  4. The greatest power in the entire universe accompanies God's Word as the Holy Spirit opens the dead hearts of sinners and applies the atoning sacrifice of Christ enabling them to receive the good news of the Gospel.
  5. This is the meaning conveyed in **Verse 2**  
**Hebrews 4:2 NAU** - "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard."

#### IV. It is a searching Word.

- A. The Word of God is able to search out the deepest secrets of the human heart.
  1. The author describes it as cutting beyond the flesh extending all the way to the soul and spirit and joints and marrow.
  3. This brings up the question, are human beings composed of body, soul, and spirit (a trichotomy) or are we composed of body and soul (dichotomy).  
The Bible doesn't make a strict distinction between soul and spirit. The two terms are often used interchangeably.
    - a. Calvin: "That man consists of a soul and a body ought to be beyond controversy" (Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 184).
    - b. Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck – "Soul and spirit in Scripture repeatedly occur in parallelism and interchangeably. One moment "body and soul" constitute the nature of man, the next it is "body and spirit."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), Page 189

- c. The author is making a statement on the composition of the human being. He is simply describing how the Word of God searches to the innermost part of a man.
- B. The Bible probes with surgical accuracy
1. It exposes every detail of our heart. It reveals the truth about us. It shows us what we are. It convicts us and cuts away every pretense.
  2. The Bible brings us face to face with God – It is God’s revelation of Himself.
  3. The Bible also brings us face to face with ourselves.  
 “I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.”  
 Through God’s Word we can see ourselves as God sees us.  
 The Bible able to expose the innermost secrets of the heart?  
 "and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
  4. **Verse 13** describes God’s probing eye. Nothing can escape His gaze. The word “laid bare” means “exposed.” The ESV calls it “naked and exposed.” Put into context, the Bible exposes us. The author is comparing God’s Word to God’s probing eyes. God cannot be separated from His Living Word. Every thought, word, and deed are exposed before the all-knowing God. Likewise, nothing can escape the truth of God’s Word.
- C. The two-edged sword also provides protection.
1. Jesus wielded it skillfully during His wilderness temptation. With each temptation of Satan Jesus responded with the Word of God.
  2. Paul described it as our chief weapon for spiritual warfare.  
**Ephesians 6:17 NAU** - "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."
  3. In 1520 Martin Luther was ordered by the Pope to appear before the Diet of Worms to recant his writings. He asked for a day to consider the order—a day spent in prayer and seeking the counsel of other Godly men. The next day he gave his famous response:  
 “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen.”
  4. Luther knew first-hand the power of our warfare. He wrote:  
 “The prince of darkness grim—we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo! His doom is sure: One little word shall fell him.”

#### Conclusion:

1. God’s Word is the means of God’s convicting power. It is the bloodhound that tracks us down leaving us defenseless.
2. No one can be saved apart from God’s Word.