

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE WORD A SWORD.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 17TH, 1887, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”—Hebrews iv. 12.

THOSE who are fond of a labyrinth of exposition will find a maze perplexing to the last degree if they will read the various commentators and expositors upon this verse. This is the question : By the Word of God, are we here to understand the Incarnate Word, the Divine Logos, who was in the beginning with God ; or does the passage relate to this inspired Book, and to the gospel, which is the kernel of it, as it is set forth in the preaching of the truth in the power of the Holy Ghost ? You shall find Dr. John Owen, with a very large number of eminent servants of God, defending the first theory, that the Son of God is doubtless here spoken of ; and I confess that they seem to me to defend it with arguments which I should not like to controvert. Much more is to be said on this side of the question than I can here bring before you. On the other side, we find John Calvin, with an equally grand array of divines, all declaring that it must be the Book that is meant, the gospel, the revelation of God in the Book. Their interpretation of the passage is not to be set aside, and I feel convinced that they all give as good reasons for their interpretation as those who come to the other conclusion. Where such Doctors differ, I am not inclined to present any interpretation of my own which can be set in competition with theirs, though I may venture to propound one which comprehends them all, and so comes into conflict with none. It is a happy circumstance if we can see a way to agree with all those who did not themselves agree. But I have been greatly instructed by the mere fact that it should be difficult to know whether in this passage the Holy Ghost is speaking of the Christ of God, or the Book of God. This shows us a great truth, which we might not otherwise have so clearly noted. How much that can be said of the Lord Jesus may be also said of the inspired volume ! How closely are these two allied ! How certainly do those who despise the one reject the other ! How intimately are the Word made flesh, and the Word uttered by inspired men, joined together !

It may be most accurate to interpret this passage as relating both to the Word of God incarnate, and the Word of God inspired. Weave the two into one thought, for God hath joined them together, and you will then see fresh lights and new meanings in the text. The Word of God, namely, this revelation of himself in Holy Scripture, is all it is here described to be, because Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, is in it. He doth, as it were, incarnate himself as the divine truth in this visible and manifest revelation; and thus it becomes living and powerful, dividing and discerning. As the Christ reveals God, so this Book reveals Christ, and therefore it partakes, as the Word of God, in all the attributes of the Incarnate Word; and we may say many of the same things of the written Word as of the embodied Word; in fact, they are now so linked together that it would be impossible to divide them. This I like to think of, because there are some nowadays who deny every doctrine of revelation, and yet, forsooth, they praise the Christ. The Teacher is spoken of in the most flattering style, and then his teaching is rejected, except so far as it may coincide with the philosophy of the moment. They talk much about Jesus, while that which is the real Jesus, namely, his gospel, and his inspired Word, they cast away. I believe I do but correctly describe them when I say that, like Judas, they betray the Son of man with a kiss. They even go so far as to cry up the names of the doctrines, though they use them in a different sense that they may deceive. They talk of loyalty to Christ, and reverence for the Sermon on the Mount; but they use vain words. I am charged with sowing suspicion. I do sow it, and desire to sow it. Too many Christian people are content to hear anything so long as it is put forth by a clever man, in a taking manner; I want them to try the spirits, whether they be of God, for many false prophets have gone forth into the world. What God has joined together these modern thinkers wilfully put asunder, and separate the Revealer from his own revelation. I believe the Saviour thinks their homage to be more insulting than their scorn would be. Well may he do so, for they bow before him, and say, "Hail, Master!" while their foot is on the blood of his covenant, and their souls abhor the doctrine of his substitutionary sacrifice. They are crucifying the Lord afresh, and putting him to an open shame, by denying the Lord that bought them, by daring to deride his purchase of his people as a "mercantile transaction," and I know not what of blasphemy beside.

Christ and his Word must go together. What is true of the Christ is here predicated both of him and of his Word. Behold, this day the everlasting gospel has Christ within it. He rides in it as in a chariot. He rides in it as, of old, Jehovah "did ride upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind." It is only because Jesus is not dead that the Word becomes living and effectual, "and sharper than any two-edged sword"; for, if you leave Christ out of it, you have left out its vitality and power. As I have told you that we will not have Christ without the Word, so neither will we have the Word without Christ. If you leave Christ out of Scripture, you have left out the essential truth which it is written to declare. Ay, if you leave out of it Christ as a Substitute, Christ in his death, Christ in his garments dyed in blood, you have left out of it all that is living and powerful.

How often have we reminded you that as concerning the gospel, even as concerning every man, "the blood is the life thereof": a bloodless gospel is a lifeless gospel! A famous picture has been lately produced, which represents our Lord before Pilate. It has deservedly won great attention. A certain excellent newspaper, which brings out for a very cheap price a large number of engravings, has given an engraving of this picture; but, inasmuch as the painting was too large for the paper to give the whole, they have copied a portion of it. It is interesting to note that they have given us Pilate here, and Caiaphas there, but since there was no room for Jesus upon the sheet, they have left out that part of the design. When I saw the picture, I thought that it was wonderfully characteristic of a great deal of modern preaching. See Pilate here, Caiaphas there, and the Jews yonder—but the Victim, bound and scourged for human sin, is omitted. Possibly, in the case of the publication, the figure of the Christ will appear in the next number; but even if he should appear in the next sermon of our preachers of the new theology, it will be as a moral example, and not as the Substitute for the guilty, the Sin-bearer by whose death we are redeemed. When we hear a sermon with no Christ in it, we hope that he will come out next Sunday; at the same time, the preaching is, so far, spoilt, and the presentation of the gospel is entirely ruined so long as the principal figure is left out. Oh, it is a sad thing to have to stand in any house of prayer and listen to the preaching, and then have to cry, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him"! Rest assured that they have laid him in a tomb. You may be quite certain of that. They have put him away as a dead thing, and to them he is as good as dead. True believer, you may comfort your heart with this recollection, that he will rise again. He cannot be holden by the bonds of death in any sense; and, though his own church should bury him, and lay the huge lid of the most enormous sarcophagus of heresy upon him, the Redeemer will rise again, and his truth with him, and he and his Word will live and reign together for ever and ever.

Brethren, you will understand I am going to speak about the Word of God as being, like the Lord Jesus, the revelation of God. This inspired volume is that gospel whereby you have received life, unless you have heard it in vain. It is this gospel, with Jesus within it, Jesus working by it, which is said to be living and effectual, and "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." I shall only talk with you in very simple style. First, *concerning the qualities of the Word of God*; and, secondly, *concerning certain practical lessons which these qualities suggest to us.*

I. First let me speak CONCERNING THE QUALITIES OF THE WORD OF GOD. It is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword."

The Word of God is said to be "*quick.*" I am sorry the translators have used that word, because it is apt to be mistaken as meaning speedy, and that is not the meaning at all; it means alive, or living. "Quick" is the old English word for alive, and so we read of the "quick and dead." The Word of God is alive. This is a living Book. This is a mystery which only living men, quickened by the Spirit of God, will

fully comprehend. Take up any other book except the Bible, and there may be a measure of power in it, but there is not that indescribable vitality in it which breathes, and speaks, and pleads, and conquers in the case of this sacred volume. We have in the book-market many excellent selections of choice passages from great authors, and in a few instances the persons who have made the extracts have been at the pains to place under their quotations from Scripture the name "David," or "Jesus," but this is worse than needless. There is a style of majesty about God's Word, and with this majesty a vividness never found elsewhere. No other writing has within it a heavenly life whereby it works miracles, and even imparts life to its reader. It is a living and incorruptible seed. It moves, it stirs itself, it lives, it communes with living men as a living Word. Solomon saith concerning it, "When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." Have you never known what that means? Why, the Book has wrestled with me; the Book has smitten me; the Book has comforted me; the Book has smiled on me; the Book has frowned on me; the Book has clasped my hand; the Book has warmed my heart. The Book weeps with me, and sings with me; it whispers to me, and it preaches to me; it maps my way, and holds up my goings; it was to me the Young Man's Best Companion, and it is still my Morning and Evening Chaplain. It is a live Book: all over alive; from its first chapter to its last word it is full of a strange, mystic vitality, which makes it have pre-eminence over every other writing for every living child of God.

See, my brothers, *our* words, *our* books, our spoken or our printed words by-and-by die out. How many books there are which nobody will ever read now because they are out of date! There are many books that I could read profitably when I was a youth, but they would teach me nothing now. There are also certain religious works which I could read with pleasure during the first ten years of my spiritual life; but I should never think of reading them now, any more than I should think of reading the "a-b ab," and the "b-a ba," of my childhood. Christian experience causes us to outgrow the works which were the class-books of our youth. We may outgrow teachers and pastors, but not apostles and prophets. That human system which was once vigorous and influential may grow old, and at length lose all vitality; but the Word of God is always fresh, and new, and full of force. No wrinkle mars its brow: no trembling is in its foot. Here, in the Old and New Testaments, we have at once the oldest and the newest of books. Homer and Hesiod are infants to the more ancient parts of this venerable volume, and yet the gospel which it contains is as truly *new* as this morning's newspaper. I say again that our words come and go: as the trees of the forest multiply their leaves only to cast them off as withered things, so the thoughts and theories of men are but for the season, and then they fade and rot into nothingness. "The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever."

Its vitality is such as it can impart to its readers. Hence, you will often find, when you converse with revelation, that if you yourself are dead when you begin to read, it does not matter, you will be quickened

as you peruse it. You need not bring life *to* the Scripture; you shall draw life *from* the Scripture. Oftentimes a single verse has made us start up, as Lazarus came forth at the call of the Lord Jesus. When our soul has been faint, and ready to die, a single word, applied to the heart by the Spirit of God, has aroused us; for it is a quickening as well as a living Word. I am so glad of this, because at times I feel altogether dead; but the Word of God is not dead; and coming to it, we are like the dead man, who, when he was put into the grave of the prophet, rose again as soon as he touched his bones. Even these bones of the prophets, these words of theirs spoken and written thousands of years ago, will impart life to those who come into contact with them. The Word of God is thus overflowingly alive.

Hence, I may add it is so alive that you need never be afraid that it will become extinct. They dream—they dream that they have put us among the antiquities, those of us who preach the old gospel that our fathers loved! They sneer at the doctrines of the apostles and of the reformers, and declare that believers in them are left high and dry, the relics of an age which has long since ebbed away. Yes, so they say! But what they say may not after all be true; for the gospel is such a living gospel that, if it were cut into a thousand shreds, every particle of it would live and grow. If it were buried beneath a thousand avalanches of error, it would shake off the incubus and rise from its grave. If it were cast into the midst of fire it would walk through the flame as it has done many a time, as though it were in its natural element. The Reformation was largely due to a copy of the Scriptures left in the seclusion of a monastery, and there hidden till Luther came under its influence, and his heart furnished soil for the living seed to grow in. Leave but a single New Testament in a Popish community, and the evangelical faith may at any moment come to the front, even though no preacher of it may ever have come that way. Plants unknown in certain regions have suddenly sprung from the soil: the seeds have been wafted on the winds, carried by birds, or washed ashore by the waves of the sea. So vital are seeds that they live and grow wherever they are borne; and even after lying deep in the soil for centuries, when the upturning spade has brought them to the surface, they have germinated at once. Thus is it with the Word of God: it liveth and abideth for ever, and in every soil and under all circumstances it is prepared to prove its own life by the energy with which it grows and produces fruit to the glory of God. How vain, as well as wicked, are all attempts to kill the gospel. Those who attempt the crime, in any fashion, will be for ever still beginning, and never coming near their end. They will be disappointed in all cases, whether they would slay it with persecution, smother it with worldliness, crush it with error, starve it with neglect, poison it with misrepresentation, or drown it with infidelity. While God liveth his Word shall live. Let us praise God for that. We have an immortal gospel, incapable of being destroyed, which shall live and shine when yon lamp of the sun has consumed its scant supply of oil.

In our text the Word is said to be "*powerful*" or "*active.*" Perhaps "*energetic*" is the best rendering, or almost as well, "*effectual.*" Holy Scripture is full of power and energy. Oh, the majesty of the Word

of God! They charge us with Bibliolatry: it is a crime of their own inventing, of which few are guilty. If there be such things as venial sins, surely an undue reverence of Holy Scripture is one of them. To me the Bible is not God, but it is God's voice, and I do not hear it without awe. What an honour to have it as one's calling, to study, to expound, and to publish this sacred Word! I cannot help feeling that the man who preaches the Word of God is standing, not upon a mere platform, but upon a throne. You may study your sermon, my brother, and you may be a great rhetorician, and be able to deliver it with wonderful fluency and force; but the only power that is effectual for the highest design of preaching is the power which does not lie in your word, nor in my word, but in the Word of God. Have you never noticed, when persons are converted, that they almost always attribute it to some text that was quoted in the sermon? It is God's Word, not our comment on God's Word, which saves souls. The Word of God is powerful for all sacred ends. How powerful it is to convince men of sin! We have seen the self-righteous turned inside out by the revealed truth of God. Nothing else could have brought home to them such unpleasant truth, and compelled them to see themselves as in a clear mirror, but the searching Word of God. How powerful it is for conversion! It comes on board a man, and without asking any leave from him, it just puts its hand on the helm, and turns him round in the opposite direction from that in which he was going before; and the man gladly yields to the irresistible force which influences his understanding and rules his will. The Word of God is that by which sin is slain, and grace is born in the heart. It is the light which brings life with it. How active and energetic it is, when the soul is convinced of sin, in bringing it forth into gospel liberty! We have seen men shut up as in the devil's own dungeon, and we have tried to get them free. We have shaken the bars of iron, but we could not tear them out so as to set the captives at liberty. But the Word of the Lord is a great breaker of bolts and bars. It not only casts down the strongholds of doubt, but it cuts off the head of Giant Despair. No cell or cellar in Doubting Castle can hold a soul in bondage when the Word of God, which is the master-key, is once put to its true use, and made to throw back bolts of despondency. It is living and energetic for encouragement and enlargement. O beloved, what a wonderful power the gospel has to bring us comfort! It brought us to Christ at the first, and it still leads us to look to Christ till we grow like him. God's children are not sanctified by legal methods, but by gracious ones. The Word of God, the gospel of Christ, is exceedingly powerful in promoting sanctification, and bringing about that whole-hearted consecration which is both our duty and our privilege. May the Lord cause his Word to prove its power in us by its making us fruitful unto every good work to do his will! Through the "washing of water by the Word"—that is, through the washing by the Word—may we be cleansed every day, and made to walk in white before the Lord, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things!

The Word of God, then, is quick and powerful in our own personal experience, and we shall find it to be so if we use it in labouring to bless our fellow-men. Dear brethren, if you seek to do good in this sad world, and want a powerful weapon to work with, stick to the gospel,

the living gospel, the old, old gospel. There is a power in it sufficient to meet the sin and death of human nature. All the thoughts of men, use them as earnestly as you may, will be like tickling Leviathan with a straw. Nothing can get through the scales of this monster but the Word of God. This is a weapon made of sterner stuff than steel, and it will cut through coats of mail. Nothing can resist it. "Where the word of a king is, there is power." About the gospel, when spoken with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, there is the same omnipotence as there was in the Word of God when in the beginning he spoke to the primeval darkness saying, "Let there be light," and there was light. Oh how we ought to prize and love the revelation of God; not only because it is full of life, but because that life is exceedingly energetic and effectual, and operates so powerfully upon the lives and hearts of men!

Next, the apostle tells us that this Word is *cutting*. "Cutting" would be as correct a translation as that of our own version: it is "more cutting than any two-edged sword." I suppose the apostle means by the description "two-edged" that it is all edge. A sword with two edges has no blunt side: it cuts both this way and that. The revelation of God given us in Holy Scripture is edge all over. It is alive in every part, and in every part keen to cut the conscience, and wound the heart. Depend upon it, there is not a superfluous verse in the Bible, nor a chapter which is useless. Doctors say of certain drugs that they are *inert*—they have no effect upon the system one way or the other. Now, there is not an inert passage in the Scriptures; every line has its virtues. Have you never heard of one who heard read, as the lesson for the Sabbath-day, that long chapter of names, wherein it is written that each patriarch lived so many hundred years, "*and he died*"? Thus it ends the notice of the long life of Methuselah with "*and he died*." The repetition of the words, "*and he died*," woke the thoughtless hearer to a sense of his mortality, and led to his coming to the Saviour. I should not wonder that, away there in the Chronicles, among those tough Hebrew names, there have been conversions wrought in cases unknown to us as yet. Anyhow, any bit of Holy Writ is very dangerous to play with, and many a man has been wounded by the Scriptures when he has been idly, or even profanely reading them. Doubters have meant to break the Word to pieces, and it has broken them. Yea, fools have taken up portions, and studied them, on purpose to ridicule them, and they have been sobered and vanquished by that which they repeated in sport. There was one who went to hear Mr. Whitefield—a member of the "Hell-fire Club," a desperate fellow. He stood up at the next meeting of his abominable associates, and he delivered Mr. Whitefield's sermon with wonderful accuracy, imitating his very tone and manner. In the middle of his exhortation he converted himself, and came to a sudden pause, sat down broken-hearted, and confessed the power of the gospel. That club was dissolved. That remarkable convert was Mr. Thorpe, of Bristol, whom God so greatly used afterwards in the salvation of others. I would rather have you read the Bible to mock at it than not read it at all. I would rather that you came to hear the Word of God out of hatred to it than that you never came at all.

The Word of God is so sharp a thing, so full of cutting power, that you

may be bleeding under its wounds before you have seriously suspected the possibility of such a thing. You cannot come near the gospel without its having a measure of influence over you ; and, God blessing you, it may cut down and kill your sins when you have no idea that such a work is being done. Dear friends, have you not found the Word of God to be very cutting, more cutting than a two-edged sword, so that your heart has bled inwardly, and you have been unable to resist the heavenly stroke? I trust you and I may go on to know more and more of its edge till it has killed us outright, so far as the life of sin is concerned. Oh, to be sacrificed unto God, and his Word to be the sacrificial knife! Oh, that his Word were put to the throat of every sinful tendency, every sinful habit, and every sinful thought! There is no sin-killer like the Word of God. Wherever it comes, it comes as a sword, and inflicts death upon evil. Sometimes when we are praying that we may feel the power of the Word we hardly know what we are praying for. I saw a venerable brother the other day, and he said to me, "I remember speaking with you when you were nineteen or twenty years of age, and I never forgot what you said to me. I had been praying with you in the prayer-meeting that God would give us the Holy Ghost to the full, and you said to me afterwards, 'My dear brother, do you know what you asked God for?' I answered, 'Yes.' But you very solemnly said to me, 'The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning, and few are prepared for the inward conflict which is meant by these two words.'" My good old friend told me that at the time he did not understand what I meant, but thought me a singular youth. "Ah!" said he, "I see it now, but it is only by a painful experience that I have come to the full comprehension of it." Yes, when Christ comes, he comes not to send peace on the earth, but a sword ; and that sword begins at home, in our own souls, killing, cutting, hacking, breaking in pieces. Blessed is that man who knows the Word of the Lord by its exceeding sharpness, for it kills nothing but that which ought to be killed. It quickens and gives new life to all that is of God ; but the old depraved life which ought to die, it hews in pieces, as Samuel destroyed Agag before the Lord. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword."

But I want you to notice next, that it has a further quality: *it is piercing*. While it has an edge like a sword, it has also a point like a rapier, "Piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." The difficulty with some men's hearts is to get at them. In fact, there is no spiritually penetrating the heart of any natural man except by this piercing instrument, the Word of God. But the rapier of revelation will go through anything. Even when the "heart is as fat as grease," as the Psalmist says, yet this Word will pierce it. Into the very marrow of the man the sacred truth will pass, and find him out in a way in which he cannot even find himself out. As it is with our own hearts, so it is with the hearts of other men. Dear friends, the gospel can find its way anywhere. Men may wrap themselves up in prejudice, but this rapier can find out the joints of their harness ; they may resolve not to believe, and may feel content in their self-righteousness, but this piercing weapon will find its way. The arrows of the Word of God are sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies, whereby the people fall

under him. Let us not be afraid to trust this weapon whenever we are called up to face the adversaries of the Lord Jesus. We can pin them, and pierce them, and finish them with this.

And next, *the Word of God is said to be discriminating.* It divides asunder soul and spirit. Nothing else could do that, for the division is difficult. In a great many ways writers have tried to describe the difference between soul and spirit; but I question whether they have succeeded. No doubt it is a very admirable definition to say, "The soul is the life of the natural man, and the spirit the life of the regenerate or spiritual man." But it is one thing to define and quite another thing to divide.

We will not attempt to solve this metaphysical problem. God's Word comes in, and it shows man the difference between that which is of the soul, and that which is of the spirit; that which is of man, and that which is of God; that which is of grace, and that which is of nature. The Word of God is wonderfully decisive about this. Oh, how much there is of our religion which is—to quote a spiritual poet—"The child of nature finely-dressed, but not the living child": it is of the soul, and not of the spirit! The Word of God lays down very straight lines, and separates between the natural and the spiritual, the carnal and the divine. You would think sometimes, from the public prayers and preaching of clergymen, that we were all Christian people; but Holy Scripture does not sanction this flattering estimate of our condition. When we are gathered together, the prayers are for us all, and the preaching is for us all, as being all God's people—all born so, or made so by baptism, no question about that! Yet the way the Word of God takes is of quite another sort. It talks about the dead, and the living; about the repentant, and the impenitent; about the believing, and the unbelieving; about the blind, and the seeing; about those called of God, and those who still lie in the arms of the wicked one. It speaks with keen discrimination and separates the precious from the vile. I believe there is nothing in the world that divides congregations, as they ought to be divided, like the plain preaching of the Word of God.

This it is that makes our places of worship to be solemn spots, even as Dr. Watts sings—

"Up to her courts with joys unknown
The holy tribes repair;
The Son of David holds his throne,
And sits in judgment there.

"He hears our praises and complaints;
And, while his awful voice
Divides the sinners from the saints,
We tremble and rejoice."

The Word of God is discriminating.

Once more, *the Word of God is marvellously revealing to the inner self.* It pierces between the joints and marrow, and marrow is a thing not to be got at very readily. The Word of God gets at the very marrow of our manhood; it lays bare the secret thoughts of the soul. It is "a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Have you not often, in hearing the Word, wondered how the preacher could so unveil that

which you had concealed? He says the very things in the pulpit which you had uttered in your bed-chamber. Yes, that is one of the marks of the Word of God that it lays bare a man's inmost secrets; yea, it discovers to him that which he had not even himself perceived. The Christ that is in the Word sees everything. Read the next verse—"All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

The Word not only lets you see what your thoughts are, but it criticizes your thoughts. The Word of God says of this thought, "it is vain," and of that thought, "it is acceptable"; of this thought, "it is selfish," and of that thought, "it is Christ-like." It is a judge of the thoughts of men. And the Word of God is such a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart that when men twist about, and wind, and wander, yet it tracks them. There is nothing so difficult to get at as a man. You may hunt a badger, and run down a fox, but you cannot get at a man—he has so many doublings and hiding-places: yet the Word of God will dig him out, and seize on him. When the Spirit of God works with the gospel, the man may dodge, and twist, but the preaching goes to his heart and conscience, and he is made to feel it, and to yield to its force.

Many times, I do not doubt, dear brothers, you have found comfort in the discerning power of the Word. Unkind lips have found great fault with you; you have been trying to do what you could for the Lord, and an enemy has slandered you, and then it has been a delight to remember that the Master discerns your motive. Holy Scripture has made you sure of this by the way in which it understood and commended you. He discerns the true object of your heart, and never misinterprets you; and this has inspired you with a firm resolve to be the faithful servant of so just a Lord. No slander will survive the judgment-seat of Christ. We are not to be tried by the opinions of men, but by the impartial Word of the Lord; and, therefore, we rest in peace.

II. I have been all this while over the first part of the discourse. I have only a minute or two just to show ONE OR TWO LESSONS WE OUGHT TO GATHER FROM THE QUALITIES OF THE WORD OF GOD that I have described.

The first is this. Brothers and sisters, *let us greatly reverence the Word of God.* If it be all this, let us read it, study it, prize it, and make it the man of our right hand. And you that are not converted, I do pray you treat the Bible with a holy love and reverence, and read it with the view of finding Christ and his salvation in it. Augustine used to say that the Scriptures are the swaddling-bands of the child Christ Jesus: while you are unrolling the bands I trust you will meet with him.

Next, dear friends, let us, *whenever we feel ourselves dead, and especially in prayer, get close to the Word, for the Word of God is alive.* I do not find that gracious men always pray alike. Who could? When you have nothing to say to your God, let him say something to you. The best private devotion is made up, half of searching Scripture in which God speaks to us, and the other half of prayer and praise, in which we speak to God. When thou art dead, turn from thy death to that Word which still lives.

Next, *whenever we feel weak in our duties, let us go to the Word of*

God, and the Christ in the Word, for power; and this will be the best of power. The power of our natural abilities, the power of our acquired knowledge, the power of our gathered experience, all these may be vanity, but the power which is in the Word will prove effectual. Get thou up from the cistern of thy failing strength to the fountain of omnipotence; for they that drink here, while the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, shall run, and not be weary, and shall walk, and not faint.

Next, *if you need as a minister, or a worker, anything that will cut your hearers to the heart, go to this Book for it.* I say this because I have known preachers try to use very cutting words of their own. God save us from that! When our hearts grow hot and our words are apt to be sharp as a razor, let us remember that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Let us not attempt to carry on Christ's war with the weapons of Satan. There is nothing so cutting as the Word of God. Keep to that. I believe also that one of the best ways of convincing men of error is not so much to denounce the error as to proclaim the truth more clearly. If a stick is very crooked, and you wish to prove that it is so, get a straight one, and quietly lay it down by its side, and when men look they will surely see the difference. The Word of God has a very keen edge about it, and all the cutting words you want you had better borrow therefrom.

And next, the Word of God is very piercing. When we cannot get at people by God's truth, we cannot get at them at all. I have heard of preachers who have thought they ought to adapt themselves a little to certain people, and leave out portions of the truth which might be disagreeable. Brothers, if the Word of God will not pierce, our words will not, you may depend upon *that*. The Word of God is like the sword of Goliath, which had been laid up in the sanctuary, of which David said "There is none like it, give it me." Why did he like it so well? I think he liked it all the better because it had been laid up in the Holy Place by the priests; that is one thing. But I think he liked it best of all because it had stains of blood upon it—the blood of Goliath. I like my own sword because it is covered with blood right up to the hilt: the blood of slaughtered sins, and errors, and prejudices has made it like the sword of Don Rodrigo, "of a dark and purple tint." The slain of the Lord have been many by the old gospel. We point to many vanquished by this true Jerusalem blade. They desire me to use a new one. I have not tried it. What have I to do with a weapon which has seen no service? I have proved the Sword of the Lord, and of Gideon, and I mean to keep to it. My dear comrades in arms, gird this sword about you, and disdain the wooden weapons with which enemies would delude you! Let us use this blade of steel, well tempered in the fire, against the most obstinate, for they cannot stand against it. They may resist it for a time, but they will have to yield. They had better make preparations for surrender; for if the Lord comes out against them with his own Word, they will have to give in, and cry to him for mercy.

Next, if we want to discriminate at any time between the soul and the spirit, and the joints and marrow, *let us go to the Word of God for discrimination.* We need to use the Word of God just now upon several subjects. There is that matter of holiness, upon which one saith one

thing, and another another. Never mind what they all say, go to the Book, for this is the umpire on all questions. Amidst the controversies of the day about a thousand subjects, keep to this infallible Book, and it will guide you unerringly.

And lastly, since this Book is meant to be a discernor or critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart, *let the Book criticize us*. When you have issued a new volume from the press—which you do every day, for every day is a new treatise from the press of life—take it to this great critic, and let the Word of God judge it. If the Word of God approves you, you are approved; if the Word of God disapproves you, you are disapproved. Have friends praised you? They may be your enemies in so doing. Have other observers abused you? They may be wrong or right, let the Book decide. A man of one Book—if that Book is the Bible—is a *man*, for he is a man of God. Cling you to the living Word, and let the gospel of your fathers, let the gospel of the martyrs, let the gospel of the Reformers, let the gospel of the blood-washed multitude before the throne of God, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, be your gospel, and none but *that*, and it will save you and make you the means of saving others to the praise of God.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxix. 105—120.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—486, 954, 957.
