

# The Word of God

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*"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). When we think of "the word of God," what comes to our minds? Many people would answer, "The Bible is the Word of God." Is this indeed the primary meaning of "the word of God"? Jesus said that the word of God is what we live by, so this is a crucial area. If our focus is wrong and we miss the word of God, how shall we live? Let us allow God to expand our understanding, give us a revelation in this area, and bring us into a living relationship with Him. Let us come to God and allow Him to write His word on our minds and hearts.

## The Living Word

*"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"* (Hebrews 4:12). This statement from the book of Hebrews can help us greatly. The Amplified Bible renders the first phrase: *"For the word that God speaks..."* This word of God is living, not dead. It has power in the inner man; therefore our focus is immediately lifted to a working of God by the Spirit, for the Spirit is the only one who can work in the inner heart of man in this way.

According to this scripture, the word of God is active--it does something. The whole creation was brought into existence through the word of God and is kept in store for future judgment by the same word (II Peter 3:5-7). This defies the natural reasoning of man, but will we only believe our natural reasoning and let our minds limit us, or will we believe God and let Him lead us into spiritual realms?

Christ Himself is referred to as "The Word" (John 1:14). In the book of Revelation we see Christ sitting on a white horse, moving in judgment, and His name is given as "The Word of God" (Revelation 19:13). In speaking to the church in Pergamos, Jesus says: *"I will fight against them with the sword of My mouth"* (Revelation 2:16).

We see from just these few passages that the term "the word of God" cannot be interchanged consistently with "the Bible." Further on, we will consider the purpose of the Bible, but we can see at this point that the word of God is something that is alive by the Spirit and connected directly to the person of God and what He is doing at this very moment. "The word of God" always involves a living communication from a living God to meet a specific need.

John tells us, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (John 1:1). He goes on to tell us that *"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). When God wanted to communicate the fullness of Himself to mankind, He sent Christ. Christ was the full expression of God's word. Surely this should lift our vision higher and focus our attention on a living relationship with a living God.

The word of God is not dead words, inscribed within a monastery and covered with dust. The word of God is a communication of the very person of God right now. It is never separate from God, but communicates the reality of His presence, power and love to meet the need of the moment. It is this word that man shall live by.

## The Bible

Many have the understanding that God has already spoken everything that He has to say, and that what He has said is recorded in what we call the Bible. They believe it is now up to us to study that book and find out what He has said. But has God stopped speaking? If so, when? At the end of the Old Testament? When Christ left this earth? At the end of the book of Acts? If the generations before us needed direct communication by the Spirit of God, why do we only need a book to study? If we really think about this, we can begin to see how shallow our thinking may be. Why did the early saints and heroes of the faith need the divine communication of God, while we only need a book? Did God ever promise to send us a book?

In no way am I trying to discredit the authority of the scriptures. These truths come from the scriptures themselves. Our aim is to put the scriptures in their proper perspective. When Paul was writing to Timothy, he told him exactly what the purpose of scripture was: *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (II Timothy 3:16,17) The word "scriptures" means "writings." Could we then make the statement that the scriptures are the writings or the record of the word of God to others who have gone before us?

Again and again we read that "the word of God came to so-and-so saying..." Just reading what God said to someone does not make it the word of God to us. It was the word of God to that person. It was living and active, and it met the need of that moment. Men recognized it for what it was, the word of God, and preserved it for our day as the Holy Spirit directed.

Let us ask a second question: When we read "the word of God" in the scriptures, does it refer to men reading the scriptures, or to their hearing of the living word of God by the Spirit? The scriptures are important for what God gave them for. Paul said they are given for doctrine (teaching), for reproof (Jesus used them that way in speaking to the devil), for correction (they keep us on course), and for instruction (we are using them in that way now). Above all, they point us to Jesus who gives life (John 5:39). That is a full ministry. But they do not take the place of the "word of God" by which we live. They do not take the place of the Holy Spirit, and they do not give life. I believe if we would stop and think carefully, we would agree that God has not stopped speaking in our day.

Perhaps a fear that some of us have is that we will start to open ourselves up to teaching that is not of God, and put other teaching on the same level as the Bible. Our fears can be laid aside with this one thought: Will God ever contradict Himself? *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8). God does not change. He is the same from eternity past to eternity future. Thus we can have full confidence that what God speaks today will not contradict what He has already spoken, and what He has spoken, recorded for us in the scriptures, can be used to judge what we say He is speaking today. This one truth should set us free. There is no new revelation, no new teaching, no new book that is needed to keep us on course. God has provided all that we need. We just need to use it for the purpose He gave it for.

In reality, there is something much greater to fear, which is that we will not be hearing what God is saying today. If our focus is on studying what God has said at other times and trying to understand it with our natural minds, we may find ourselves missing what God is speaking today. Men go to school for years, learn different languages, pore over numerous translations of the scriptures, and never once hear God speaking personally to them.

Both errors are bad, but the second one is more deceptive. Why? Because men are using the right words and believing the right things, but are void of the Spirit and the reality behind the words. They are just as far from God as the one who has laid aside the scriptures for another book. This danger is the one we most need to be concerned about. Men are living by the dead letter of the scriptures instead of by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The Pharisees were religious men whose god was the scriptures. They crucified the Word of God, the Lord of glory. They did not have ears to hear God.

## **The Anointing**

How then does God speak to us? How do we know it is God? Consider this statement from John: *"But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him"* (I John 2:27). Also consider this verse: *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things"* (I John 2:20).

We must come to reckon with the fact that "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." God cannot be known by our natural senses, nor can we know the word of God by our natural minds. We cannot study the scriptures, apply rules of grammar, refer to the dictionary and then say we have heard God. This is not the word that is active, a communication of God Himself to us.

The only way we can hear God is by the anointing that He has given every true believer. This has nothing to do with the natural mind; it is a spiritual matter. God does write His word on our minds, but it is by the Spirit, not by our efforts of intellect. It happens as we bow our knee to God and wait on Him. We are utterly dependent upon God in this matter. If we cannot hear God, all we can do is continue to wait on Him until we do hear Him speak. If we are serious with God, we will not rise from this place until we let Him put His finger on whatever is hindering the communication.

In the end, we only know a word of God by the anointing. The anointing is a spiritual "witness" or "knowing" that makes His word alive and active, meeting the need of the moment and communicating the reality of God.

When and how does this anointing come? John says we have an anointing and that it abides with us even as the Holy Spirit abides in us. We are to abide or live in that anointing or "knowing" at all times. An intellectual reading of the scriptures does not produce this anointing. What is needed is a humble desire to hear God and obey what He speaks.

Some have the mistaken idea that we only need the anointing for special times. We do need the anointing for special times, but the anointing is not just for those special times. We are called to live every moment in that anointing, living in His presence, living His life in every circumstance and responsibility that comes our way. God gives a "knowing" of His presence and His mind moment by moment if we are quiet, sensitive, and looking to Him in all things. He communicates His wisdom in every circumstance of life. This is the fulfillment of Hebrews 8:10: *"I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts."* It is a "new and living way." God is alive, and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, He is alive in us.

This personal living word of God is the basis of faith. *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17). When we are confident we have heard God, then we can move in faith. Faith brings the ability to take steps of obedience to God. The living word awakens faith in our hearts and keeps us in relationship with Jesus who will fulfill that word in our lives. Apart from this

faith, we cannot please God because we cannot move in His life and power. No wonder God said that man should not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Notice that (as in our previous discussion) this verse does not read, "Faith comes by reading the scriptures." If that were true, all we would need to do is read the Bible and we would have faith. How many read the Bible and yet don't even know what faith is? What does produce faith is the word of God to the one who has ears to hear Him. Will God feed us? Does He not feed the hungry? If we are hungry, God will feed us by His very own word. God's word will become nourishment to us, enabling us to live in Him.

## **The Word Made Flesh**

*"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). This is a statement about Christ our Lord and what God did in and through Him. We rejoice in it, but have we considered what God wants to do in us? Jesus said that it is enough if a disciple is like his master. Does not God want His word to become flesh in us? Remember God speaks for a reason. His word is active--it does something. He speaks so that His word may become flesh in us, that we also may be an expression of His grace and truth.

James 1:21 tells us that it is the "engrafted" or "implanted" word that is able to save our souls. When the word begins to take root in your life, affecting your character, changing your mind, and washing your entire being, you can be confident that you are hearing God. Until we hear the *living* word of God, this will not take place. When we do hear God, we must act upon what we have heard. When we do, the word becomes part of us. If we just listen and do nothing, we deceive ourselves and the word does not profit us (verse 22).

When our ear is tuned to hear God, we will hear Him communicate to us in every activity and circumstance of life. Our lives are not partly natural (where we don't need to hear God) and partly spiritual (where we know we need to hear God). We are called to live in union with Him twenty-four hours a day. God is concerned with our whole life, and His Spirit will communicate His mind in all things if we have ears to hear. Are we hearing God and responding to what He is speaking, thereby implanting that word within our lives?

What was it that opened the door for men to hear the word that Christ spoke? Was it not the life He lived and the deeds that He did? Will it be any different for us? Often we want to speak for Christ, but the life we live has not opened the door. People may be polite and listen, but they will not act. Why not? Because the word we speak has no anointing and no power; thus, it does not affect. Let us concentrate on letting the living word be made flesh in us. Then the words we speak will come with anointing, and others will be left with the word of God, not just our word. This takes time, but it is the only way we will see true and lasting results. God is not in a hurry as we sometimes are.

The word of God made flesh in each believer is the basis of being a witness unto Him. (See Acts 1:8.) Men can read scriptures and interpret them to suit their own thinking, but when they see the living word before their very eyes, it is hard to escape what they see. That is why in the wisdom of God he sent Jesus to proclaim the word of God to us in flesh. He did not just tell us about love; He showed us love. He was love in action. It is here that our vision so often falters. We think that because we tell somebody we love them, we have done a good thing. We should speak those words, but for them to have any meaning there must be action behind the words.

It is the *living word*, the word living in a life, which has power to affect for God's glory. The word must be living in our hearts to the extent that it is expressed in our whole person. It has been said that God's

method is men and women filled with the Holy Spirit. He carried this out perfectly in Christ, and He is still doing the same thing through the members of His body, the church of the living God.

## **The Word That Washes**

*"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the **washing of water by the word**, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish"* (Ephesians 5:25-27). These scriptures tell us that the word of God has a cleansing effect in our lives and in the church as a whole. Do we know what this is, and have we given it importance in our lives?

This passage refers to the sacrifice of Christ. As the Word of God, He gave Himself, opening the door for God to dwell within man by the Spirit. In so doing, He brings the word of God into our lives. We are "already clean" after we have responded in faith to the word that comes to us to repent, based on Christ's work at the cross. Not only did Jesus cleanse us initially from sin, He continues to wash us by the living word as we respond in faith to that word. As we live in His presence, the flow of the water of the word has a purifying and cleansing effect in our lives. He touches every part of us, removing every spot and wrinkle, that we may be a pure expression of his nature.

From this scripture, we understand that God does not settle for anything less than a perfect expression of His nature through the church. Spots and wrinkles detract from the beauty and testimony that God desires. If not dealt with, they are also weaknesses which leave a place for the enemy of our souls to bring us down again into sin.

The initial cleansing we receive from Christ is a cleansing from sin, and it is a complete work. But the *effects* of sin are still with us. At new birth, Christ gives us a new heart, but we do not get a new body or a new mind. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of our relationship with God is the renewing of our minds. If we do not take on the mind of Christ, how can we see ourselves brought completely under God's control, in order to do the will of God in all things?

To see every spot and wrinkle removed, we must experience the continual washing of the word. For this to happen, we must be in an active faith relationship with God. We must know that Christ dwells within by the Spirit. From this place of grace, in God's ability, we respond to the living word. The word of God is the foundation, and as we have seen, the word takes effect through obedience. This is faith revealed in works. To see the character of Christ formed in us in this faith relationship, consistent diligence over a period of time is the price of success.

The ministry of the word in the midst of the church is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, this is one of the primary ways God has chosen to bring his word to the church. The word must come through God's chosen vessels who have been called of God and prepared. They must be men who are first living the word, who see what God is doing, and who are willing to labor to see God's word take expression in others. The ministry of the word should hold a central place in the gathering of God's people.

A God-directed ministry will keep Christ as the living Word, God's answer to every need, before the entire body. As the church gathers, we all need to come ready to feed and allow the word to wash us as we respond in faith. To truly hold before us Christ and the vision of what God is doing is a demanding labor, and the flock has a responsibility to constantly uphold God's messengers before the throne of grace in prayer.

Although God-given ministers are God's provision for the overall direction that we need, there is also a place for every member in the ministry (or serving) of the word. Just before Christ went to the cross, He took a towel and washed the disciples' feet (John 13). He said they were clean already because of the word He had spoken to them, but that they needed to have their feet washed. He told them to wash one another's feet as He had given them an example. Does not the primary teaching of this passage refer to the work that is taking place in our lives as we serve the *living* word of God to one another? This is not just speaking the word to one another (although it includes that), but *serving* the word, which is really Christ Himself, to the other members of His body. This is a full ministry, and there is a place for everyone.

Not only are we called to wash the feet of others; we need others to wash our feet. We need the cleansing effect that this has on our lives. We cannot make each other clean, as only Jesus can do that work in the heart. But as we serve the word of God to one another through our lives in a multitude of ways, we will find that the church, the body of Christ, is being washed of every spot and wrinkle, as a bride prepared for her husband.

Often we try to affect other brothers and sisters in the wrong way by using the Bible and quoting "a verse that they need to consider." There is a place for this under the direction of the Holy Spirit, but the expression of the living word by example can be done on a continual basis. When the word becomes flesh in us and we are an expression of the living word, our brothers and sisters will read our lives and God will use us as a great encouragement to each other. This is demanding, because it requires that our whole lives be lived in the power of His life. We will speak to our brother or sister, but when we speak, we must speak out of the word that is living in us. Then it will minister grace to the hearer. In this way, we will serve Christ to each other, and wash one another's feet.

The word of God also comes to us through the spiritual gift of prophecy. This is also beyond our discussion here. As those who have an "ear to hear" God, we need to "earnestly desire" all of God's "spirituals," and not settle for anything less than everything God has for us (I Corinthians 14:1). Each of God's provisions has its place in bringing the word of God to us and meeting needs in our lives. All are given by God, and none are without meaning.

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In summary, the revelation of "the word of God" needs to take on a much fuller place in our hearts. Yes, the Bible is the word of God that came to others who have gone before us. But we cannot live on that word. We must have fresh bread from heaven--today. It must be life to us today. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, that word is coming to us by the Spirit. And if through obedience we are allowing the word to become engrafted in us, God is making us an expression of His living word to others. This is a continual process that never stops. It is not automatic, however. It only happens as we have ears to hear the word of God and faith to act on that word as it comes to us.

Brothers and sisters, the kingdom of God is not in word but in the very presence and power of God. Listen to Jesus: *"You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life"* (John 5:39,40). Is it the all-consuming passion of our hearts to be living the very life of God in the Spirit? If not, we are likely living according to the dead letter which kills. (See II Corinthians 3:6.)

Let us have ears to hear God today. He is not hiding, but communicating the riches of Himself when we are listening. Let us be diligent to respond in faith to the word of God, that we may not miss God and His purpose. God will be glorified and His will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.