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The Word of God (Jan 1966)

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There are three great passages dealing with the subject of the written Word of God and each tells us in a different way its value and why it must be an integral part of the Christian's life if he is to grow spiritually.

The first, 2 Timothy 3:16, the content of which could be summed up by the word "profit." The second passage, found in 2 Peter 1:21, has the key thought of preeminence. The third passage is in Hebrews 4:12, and the key word is power. It is upon this third passage we shall focus our attention.

In the third chapter of Hebrews the writer is reminding his readers of the failure of God's chosen people —the nation of Israel. He summarizes the sad history of Israel in verse 19, "So we see that they could not enter in (to the Land of Canaan) because of unbelief.

In chapter four the writer turns to the present and proceeds to outline four very real provisions for the Christian which will enable him to be successful in his Christian life. This, of course, is in direct contrast to the nation of Israel which fell in the wilderness. The four provisions suggest a breakdown of the chapter for analysis.

The Rest of God — (v1-11).

The Word of God — (v 12-13).

The Priest of God — (v 14-15).

The Throne of God — (v 16).

Each one affords a wealth of blessing if studied in detail but we will confine our thinking to the second —the Word of God.

May I suggest that in our meditation on verses 12 and 13, we study the message of the writer under five points:

Vibrant in its Life

Our verse says that the Word of God is “quick.” The word translated quick is the Greek word “Zao.” It is the same word that is used by Paul in Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live, is Christ.” The word is used by the Lord Jesus in John 18:19 “Because I live, ye shall live also.”

Let us read Hebrews 4:12, that way. “The Word of God lives.” The life that filters through the pages of the Word of God will begin to filter through the life of that person who addicts himself to it. One cannot continually read the Word of God and not be affected. It is alive and is able to revitalize the cold heart and warm it towards the Saviour.

Vigorous in its Action

The next word used to describe the Word of God is “Powerful.” Strangely enough this is not the normal word for power and had the passage been written by man no doubt the normal word would have been used. Instead the writer uses the Greek word “Energees” and our word energy is derived from it. This particular word is found in only two other places in the New Testament. It is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:9 where he says that an “effectual door” was opened unto him. He uses it again in Philemon 6 and describes the communication of Philemon’s faith as “effectual.” The effectual door was an active door in that it allowed Paul to spread the

gospel. The effectual communication of faith meant that Philemon's faith was operative — not stagnant. Hence, when it says that the Word of God is effectual it means that it is active and operative. In fact the word could be described as meaning "Life (point 1.) in action." There is no limitation to the activity of the Word of God in a Christian life. It can transform a Christian who is weak, defeated and wasted into a living, active and vibrant vessel for the Lord Jesus Christ. Try it and see.

Vindictive in its Judgment

First, the verse tells us that the Word of God is "sharper than any two edged sword." The sword in Scripture is, almost without exception, a picture of judgment. When the record of the message to the church at Pergamos is made in Revelation 2:12, the message comes from One "which hath a sharp sword with two edges." In other words the church was subject to judgment. In Revelation 19:15, there is recorded that great event where a sword goes out of the mouth of Him who is called "The Word of God," and the mission of the sword is to smite the nations, again an indication of judgment.

Here in Hebrews 4 it would seem that the sword of the Word of God judges the individual Christian's life. A sword cuts. Thus, as we allow the Word of God to take control and govern our lives it will ruthlessly cut away those things that would mar fellowship with our Saviour. How we need the sharp cutting of the Word of God!

Second, the writer tells us that the Word of God is a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The word discerner comes from the same root as the word judge. Let us read it that way. "The Word of God acts as a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Thoughts are those things with which our minds are occupied. Intents, on the other hand, are motivation — the reasons behind our actions. Now if the Word of God is judging daily our occupation and our motivation the logical conclusion is that what comes out must be right. It is a matter of cause and effect. If the cause is cured so is the effect. If my car is noisy due to a faulty muffler, by correcting the faulty muffler I correct the noise. So it is in spiritual things. Allow the Word of God to judge your life and what comes out in deed and action will be pleasing to the Lord and a blessing to others.

Violent in its Operation

The writer tells us that the Word of God is “piercing, even to the dividing assunder of soul and spirit and joints and marrow.” It is indeed interesting that the word “piercing” translated literally means “coming through.” The picture, of course, is that of a sword being thrust and coming through on the other side. It is certainly suggestive of the powerful effect the Word of God can be in an individual’s life.

But what does the writer mean when he writes of the “soul and spirit” and “joints and marrow?” May this be suggested, the soul and spirit are those things that we cannot touch, see or feel, and hence they represent that which is spiritual. The joints and marrow, on the other hand, can be felt, handled and seen, hence, remind us of that which is material or carnal. Now the Word of God divides between these two; that is it divides that which represents the spiritual from that which represents the carnal. In other words, the Word of God is the basis for our separation.

As we meditate upon this we become increasingly aware that there is much, so called, separation among assemblies which is not founded upon the Word of God. Separation is primarily a positive force and secondarily negative. It is always “unto Him” and then “without the camp” (Heb. 13:13). Any separation which does not join God’s people in a mutual attraction to Christ, but rather separates God’s people from themselves is contrary to the Word of God and harmful to God’s people.

Valuable in its Revelation

Our passage tells us that the Word of God reveals two things to the Christian.

First, it reveals the “sinful heart.” “All things are opened.” The word translated here is the Greek word “tetrakelismena” and it comes from the Greek word meaning neck. What is the connection? Perhaps the reference is to a custom of the priest in the old economy. Just before the sacrifice was offered the priest would seize the animal by the neck and hold its head back. The reason for this was to ensure that the animal was without spot or blemish, so the priest would take this last look before plunging the knife into the animal’s heart. By seizing the animal’s neck and holding the head back all the animal was exposed to the priest’s scrutiny. The Word of God also reveals all the spots and blemishes in our lives so that correction may take place.

Second, the passage tells us that the Word of God gives a revelation of the “Steward’s hope,” “To the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” A more correct rendering would be, “To the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.” All my activities should be in view of that day of reckoning. Just as the financial audit

reveals the faithfulness of the accountant, so that eternal audit will reveal the faithfulness of the steward. All that we have, whether spiritual or material is only given to us in trust. One day we must give an account. No wonder we say that the Word of God is “valuable in its revelation.”

As I bring our little meditation to a close I would like to underline the message of Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:15, “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them (addict yourself to them).” Just as the dope addict cannot survive without dope, in that measure should the Christian be dependent upon the Word of God.

An Organism At Work (Apr 1968)

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The spiritually gathered local church should be a miniature of the Universal Church, and as such may be likened to an organism, not an organization. The differences between the two are simple but fundamental. An organization is manmade whereas a local church is established by Christ Himself. If the components of an organization are divorced from one another, they still continue to operate independently; not so an organism; if its components are separated, it dies. An organization is an inanimate structure void of life, whereas, the local church pulsates with the very life of Christ.

A forceful illustration of the difference between these two is found in the Book of the Revelation (3:20). In that passage Christ is seen outside the door of the Laodicean church begging admittance, but His plea is unheard. The church at Laodicia had degenerated from an organism full of vitality into an organization void of life.

What, then, makes this organism, the local church, work? Basically there are three major components, all of which must function properly in order that the local church be effective. The three components are priesthood, oversight and deaconship.

Each of these operates under Christ and is responsible to Him. Each priest is responsible to Him as the “Great High Priest” (Heb. 4:14).

Each overseer is responsible to Him as the Chief Bishop (Chief Overseer) (1 Pet. 2:25). Each deacon is

responsible to Him as the Head Deacon. The Lord Jesus during His sojourn here said, “I am unto you as a deacon” (Luke 22:27, a literal translation).

The priesthood has its source in spiritual birth; the oversight, in spiritual character and maturity; the deaconship in spiritual gifts.

Priesthood

The concept of priesthood is an Old Testament one that has been borrowed by the writers of the New Testament and developed through truths and principles meant for the Church. This function which was limited to only a few in the Old Testament dispensation, in the New is possible to every member of the Church of the Living God. The Spirit of God indicates that all are “an holy priesthood” and “a royal priesthood.”

Under the Old Testament economy the priest engaged in three functions which have a counterpart among the activities of priesthood in the churches.

First, they entered into the tabernacle. Although all priests were not allowed into the holiest of all, this being reserved for the high priest only, yet, we might consider their lives as being lived in the presence of the Lord. Today, each New Testament priest, by a new and living way, may enter into the immediate presence of God and there enjoy communion and fellowship with his Creator.

Second, the Aaronic priests, those of the Old Testament, offered sacrifices for both themselves and the ordinary people.. Hebrews eight reminds us that inherent in the office of a priest is the function of offering sacrifices. What may be the sacrifices which the priest of the New Testament should offer? Here are three: his person

(Rom. 12:1), his praise (Heb. 13:15), and his purse (Heb. 13:16).

Third, the Aaronic priests were consecrated to the service of God; their consecration was detailed, their functions explicit, and their separation clear. It is similar today for the members of the Christian priesthood. In the consecration of the former, each was anointed on the right ear, right thumb and right large toe. This indicated that his entire person was physically the property of God. Today, the Christian is asked to come out from the throng and identify himself with Christ; to associate himself with the Man of Sorrows and to be separated to Him alone.

Oversight

We noted in our first article that there were three terms used to describe the same person; namely, overseer, bishop and pastor. We also noted that where these individuals were mentioned, it is always in the plural, indicating that each local church had elders (bishops and pastors) who carried out the functions assigned to them. What are these functions?

First, elders are to care for the church of God (1 Tim. 3:5). The word “care” used here is the same word as was used by the good Samaritan when speaking to the Innkeeper, “Take care of him,” he said. This responsibility involves spiritual exercise and concern. It often makes elders unpopular but their hearts are knit to the people of God.

Second, they are to rule the church of God (1 Tim. 5:17). The word “rule” means to rule by example and suggests leadership. Eliphaz said of Job, “Thy words have

upholden him that was falling" (Job. 4:4). Such is the function of elders.

Third, they are to feed the church of God (Acts 20:28). There is a ministry that can be given by visiting teachers. Even an evangelist can play a great part in teaching new converts. However, in the final analysis, it is the elders who are responsible to feed the church of God; to saturate the members of the assembly with the Word of God.

Fourth, they are to watch over the church (Heb. 13:17).

The word translated overseer is the Greek word, episcopos, which comes from two other Greek words, scopio, to see or watch, and, epi, over. It, therefore, literally means one who watches over. Elders must give an account of their work at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The accounting records will be opened to the One who will perform an exhaustive audit. The responsibility of making the entries belongs to the elders.

Finally, elders must guard the church (Tit. 1:9). They themselves must be so well versed in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures as to recognize false doctrine when it appears and keep it out of the church.

Is it any wonder that when Paul specifies the qualifications of an elder, he searches the elders inward life, family life and outward life? He qualifies them as to character, temperment, experience and reputation. True overseers are men of God appointed by the Holy Spirit, and they are accountable to Him for their charge.

Deacons

As noted above, deaconship falls into two categories according to their natural gifts and their spiritual gifts.

A contractor who serves on a building committee is using his natural gift for the Lord. An accountant who acts as treasurer of an assembly is using his natural gift for the Lord. When the Lord was choosing a man to lead His people out of Egyptian bondage, He did not choose one who was ill-prepared for the job; He chose Moses, a man raised in the courts of Egypt, a man who because of his natural gifts could speak to the Pharaoh. A natural gift is one for which we are trained in the secular world; it can be of value in the work of God.

Spiritual service requires more than natural gift; it requires spiritual gift and preparation. Moses spent forty years in the courts of Pharaoh developing natural gifts, but he spent forty years in the backside of the desert developing spiritual gifts; he was learning lessons in the school of God.

Today we need deacons who are prepared by God. We need young people who are willing to be moulded by the hands of God who will emerge as vessels of honour ready for the use of the Master. Do not confuse spiritual gifts with natural gifts, both are important in the assembly. When the two complement each other, work is accomplished for the Lord.

Then God Made Woman (May 1968)

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The place occupied by women in the operation and function of the local church has been a point of contention among evangelicals for many generations. Some groups consider the function of women to be synonamous with that of men and the ministry of each has become interchangeable. What saith the Scriptures?

It seems that the Scriptures clearly teach the relationship of the women as it pertains to the local church is summed up in three words: (1) silence, (2) sobriety, (3) subjection.

There are basically four Scriptures that deal with the subject and in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the entire teaching, all four Scriptures should be considered. The Scriptures are as follows: (1) 1 Timothy 2:9-15 (2) 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (3) 1 Peter 3:1-6 (4) 1 Corinthians 11:3-16.

Three out of the four Scriptures (the exception being 1 Cor. 11:3-16) deal with the subjects covered by the three summary words mentioned above. One refers to all three (1 Tim. 2: 9-15) whereas the other two mention a combination of two out of the three.

Since 1 Corinthains 11:3-16 covers a related but entirely different subject, let us deal with it first.

It is important to note, first of all, that the Corinthian letter was written to a local church and the subject matter of the letter deals with the Christian’s relationship to the local church and how he or she

should act while therein. It therefore follows that what Paul says about women in chapter 11 does not apply to them in their homes or outside the local church activities.

There are four persons or items under consideration. These are: (1) God (2) man (3) woman (4) her hair.

Paul goes on to say, (a) man is the glory of God V7, (b) woman is the glory of man V7, (c) her hair is the glory of the woman V15. The principles are as follows:

(a) The glory of God (which is man) must never be covered. His glory is the first and foremost consideration of any Christian activity. Hence man (who is the glory of God) is not covered.

(b) The glory of man (which is the woman) must always be covered. He must be placed in the background; he must decrease. Hence the women (who is the glory of man) is covered.

(c)The glory of woman (which is her hair) must always be covered. Again this necessitates that the woman must wear a covering so that her glory is out of sight.

It is indeed logical, therefore, that the woman wear a covering for two reasons. First, so that she is, by symbol, hidden, being the glory of the man and second, so that her glory (her hair) is not seen.

It is also important to note what Paul is saying about the woman's hair. First of all he says that it is a shame for it to be shaven or shorn. "If this is the case," says Paul, "it must be covered." In other words he is saying that either her hair (which is her glory) must be shorn (done away with) or covered —one or the other. He is not speaking about the length of hair. His whole point is that

one way or the other her hair (her glory) must disappear.

Now consider the other three Scriptures and the three great summary words which describe the ministry of women.

First let us examine the subject of silence. Two of the Scriptures mention it — 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-5. In 1 Timothy 2 the context is that of prayer. Paul says that he desires men everywhere to pray. The word for “men” denotes the male of the species and does not refer merely to mankind. He then goes on to describe the ministry of women. It therefore follows that it would be inappropriate for women to audibly pray in a general meeting of the local church.

In connection with the “silence” in these two Scriptures, there are two words which perhaps give the key. The first word is “learn” and it is used in 1 Timothy 2, as well as 1 Corinthians 14. The other word is “teach.” The word for teach (didasko) means “absolutely, to give instruction” (W. E. Vine) and the word for learn (manthano) is related to the Greek word mathetes meaning “disciple.” The silence, therefore, referred to in these Scriptures is associated with prayer and with teaching.

He uses another clause that may help us in understanding the passages — “As also thus saith the law.” We would gather that he is not speaking of a peculiar situation at Corinth but rather a principle which has been carried forward from the Old Testament to the New and hence is applicable today.

What constitutes teaching? There is another Greek word used in the New Testament which is very interesting. It

is the word Paideuo and means “to train children.” Paul does not use this word in connection with the ministry of women. It seems to me that teaching refers to any situation where the church is being instructed either by way of doctrinal teaching or exhortation. This function is reserved for men.

Second, there is the principle of sobriety. Two Scriptures deal with this subject. 1 Peter 3:1-6 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

Someone has suggested that the Christian should not be ashamed of the gospel nor a shame to it. The principle here is the matter of dress. He uses terms such as “modest apparel,” “shame facedness” and “meek and quiet spirit.” The negatives that the writers use describe those women that were prostitutes and dressed as such in the days the passages were written. The whole point of these Scriptures is that the inward adornment is the thing that matters. As we are internally so we will appear externally. The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit will find its expression in an outward appearance which is similar.

Paul uses an interesting word in Romans 12:1 where he speaks about not being “conformed” to this world. It is the word suschematizesthai and the root of the word is schema which means our outer form, that which changes. A man’s scheme may be different when he is dressed for dinner than when he is working in the garden. Paul says in effect “don’t let the world dictate what form your outward appearance should take. Let the inner man be the important part of your life.”

Third, there is the principle of subjection. All three Scriptures mention it. Sorry girls — it is the Word of God and it is extremely clear.

First, the Scriptures teach that wives are to be subject to their husbands. In Ephesians Paul gives the reason for this subjection. He says that the relationship that exists between a man and his wife is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His Church. What a beautiful relationship! It is not a matter of lording over or being in command but rather the subjection of love.

Second, Paul says that the woman is not to usurp authority over the man. The word “to usurp authority” is interesting. It is the Greek word authenteo and comes from two Greekwords — autos meaning “self” and hentes meaning “working.” It, therefore, literally means “working for self.” In its early use it meant “to take the law into ones own hands” and later came to mean, “to domineer over.” It is always disheartening to see a situation, whether in the local church, in the home or in an office, where a woman has usurped authority. Girls, it is important to understand your scriptural position. Remember that in the analogy mentioned above you are likened to the Church which will become the bride of Christ, without spot and without wrinkle.