

## INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the best-selling book in all of history. But sadly, many people who own Bibles as books or on an app seldom read and study what the Bible teaches. Here are some actual answers children gave to Bible questions:

1. Noah's wife was Joan of Ark.
2. Moses went up on Mt. Cyanide to get the Ten Amendments.
3. The fifth commandment is to humor your father and mother.
4. The seventh commandment is you shall not admit adultery.
5. Moses died before he ever reached Canada.
6. It was a miracle when Joshua commanded his son to stand still and he obeyed.
7. Jesus said, "Man does not live by sweat alone."
8. Jesus taught, "Do one to others before they do one to you."
9. The opossum Paul cavorted to Christianity.
10. The Bible says a man should have only one wife. This is called monotony.

Of course, it's cute when children write humorous statements about the Bible. But according researcher George Barna, American adults don't fare much better. Less than 50% of Americans can name the four gospels. 60% of Americans can't name five of the Ten Commandments. 82% of Americans believe the phrase "God helps those who help themselves" is in the Bible. No, that's not in the Bible. 50% of Americans thought Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

As we examine this passage about the power of God's Word, we must put it in proper context. Over the past few weeks we explored the story of how an entire generation of Israelites heard the Word of God, "Go take the Promised Land." But they didn't believe God's Word and turned away to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Then the writer turns to us and states that there is still a rest for the people of God, and we need to avoid making the mistake of those Israelites who didn't believe God's Word.

Hebrews 4:12 is a famous verse about the Bible, but it is most often read or quoted alone. We're going to get a running start with the ninth verse, so we can understand the context.

Hebrews 4:9-13. "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

There was a time when almost everyone in America respected the Bible, whether they believed it or not. But we live in a time of relative morality today when popular opinion and personal

beliefs are held to be truth more than the Bible. The positions of the scriptures on subjects such as marriage, family, and the sanctity of life in the womb are now ridiculed as being old fashioned. So we are living in a time when the truth of the Bible is counter-cultural. We're the radicals these days. Some churches have forsaken the Bible as their centerpiece of truth. But I want to assure you that at Green Acres we will continue to speak the truth of the Bible in love. If you are new to Green Acres and wonder what we believe about the Bible, let me read you our statement of belief about the Bible from our church constitution: "It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. It reveals the principles by which God judges us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried."

But what does the Bible say about itself? In this passage of scripture we're going to examine four powerful metaphors used for the word of God. It is a living organism, a sharp scalpel, a powerful weapon, and a perfect mirror.

### **1. The Word is a living organism that activates my faith**

Our text says, "The word of God is living and active." For those of you who don't read the Bible it is dead and dusty. But for those of us who feed on it every day it is alive. It was written by the Living God; therefore it is a living document. God never changes, and His Word never changes, but it's amazing how a verse of scripture can come alive at a certain time in your life to activate your faith. You might have read that same verse dozens of times before, but one day you're reading it and the truth leaps off the page and grabs you by the lapels and God says, "This is for you!"

Martin Luther was a leader of the Protestant Reformation. He loved the Bible. One of my favorite quotes of his is: "The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me...A simple believer armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a cardinal without it."

Men and women of faith feed themselves on the Word of God. Someone once said that one of the temptations of the devil is for Christians to devote more time reading Christian books about the Bible than reading the Bible itself.

The more we devour the scriptures, the stronger our faith becomes. Paul wrote, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17 KJV)

Let me tell you a true story about the power of the Bible to generate faith. Dr. Gaylord Kambarami is the General Secretary for the International Bible Society in Zimbabwe. Once, he was handing out New Testaments and a very skeptical man told him that if he took the Bible, he would just tear the pages out and roll them up to make cigarettes. Dr. Kambarami told him to go ahead and do that, but promise him he would read each page before he smoked it.

Years later, he met the man at a Christian convention. The scripture-smoking man had been saved and was now an evangelist himself. His testimony was simple. The man told how he had received a New Testament to make cigarettes. He said, "I smoked my way through Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but when I got to John 3:16, I couldn't smoke anymore. When I read that I got on my knees and that's when Jesus changed my life!" Have you allowed the Living Word to change your life?

## **2. The Word is a weapon I can use to repel Satan's attacks**

Our text says, that the Bible is "Sharper than any double-edged sword." Perhaps the most famous sword from literature is the Excalibur, which Arthur drew from a stone, and which made him the legendary king. The sword was said to have special powers. On his deathbed, King Arthur had Sir Bedivere throw the sword into the lake. When he did the Lady of the Lake's hand emerged from the waters and caught the sword. The Legend says Arthur sleeps peacefully and will one day come back with his sword when his country needs him.

But there is a sword that is much sharper and more powerful than Excalibur. It is the Word of God. In Ephesians 6 Paul is writing about the importance of putting on the full armor of God. "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:17)

Satan is a liar and a thief. He has come to steal, kill and destroy. He wants to control our culture. That's why we've seen such a rise in immorality and perversity. He is the great divider. He wants to see every nation divided and fighting. Other than perhaps the Civil War can you remember a time in American history when Americans were so divided as we approach this election season? Abraham Lincoln was correct when he quoted Jesus by saying, "a house divided against itself shall not stand." Satan wants to divide every marriage, every family, and every church.

But the Bible says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." The best way to resist the devil is with the Word of God. When Jesus was tempted three times by the devil, he repelled Satan three times by saying, "It is written; it is written; it is written." If Jesus could banish Satan with three verses from Deuteronomy, what do you think we can do by quoting John and Romans? When Satan comes against you, draw out the Sword of the Spirit and say, "It is written. Your power was destroyed at the cross. And greater is he who is within me than he that is in the world. Scram, you satanic scum, you have no place in my life. For I my life is hid in Christ." Satan will run from you when you use the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

## **3. The Word is a scalpel that divides between my soul and spirit**

Our text says, "It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow." To understand this, we must remember that God created us in His image. God exists as a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we exist as body, soul, and spirit. With our body we connect to the physical world beneath us. With our souls we connect to the social world around us. And with our spirits we connect to the spiritual world above us.

Plants and all animals have bodies, but plants don't have a soul. Animals have bodies and souls. The soul is like your personality: mind, emotions, and will. If you've ever ridden a horse, or had a pet, you'll agree that animals have personalities. But only human beings have a spirit. That is the capacity to relate to our Creator. That's why you never see animals praying or attending church. Someone posted a picture on my Facebook page of their cat watching me preach on television. I guess he was taking catechism. The cat might have been amused, but I could tell he wasn't really into what I was saying because he wasn't taking notes.

Genesis speaks of the animals having a *nephesh*, or soul. But it only says of Adam and Eve that God breathed into them the spirit of life. Now since our soul and spirit are both invisible, for many years I didn't understand the difference between the two. Only the Word of God can divide between the two. Do you know the difference?

Here it is in a nutshell: The difference between the soul and the spirit is the difference between the natural (soul) and the supernatural (spirit). It is the difference between carnal emotions and spiritual thinking.

My soul is the realm of self-consciousness. My spirit is the realm of God-consciousness. My soul is my personality, and I inherited part of my personality from my parents, and from my life experiences. The Greek word for soul is *psyche*, from which we get the word psychology. Psychology is the study of why we think the way we think, feel the way we feel, and act the way we act.

But my spirit is the innermost part of my being. The Bible says we were once dead in our trespasses and sins, but Jesus Christ has made us alive.

Some Christians live soul-driven lives. Their human feelings, fears, and emotions rule their lives. But there are some Christians who have the mind of Christ and their lives are driven by the Word of God and the indwelling Christ.

The illustration used for soul and spirit is that of joints and marrow. Joints are the connections of our bones that allow us to move. Bones are hard and brittle. They are like our soul. But marrow is the soft substance that resides within the cavity of our bones that produces blood cells. That's like our spirit. God's Word is like a sharp scalpel that can cut through the hard soulish life and reveal the inner spirit.

God wants you to live on the spiritual level instead of merely a soulish level. Let me give you a practical example. Let's say you are facing surgery and you are filled with fear and anxiety. Those emotions are produced by your soul. But let's say you open God's Word and read Psalm 56:3 that says, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you." If you allow that sharp word to operate in your spirit, it will cut away the fear and the worry, and replace it with faith, which is produced by faith in God. So allow God's Word to separate your soulish life from your spiritual life.

#### **4. The Word is a mirror that reveals my thoughts and attitudes**

"It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The interesting thing about a mirror is that it doesn't lie. What you see is what you are. I remember years ago in another church a godly woman asked my advice on a new Bible. She got it and when I saw her I asked her, "Are you enjoying reading your new Bible?" She held it up and replied with great wisdom, "Oh, Pastor, I'm not reading this book; this Book is reading me." God knows you better than you know yourself. And His Word reveals your thoughts and attitudes.

The best illustration of this truth is the one James gives us in the first chapter of his letter. He writes, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:23-25 NKJV)

First of all, I need to give credit to Tony Evans who spoke here a few weeks ago. He talked about this passage. He said James was right to talk about a MAN glancing in a mirror and walking away. That's all men do when they look in a mirror: Am I dressed? Hair combed? It's all good.

But Tony said women have a different relationship with mirrors than men. He said every woman has six mirrors. She wakes up in the morning and looks in the bathroom mirror to see how much damage the night did. Then mirror #2 is when she sits down the make-up mirror to begin to repair the night's damage. Mirror #3 is when she flips the mirror over and it is a magnifying mirror. Then she gets dressed and mirror #4 is that full-length mirror to see how she looks, front and back. Then she gets in her car and mirror #5 is that lighted mirror in the visor that she pulls down to double check her make-up. Then mirror #6 is that little round compact mirror in your purse. So James would never have written about a woman glancing into a mirror and forgetting what she sees.

I must say to you ladies who use those magnifying mirrors, you are pretty brave, because I glanced into my wife's magnifying mirror once, and it was pretty brutal. I saw whiskers I had missed, and blemishes I hadn't noticed before. Mirrors don't lie, and neither does God's Word.

That's the exact reason some people are reluctant to really look into God's Word. It reveals who we really are. It shows me that my heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. It shows me that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But it also shows me a loving God who sent Jesus to this planet to take the punishment for my sins.

We've seen that God's Word is alive and active, it is a powerful weapon, it's a scalpel that divides my soul and spirit, and it's a magnifying mirror. So what's the take away truth from what we've learned about the Bible? Just this: There will be a final accounting, so let's be honest with God and with ourselves. The last verse in our passage says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13)

A nun placed a sign at the beginning of the lunch line in a Catholic elementary school. The sign read, "Take only one apple. God is watching." At the end of the line, a student had printed a note on the tray of cookies that said, "Take all the cookies you want. God is watching the apples."

God is watching you and He's watching me. You've probably heard the old saying, "You can fool all of the people some of the time, and you can fool some of the people all of the time. But you can't fool all the people all of the time. We can add this statement: you can *never* fool God. We can deceive others and we can even deceive ourselves. But God knows everything about us. He knows every sin we've ever committed, and every sin we will ever commit. And yet, the One who knows us the best; loves us the most. So don't try to fool God, just be honest with Him because He knows everything about us. And he reveals our hearts in His word.

## CONCLUSION

Let me tell you the role God's Word played in the remarkable conversion one of the greatest Christian leaders in history. St. Augustine became a leading bishop in Northern Africa and wrote over 100 books. But he ran from God for much of his youth. He was born in Algeria in 354, a brilliant student who excelled in all of his classes. His mother, Monica, was a devout Christian, who prayed for his conversion. For many years, Augustine flirted with Christianity – and flirted with a lot of other things including wild parties and sexual promiscuity. He resisted Christianity for intellectual reasons, and thought it was a religion for the ignorant and simple-minded. He moved to Carthage to attend school and when he was fifteen years old he took a mistress and fathered a son out of wedlock. He described this time of his life in his own words, "I came to Carthage, where a cauldron of unholy loves was sizzling and crackling around me."

As he moved into his late twenties, he continued to live like a 4<sup>th</sup> Century playboy. He sensed and emptiness inside and tried to fill it with drunkenness and wild living.

When he was 32, he heard the preaching of a pastor named Ambrose, who was a great intellect himself. He talked about the great men who faith who had conquered sexual temptation in their lives. Augustine was miserable.

One day he was sitting alone in a garden and he heard some children in the street playing a game. In this game they kept singing these words, "Take it and read it. Take it and read it." Augustine didn't know the game, but he sensed God was telling him to find a Bible and take it and read it. I'll pick up the story from his own words from his book appropriately entitled *Confessions*: "I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." [Romans 13:13] I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away."

That was the moment his faith in Christ was activated. He returned home to his mother and joyfully reported that Jesus had changed his life.

He went on to become a bishop and his writings have had a tremendous influence on Western Culture. He is the source of the famous quote: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

And that's more evidence of the power of the living active Word of God. It is sharper than any two-edged sword; it cuts deeply even to the dividing of soul and spirit. Will you allow God to perform his loving surgery on you today?

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## TAKE-AWAY TRUTH

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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*David O. Dykes, Pastor  
Green Acres Baptist Church  
Tyler, Texas*