

GOD'S WORD IS POWERFUL

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There is a power in this world that most people are unfamiliar with, and yet it affects them every day.

If I open a checking account at a local bank in your name and deposit \$10,000 to the account, that would be a good thing wouldn't it?

But if you took that brand new check book and stuck it away in a drawer as a keepsake of the pastor's kindness, and never wrote a check against that account, that would NOT be a good thing, would it?

There is a power that has been given to every Christian, but it does not function automatically. Some of us are unaware of what we have, and most of us are unskilled in its use.

Hebrews 4:12

¹² For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

"The word of God is alive and powerful."

What an assertion!

I was first introduced to the Bible before I became a believer. A man had been telling me all about Jesus and His saving grace, quoting frequently from the Scripture. So, I went to a Christian bookstore and bought my first Bible—the King James Version of 1611.

My first effort to read it went like this: I sat down to read and let the Bible fall open. I looked down and began to read from Romans 14.

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. ² For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. ³ Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

¹⁰ But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹ For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. ¹² So then every one of us

shall give account of himself to God. ¹³ *Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.* ¹⁴ *I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.* ¹⁵ *But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died."*

As it turned out, these were amazingly appropriate verses for me, but I simply could not understand them. I read them again, with equal confusion. I started to read a third time, but gave up and closed the Book.

Another year would pass before I invited Christ into my life and opened the Bible again. The second time, I couldn't put it down. I consumed it like a man famished. Instead of confusion, I was enlightened and couldn't get enough of God's wonderful truth.

The Word Written

In my first encounter with the Word, it was quoted to me by a friend. I wrestled with it, and argued with it, and it made me curious.

But what compelled me, and awakened my faith was reading the Word for myself.

My friend tackled every one of the non-Christian behaviors he saw in me with an appropriate Scripture verse, as if he expected me to recognize I was breaking God's law and repent. Instead, I rationalized my behaviors and argued with his reasoning.

But when I returned a year later, the Holy Spirit was already breaking down my defenses and weakening my pride. On our third evening together, he put his Bible on the coffee table in front of me and said, "I'm not going to tell you what it says any more. I'll tell you where to look and you can read it for yourself."

He sent me directly to 1 Corinthians 11:14. *"Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?"* I had a full beard, and my hair hung down below the middle of my back. In his eyes, this was a sure mark of foolishness and sin.

I had heard it before and simply refused to acknowledge it. But this time, my eyes wandered down the page to verse 16: *"But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God."* Then something happened.

My jaw clenched and a strange feeling arose inside me. The length of my hair was still not a problem to me, but something else was. I realized that I was that man "who seemed to be contentious." I saw myself in a way I never had before, and I didn't like what I saw.

My argumentativeness was not simple intellectual reasoning. I was contentious, antagonistic, quarrelsome. I claimed to be seeking truth, but really was hiding from it, avoiding it, deflecting it. I was that man!

For the first time, I recognized the Holy Spirit's convicting love. I was unsettled. I couldn't rest until I talked with God about it. Until I apologized. It was not my appearance or behavior that bothered me, but my attitude—my fundamental dishonesty with myself, and God, and my friend.

I invited Jesus to take control of my life and change me. Just because of the written Word of God.

This is why Jesus referred to the Scripture when Satan tested Him in the desert. To every challenge Jesus responded, *"It is written"* (Luke 4:4, 8, 12). His declarations of what was written exposed the devil's lies and defused the temptations. It's still a good model for us today.

This is also why the Gideons, and Life Publishers, and OneHope (all of whom we support on our Global Impact Team) continue to publish and distribute the written Word of God in hundreds of languages around the world. And why people who pick up those Bibles and Scripture portions in a moment of spiritual openness, testify to the convicting power of the Word, as the Holy Spirit breathes life through its pages.

The Word Spoken

The Amplified Bible renders our text: *"The Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]"*

"The Word that God speaks." This acknowledges that the printed words alone are not enough to transform a human soul. But when the Holy Spirit takes those words and drives them home to the heart, they become mighty instruments for good.

John 16:5-8

⁵ *"But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. ⁶ Instead, you grieve because of what I've told you. ⁷ But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send Him to you. ⁸ And when He comes, He will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment."*

Notice that Jesus said, *"If I do go away, then I will send Him to you."* Then, when He says, *"And when He comes..."* He means, *"When He comes **to you.**"* It is not my job or yours to convince

people of the truth of God's words. It is our job to simply present them sincerely. From there, it's up to the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts and minds.

Words are formed when breath passes over our vocal cords and through our mouths. When the Spirit, or Breath of God, blows upon the words of the Bible, they awaken faith. And when a person who believes those words are from God and takes them into his or her mouth to express them—to speak them—they come to life and their power is released.

When I try to convince people, they feel pressured and usually resist emotionally. When the Holy Spirit convinces them, their resistance melts away, just like mine did.

This is why I preach. *"Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb—preaching, of all things!—to bring those who trust him into the way of salvation"* (1 Corinthians 1:21; MSG).

Satan's greatest weapon is man's ignorance of God's Word.

Even if you never stand behind a pulpit, you should preach, too. Take God's words into your mouth and tell other people the truth, especially the truth about Jesus Christ and His saving grace.

The Word Lived

Hebrews 4:12-13; MSG

"God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it—no matter what."

In the final analysis, the Word of God is at its liveliest and most powerful neither in written form or spoken. God's Word is most effective when it is lived.

After all, Israel had God's written and spoken words for over 1400 years, yet they continued to use them to work themselves into spiritual paralysis. It took the arrival of God's Son, Jesus, to turn things around.

John 1:1, 14

¹*"In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

¹⁴*"So the Word became human and made His home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son."*

1 John 1:1-4

“We proclaim to you the One who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw Him with our own eyes and touched Him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. ² This One who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen Him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that He is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then He was revealed to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.”

Jesus, the Living Word, brought about the salvation of the world and the transformation of the human race. That’s life! And that’s power!

No wonder Paul pleaded with the churches to turn what they believe into a way of life.

Philippians 1:27

“Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ.”

Philippians 2:15

“Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.”

1 Thessalonians 4:1

“Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more.”

Nothing pleases God more than to see His children living in the truth (living out His words).

Getting Out the Word

So, today, we are going to dismiss early and move this meeting to the site of our new sanctuary (at the rear of the building). I invite you to join me in posting God’s written words on the framing of the walls. I believe God will speak to you and give you Scripture verses—promises and commands—that will frame our worship experience in that room in the years ahead.

Think of it! From behind the paint and wallboard, God’s words will form a barrier to the enemy of our souls, making that room a genuine sanctuary space. The walls will whisper faith, hope, and love to the people inside. His words will encourage our faithfulness, and strengthen our endurance, and make vibrant our offerings of praise and our service of love.

You and I will prayerfully build God's Word into the very fabric of this building. Who knows all the ways God will use His words to bring life to the people of Marin County?!?

Let's trust Him for greater things!