

For the Word of God is Living and Active

Hebrews 4:12-13

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, July 31, 2022

If you would, open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews. That's the part of the Word of God we're talking about today. We are in the book of Hebrews. And we have been studying this since the start of the year because we believe in what's called expository preaching as a church. We had a preaching lab on Wednesday night with some of the men from the church. And I told the men that there are three ways to teach the Bible, or three main ways as there are probably others. Some of you have heard me say this before, but the first one is topically or by subject, where you take a topic and you see what the Bible says about that, and you take a subject, like creation are in times or spiritual gifts, and you look at a bunch of verses to see what they reveal about it. The other one is what's called the Survey approach, where you survey the Bible, you take a passage or just a book of the Bible, and you look at it as a whole from 1000 feet up. And then the third way is what's known as expository preaching, which refers to the act of expository or explaining the Bible as meticulously as you can, verse by verse, word by word. You can see the word *explain* or *expose* in the word *expository* because that's the goal of this method. And that's what we're doing right now in the book of Hebrews. We've been doing it for five months, for quite a while now. And I'm really excited about the verse we are looking at this morning because it's probably the most famous passage in the book, and you'll see what I mean as we read it. So if you would, read Hebrews four with me. It says,

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest." Therefore, since it remains for son to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

Therefore, let us fear if while the promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed, we have had good news preached to us just as they also. But the word they heard did not profit them because it was not united by faith and those who heard, for we who have believed entered that rest, just as He also said, as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Although his works were finished from the foundation of the world, for he has said somewhere concerning the seventh day, and God rested on the seventh day from all his works. And again, in this passage, they shall not enter my rest. Therefore, since it remains for son to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience. He again fixes a certain day today, saying through David, after so long a time, just as has been said before, today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken of

another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has answered his rest has himself also rested from His works, as God did from his. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest so that no one will fall through following the same example of disobedience. For the Word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

We'll stop the reading there, but just out of curiosity, as you read that, how many of you have ever studied Hebrews four, verse 12, before? How many of you have memorized it? I'll take the no hands as a sign of saying everybody. Your eyebrows raised, so I'll take your eyebrow as a sign of saying, yes. It's one of the first things that I learned when I studied the Bible. And that is that the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword. And a key word in this passage is the phrase *Word of God*. It's another word for the Bible or the Scriptures. And the reason it's mentioned in the whole context of Hebrews four, is because this is why Israel was shut out of the promised land. This is why God said you can't go in there for 40 years until the whole generation dies off, because they ignored the Word of God. They didn't listen to it. And the whole point of this being in this text is to remind you not to do the same. It's a warning. It's an admonition.

And just to say a few words about this, when you think of the most confusing organizations on earth, and the most muddled ones, you'd have to say that one of the biggest ones might have to be the church nowadays, right? Would have to be the body of Christ, because it doesn't teach the Word of God anymore. It doesn't do what this passage says, and as a result, it's so confusing. We often complain about the government nowadays, and how confusing it is. But if we were honest, there's times where it doesn't hold a candle to the church. Because if you walk in the average church, you could hear them teach anything. And I mean, anything. I could give you lots of examples of that this morning. And I don't want to do too many for the sake of time, but just to mention a few so you can see what I'm talking about. If you were to walk into the average church in Canada today, or in Europe, or United States, you might hear a sermon on homosexuality. You might hear a message promoting the virtues of lesbianism or transgenderism, or the whole LGBTQ movement. That's a popular thing right now in it. It's very well accepted. Churches in the past used to reject homosexuality. And Christians in the past used to frown on it because they saw it as a sin, but not anymore. Today, a lot of them see it as a beautiful thing. There are pastors who perform gay marriage ceremonies, where they say, "By the powers vested in me, I now pronounce you, husband and husband or wife and wife," because they believe God blesses that union. They believe He approves of it. It's not unusual to see churches hanging rainbow flags outside their building during Gay Pride Month and putting rainbow stickers on their window. In some cases, they're even getting the kids involved in this, which is the most tragic thing. One Christian leader in Indiana just made the news for dressing in drag. In order to do that, he took it so far as to wear makeup and put on a wig and a dress, to have Storytime with the kids of his church. Fortunately, the church fired him over that. They threw him out. But the fact that he would try that shows how far this has gone. Because it's the latest trend in the church. If you walk into an average place, you might see something like that, depending on where you go.

If you go into another one, you might hear them teaching what's called the Flat Earth Theory. Or the new flat Earth conspiracy theory, as we might call it. It is to say it's new. It's not really new. Call it modern, but it's not modern. It's very old. People in the 1400s thought the Earth was flat; people in the dark ages held that line of thinking until the scientists discovered a little thing called the telescope. And they looked at the planets and saw

that every planet in the galaxy was round. So why would the earth not be round? They showed us that all the other objects are circular. So they concluded the earth must be the same, which is the way it was for centuries until somebody brought it back in the church. And I don't know who it was. I couldn't find out who was the first one to speak on this issue and promote Flat Earth theology. But whoever it was, they were convincing because they've created a following. Because if you've ever talked to someone to this line of thinking, every time they open their mouth, they want to tell you the earth is flat. And every time you get into a conversation, they want to remind you it's not circular. And they want to point you to passages like Revelation seven verse one which says, "I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth," in order to say that this is one big conspiracy and everybody's lying to you. But that's another thing that church teaches.

Also, depending on where you go on a Sunday, you might hear them talking about the health, wealth and prosperity gospel. I don't know how popular this is in Canada. This is really popular in the US where I'm from, which says if you become a Christian, this is what God will do, He'll make you healthy, wealthy and wise. He'll give you riches intelligence and power. So if you want a car, you can get a car. And if you want a house, He'll give you a house. And if you want a job, He'll give you a job. All you have to do is believe. Which is nonsense. No one in the Bible ever taught that and if that's the case, Jesus really blew it because He was poor. But I mentioned all that to say that the church is really embracing just about anything nowadays. It's begun to swallow all kinds of crazy things to the point that when someone comes into a place like Chilliwack, it's a gong show, because it's full of churches. And you go over here and you hear one thing, and then you go over there, and you hear something else. And you go into this congregation, and they present this set of doctrines, and you go into another congregation, and they tell you something else, which is frustrating. We've had people come into our church and tell us all kinds of stories of this stuff they've heard.

Now, without spending too much time on this, because there's no need to. I think we all understand the church is in bad shape nowadays. Let me ask you the question, what are we supposed to do about this? How do we fix this problem of the confusion in churches? I think the answer is pretty simple. When you look at this passage in Hebrews four, verse 12, I think it's pretty clear. You need to teach the Bible. You need to go back to preaching the Word of God. It says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword." And that means that the Bible is able to slice through all the chaos and the confusion and the turmoil. It's also able to do it with vigor and passion because it's active, which means the Word of God doesn't just bring you out of your air, it throws you out of your air. It doesn't just draw you out of the confusion, it pushes you out of it, it compels you. So you don't have a choice. And most important thing in this passage probably is that it gives you life. It raises your soul from the dead. The reason so many people buy into those lies in the churches, and they're confused, and they're in the dark, and they're all foggy is because they have no life. Their souls have never been raised from the dead. So every little lie that comes through, they swallow it. And every little deception the enemy throws, they believe it because they don't have the power to resist. So the best way to help them is to go back to teaching the words in this book. It's been said that you don't protect a lion by leaving it in its cage. You protect the lion by letting it loose. It'll protect itself the same way with the Bible. You don't have to protect the Bible, just let it loose. It'll handle itself.

Paul told Timothy and Second Timothy four verse two to preach the Word and be ready in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction. And that means this is your calling as a church. This is your commission. God's words are not ambiguous here. They're not vague. You need to preach the Word. In

season, out of season. That means when people like it and when they don't. When they approve, and when they call you a bigot and a fool and a jerk and old fashioned; you preach it both times.

In Mark 16 Verse 15, Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." And the reason He said that is because all the world needs to hear it. People in Africa need to hear it and people in Asia need to hear it. People in North America need to hear the Bible. People in South America need to hear the Bible. People in India, Europe, everywhere in between. This is for everybody. I'm not from Canada. I didn't grow up here. The Lord has blessed me to come here from somewhere else. But I'll tell you what Canada needs, it needs the Bible. And when I go back to Tennessee, you know what they mean? They need they need the Bible, too. They call it the Bible Belt. I've seen a lot of belt there. I haven't seen a lot of Bible. Everybody needs this. They don't need gimmicks. They don't need shows. They don't need tricks. They don't need fads. They don't need trends, they don't need conspiracy, they need the word of God. We all do.

And again, our text addresses this issue in verse 12. And I'm going to say more about this in a moment. But a key word here is that word, *word* or *Word of God*. It's the word *logos* in Greek, which means a word or a speech or an utterance, but the way it's used it really does refer to the Bible. This is the same term Paul use when he said, "preach the word" because this is what Israel was punished for. And this is what they got them into so much trouble because they didn't listen to that. The entire context for this is Israel's failure in the wilderness, and their sin there and the evil things that they did by plugging their ears, hardening their hearts and refusing to do what God said. So the reminder in all this setting is for you not to repeat their mistakes. Verse 12 says, "For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two edged sword," which means it's sharper than any instrument on Earth, it's sharper than any tool known so it cuts right through all the facade you try to put up between you and God and it slices right through it. You can't hide when you read the Bible. Again, there's nowhere to go. The same verse also says it's able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And that means it's able to judge you at your deepest level, it shows you who you really are, which is important to remember, because we all have a tendency to do this when we come to church, we all have a tendency to come here and hide from God, we put our best foot forward, we throw on our best suit, and our best shoes and our best hair and our best makeup, which is okay. You want to look your best for God. You want to be presentable when you come into the house of worship, but at the same time, you need to remember that it doesn't change how God sees you. He doesn't hide what He perceived, because He sees through it all.

And this is also important because we also have a tendency to be hypocritical when we come to church, and not only try to hide our sin, but to outright lie about it because we say it's no big deal. My sin is not that bad. I'm a good person. I'm nice, we're nice, you're all nice. The Bible was given to correct that as well, because it cuts through the facade of that when you read the Bible. When you read the Bible, you don't feel very nice about yourself, do you don't feel good about yourself. That's the whole point. It was written to reveal your sin as God sees it. So you'll come to Christ, come to the cross, come to the Savior, and be saved. This is why we have to go back to this. It's so important for our church.

I did some research on it this week. And I found some alarming statistics that said while the numbers vary, some studies have indicated that the average Christian young person in the United States will spend about 50 hours per year listening to sermons while at the same time spending, get this, 2000 hours watching TV. He will also see 350,000 commercials by the time he graduates high school, which is more time than he will spend talking to his father in his entire lifetime. And it's not just the kids, the average adult iPhone user will spend five hours per day

looking at their phone. And if they're a Christian, they'll probably spend less than five minutes a day reading the Bible. Our priorities are so skewed, aren't they? They're so twisted. So we need to take make some changes in this department this morning.

And the first one is because it's living and active the first reason why you need to keep studying the Word of God as a Christian, as a believer, as someone who is in a similar situation as to what Israel was, is because it's living and active, which means it has the power of God. And so if you want to experience that today, if you want power, You need to pour your life into this book. If you look in verse 10, the author says,

For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.
Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest so that no one will fall through following the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active.

If you notice as you read, that you are looking at one of the most famous passages in the Bible. And it's so familiar to some of us that you may not see the context of it, you kind of blow right past it when you read it. But the verse right above this in verse 11 tells us to be diligent, not to follow Israel's example of disobedience. That verse falls into a section that actually starts way back in chapter three, and goes all the way through chapter four, in order to talk about Israel's wandering in the wilderness because they disobeyed the Word of God there. In other words the Jews weren't punished in the wilderness for murdering someone or committing adultery or doing something horrible like that. It simply happened because they forgot to take the Bible seriously. Which is why this verse tells you to be diligent not to do that, because you have the word of God in your hands, you're holding it right there in the pew, and you need to take it seriously.

I don't know if you're aware of this or not, but the phrase, "Thus says the Lord" appears almost 2000 times in your Bible. And the phrase "God says," appears almost 2000 more, which is about twice per page. You see it all over the place because the authors of the Bible wanted to make it clear that when the Bible speaks, God speaks. And when Scripture talks, God talks, this is not a normal book. It's completely unique in all of human history, which is why verse 12 says, "For the word of God is living and active." The word *living* here is translated *alert*, in some of your translations, or *quick*, in the King James Version, because the idea here is that the word of God has the power to quicken the dead. It has the ability to raise them and awaken them and bring them back to life. Because when you read it, the Bible moves and stirs, and it awakens something deep inside of you. And it pokes and prods, and rouses something within your heart; it doesn't keep you in the same place. It doesn't leave you right where you were before. And the word power here gives the idea of force or vigor because the idea is that it does it with a certain degree of energy. That Greek word is actually the Greek word for energy, you want to write the word energy in your Bible right beside that word. Because when you read it, the Bible does move and stir and awaken you, and it pokes and prods. But it does it in a way you won't forget. It does it in a way you should remember. Because it does it with energy.

I should also tell you that both of these terms are connected with a verb that's in the continuous tense to show you that the Bible always does this, because you can read it today, and it will move you and you can read it tomorrow, and it'll do it again. And you could read it this year, and it will stir your soul. And you can read it the year after that, and it will stir you again. You can read it 10 years from now, and it will do it. You can read it 20 years from now, and it will do it. You can read it 100 years from now, and it will do it. Because there's something about the Bible that's always fresh, always new, always full of life and energy. You want to know why the Protestant

Reformation happened in the 1500s. It was because of the Bible. That's it. That's what did it. You want to know why the great awakening happened a few centuries later, because of the Bible. Same reason. You want to know why the Second Great Awakening happened a century later, same reason. It always goes back to the Bible. And I should add this verb is in the present tense in your English Bibles, which is also important because it says the Word of God *is* living and active, not that it *will be* living and active, or it *might be* living and active. Or it could be if you change it, modify it and make it more up to date. No, it is that way now. Just the way it is. And if you don't see that, you have no one to blame but yourself.

As I was studying this, I was reminded of the fact that when the Jews would translate the Bible centuries ago, if the scribe wrote it out, someone else would come back and check it. And if he saw there was an error in it, they would take it outside the synagogue and bury it in the ground. And the reason they would do that was it was showing that the book is dead. Now it is not the word of God anymore. The life has gone out of it because of this error. Archaeologists have found some of those old synagogues by finding those buried remains around them. You don't have a buried book, it's not in the ground, it has life. It's alive and it's right in front of your hand.

I don't know about you, but I've heard stories of people getting saved just by reading the Bible. Anybody ever heard about that? They didn't grow up in church. They didn't hear any sermons. They didn't have someone witnessing to them, they just read the Scripture. And that was it. They were born again. I've heard of other people in the mission field, reading one verse of the Bible and people getting saved. They didn't have a copy of it, it wasn't available, but they came across something like John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..." And that turned their whole life upside down.

And again, the setting of this passage is so important because Israel lost this, they didn't pay attention to it, which is why they kept failing all the time, because they didn't have the power of God, they didn't have the life of God, because they didn't open up the Bible. And the implication there is that if you're in the same place, you want to remember that. I meet people all the time who tell me they struggle with sin, because they don't feel like they have the power to resist it. And when they tell me that your response is always the same, when's the last time you read your Bible? When's the last time you took the time to open it up and see what it says? Because that's where your strength is found. That's where the power comes from. You meet other people that say they don't feel like they have the power to do what God wants him to do right now. They say they're struggling with being the kind of man God wants them to be at home, or in their marriage, or in their family. And we can relate to that. We can all identify with that. But the response is the same there too. When is the last time you studied scripture on that subject? Because if you need the strength to change your home, the Bible has the strength. And if you need the power to change your family, the Bible has the power. And if you need the strength to change your marriage, the word of God can do that, too. You need to go home and read it. That's the answer. The Bible has the power to pick up the broken pieces, restore the years of locusts ate, and do things that nothing else can do.

And just to get real practical for a moment. Some of you may be wondering, well, how do I read the Bible? What do I do? And there's a lot of different answers to that question. For one thing you can get on a Bible reading plan if you want to, you can go online or go to the local Christian bookstore, and find a daily reading schedule that maps out how many chapters you need to read to finish in a year. And that's very helpful. A lot of people will really enjoy that or you can read it on your own. You can develop your own plan, read at your own pace, and that's good as well. Because there may be times when you want to slow down when you need to or speed up on something. That's fine. You can read it with an accountability partner. You can pair up with someone in the

church, both of you reading at the same pace so you can hold each other steady on that. You can memorize it with flashcards didn't have flashcards anymore, I wouldn't have made it through seminary without flashcards, I guess they don't even have those anymore. Your iPhone, you can put it on your iPhone, memorize it that way, when you're at work, meditate on it, quote it to your wife, quote it to your husband, quote it to your kids, but however you do it, that doesn't matter. There's a lot of freedom in this. You just need to do it. It's living and active which means if you want to be living and active as well, for God, you have to take this seriously.

And that brings us to another reason why you need to keep studying the Word of God today. And that is because it's sharper than any two-edged sword. The second reason why you need to keep studying the Word of God today is because it's sharper than any two-edged sword, which means that it's able to cut you. This is where it starts getting a little personal here and he starts getting into your kitchen. But if you go on and read in verse 12, it says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit of both joints and marrow." And we'll stop the reading here because as you can tell, this phrase has given more attention than the previous one. When he says, "The Word of God is living and active," he kind of stops there. But when he says it's sharper, he goes on to explain it some more. And he says this is how the life and power of God manifest themselves in this passage. They do it by cutting and piercing you which is a pretty graphic picture. Because when he says the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, that phrase refers to a short two-foot long sword the Romans carried with them under their cloaks for close combat. We would probably call it a knife or a dagger or where I'm from, they call it the Arkansas toothpick because it was often used by assassins when they would want to attack somebody on the sly because it's easy to conceal, which is what made it so dangerous and deadly and caught you off guard. You could see a sword outside someone's robe because it would go all the way down. But you couldn't see this. It was also dangerous because it cut in both directions, sharp on both sides. And the author uses that here to say the word of God is like that; it has the same effect on you because it has no blunt side to it.

There is no dull edge on the Bible; no matter which way you turn it, it has an impact. Read the Old Testament, it has an impact, read the New Testament as an impact. Read something from Genesis, it should shake you; read something from Exodus that should shake you because it cuts you and that means it brings conviction. No matter where you turn in the Bible, you will eventually come to the conclusion that I am a sinner, I had no idea I was that bad. I usually feel pretty good about myself that I have my morning devotionals. And it says it's sharper than any two-edged sword piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, both joints and marrow. And that's important because after telling us that the Bible cuts you, it tells you how much it cuts you or how deep it goes. Because it goes deeper than any human blade could ever do by piercing soul and spirit. Those terms are actually synonyms that refer to the hidden part of you or the unseen part. You can see a sword that cuts your hand off, and you can see a dagger that cuts off your toes. You can't see a dagger that cuts into your soul. But that's what this is.

And these are interesting terms because they've actually started a theological controversy, called the dichotomy trichotomy debate, which tries to answer the question, does man have two parts or three parts? Is he dichotomous, made up of body and spirit? Or is he trichotomous, made up of body, soul and spirit? See the issue there? Without going into all the discussion of how some have said one thing some another, I think the answer is the dichotomy view, which says man is made up of two parts, body and spirit because the term soul and spirit refer to the same thing. And that's the part of you that you can't see. And the author uses them here to make a play on words, because you can't pierce into that, you can't slide into the division between the soul of man and the soul of man. But even if you could, he says, the Bible could do it. Even if that were possible, the Scripture could get into

that, it's that sharp. There are other interpretations but that's the clearest way I could understand it. It's the same way with the words, joints and marrow, because those terms have changed throughout the years. But they refer to the same thing and that is the place between bones. It was the spot where two parts of the human skeletons had met inside the body, because they didn't have an instrument to cut into that back then. And today, we have lasers and microscopic surgery or those kinds of things that can do that sort of thing. But back then it wasn't available. But the author says, even if you could cut into that, the Bible could do it. Even if it were possible, Scripture could see it done because it's that ruthless. It goes into parts that no tool of human industry can penetrate, which means it takes away all the delusions about yourself. When you read the Bible, it takes away all the myths and secrets and lies that we like to tell that say I'm a good person; I'm not that bad. Because it shows you that that's not the case. It cuts both ways. And that means it comforts and it afflicts you, it builds up and it tears down. It pierces in both directions, which means it convicts and it converts a sinner, it encourages and discourages them with what they do, because it shows you your sin, but it doesn't stop there. It takes you to the cross. And you might add that you never know what it's going to do with people. When you read the Bible, as you all know, it's a very unpredictable book, which is what makes it so dangerous. One southern preacher told me, you know, you're holding a sword in this book, you're not holding a butter knife. We've had people in our church read the Bible to a friend or a neighbour and share one or two verses to encourage them and build them up because they're struggling. And they've come back to me and said they lashed out at me over that. They got mad at me. Why? Because it's cutting them. It's piercing their heart. You need to expect it to do that sometimes. We've had other people read it to their neighbors who were struggling with a similar thing. And they've come back and said that they hug them for it. They put their arms is around my neck and wept. Why? Because it's cutting them to, it's just cutting in the opposite direction. But the point is that whatever it's doing, the word of God needs to have an impact on you. It needs to do something inside your heart. Otherwise, you are doing it all wrong.

I told you there are a lot of different ways to study the Bible. Let me tell you, there's one wrong way to do it and that's to read it and never change. To read it and be the same person day in, day out, week in, week out, month in month out, is to blow the whole point of it. I told you last time about the time Moses went up on the mountain to receive the 10 commandments. And the Jews started worshipping the golden calf down at the bottom. Remember that story? Do you remember what God did? He punished them. Do you remember why? Because the word had no impact on them. At another time, later on, the Israelites encountered the people of Moab. And they started sacrificing to their gods and bowing down to them. So the Lord told Moses in numbers 25, to take the leaders of the people and God will execute them in broad daylight. You know why? Same reason. The word did not penetrate their heart. They were the same people then as they were when they left Egypt. At another time, they complained, and he sent fire to consume the outskirts of their camp. Because again, they did that sort of thing over and over and over again. God hated it. He still hates it today when we respond that way.

Charles Spurgeon says that a man wants to approach him in his office. And he said, "Mr. Spurgeon, I've been reading my entire my Bible for an entire year on my knees. And it's had no impact at all on me." To which Spurgeon said, "My dear man, I would suggest you read it in a good easy chair with plenty of light. Because I think your knees are cutting off circulation to your brain." He's right. I mean, if you read this book, and it doesn't do anything to you, you need to sit in an easy chair and turn the light on.

This brings us to another reason why you need to keep studying the Word of God and that is because it's able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. First one is because it's living and active. Secondly, it's sharper than any two-edged sword, which is really convicting because so many of us don't approach the Word of God this way.

This is why we walk so cavalierly into church. This is why we're so apathetic in our Christian lives, because we don't believe we're holding a sword in our hands. In a verse like this, these just shake us and startle us out of that, which is the whole intention, we need to be reverent when we approach the Word of God.

And that brings us to another reason why you have to study the Word of God. And that's because it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart, which means that it knows you better than you know yourself, because it understands your innermost desires. And if you would read all of verse 12, it says this, it says, "For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Now, it's obvious as you're going through this text what's happening here, because the author is building an argument for you, because after telling you the Word of God is living and active, he then says that it cuts and pierces you. And to go one step further, now he says that it judges because that's what the piercing is there to do, to cut away all the layers of you and to open up your heart so you can see it for what it is. It's trying to remove all the veils and lies because it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The word *judgment* here is the Greek word *kritikos* which gives the idea of sifting out the good from the bad, telling the real thing from the fake. The same term was used to describe the Roman governor Felix, who presided over Paul's trial in the book of Acts, because that's what he did. He was sitting on the throne on the judgment chair in order to determine what was good and bad, who was guilty and who was not. Here the passage says not only does the word of God judge us like that, but it does more than that, because it judges the thoughts and intentions of our heart, which refers to the things that take place in our soul and in our mind. The word *thoughts* here refers to the things that we think about, fantasize about, and dream about on a regular basis. Which is amazing, because if you think about it, there's really nothing more personal than that, right? There's nothing more intimate than your thoughts and dreams. I mean, I can look around the room this morning and I can tell a lot about you from your parents. I can tell that you maybe come from this place or that place, and you have this background or that background, but I can't tell you what your dreams are. I have no idea. God can. In this passage it says He does because He sees all of it, which means He sees the good thoughts and the bad thoughts. He sees the holy ones and the unholy ones; He sees the righteous ones and the sinful ones. If that were not enough, it also says He knows your intentions as well. That word refers to your desires or passions or longings, and the reasons why you do what you do. Which is even more humbling, to be honest. Because most of us don't even know what our intentions are. Yes, somebody sins or does something wrong. You ask them, why? What did they say? I don't know. Well, they may not be lying when they say that, they may have no idea why they do what they do, God does. He knows exactly why you do what you do. Which means He can judge your good impulses and your bad impulses. He can sift through your holy ones and your unholy ones and your righteous ones and your sinful ones.

And if you look back at your Bibles, you might want to circle or highlight the word heart. In this passage, it's a very important word here and should jump out at you on the page, because it's another word for your soul. And the reason I asked you to highlight it is because this word or this idea is so important. It's repeated four times in this passage. Because this same word is called your soul and spirit earlier in verse 12. That's the same word. So the same idea. It's called your heart, right here, or your cardio in Greek from which we get the word cardiology. Later on in verse 13, it's going to tell you that all things are laid open and bear before God. And that actually means all things of the heart, are laid open and bear, all things of the soul. Because that's what God cares about the most. The Bible doesn't say that God will judge you by your clothes, or your hair or your eye color. And it doesn't tell you that he's going to scrutinize you by your suit, or your shoes or your makeup. He didn't care about

that. Why would God care about those things? He's going to do it by your soul. He's going to judge you by your heart, because that's the one place where the real you sticks out the most. You can hide from people or from things with your clothes, can't you? You can hide with your suit and your shoes. People do it all the time. They dress a certain way. They say the clothes make the man. Walk like this, talk like this, so people will think they're holy or righteous. But let me tell you, you can't hide your soul. God sees right through it.

In fact, just to highlight this, the passage says in verse 13, "No creature is hidden from His sight." And that means no creature's heart nor a creature's soul, even if it were Jewish. Remember the setting here. Even if that creature's soul came from the chosen race of Israel, and seemed to be nice, and seem to be good, and seem to be holy, because they went to church and paid their taxes and stood for right and wrong. The idea here is that God will judge them too because even they can't hide from God.

And let me tell you how this relates to us today. And that is, just like the Jews could not escape God's judgment because they are Jewish, you will not escape it either. Just because you came to church, just like the Israelites could not avoid it, just because they followed God outwardly and obeyed Him outwardly and were nice and all that kind of stuff, you can't do it either just because you came in here. His judgment will follow you when you leave this room. His eyes will be on you. When you walk through the doors of your home, go to go to work tomorrow morning, and get up and spend time with your family on Tuesday. So the point of this whole passage is it's just time to stop playing games with God. It's one thing to be a Christian one day a week. It's another thing to be one the rest of the time. And it's one thing to honour God on Sunday when everyone's singing and worshiping with you and patting you on the back and saying "way to go," "good job," but it's another thing to do when they're not. That's what this is talking about. The Bible was given to help you in those times too; it was given to help you honour God when there's no one else around, but you and God.

Just to give you a practical example this, when I look around the room, I see a lot of young families. God really blessed us with a lot of young parents or those who are becoming young parents. The Bible was given to help you in your parenting. You can write some of these verses down if you want. But Ephesians six, verse four, says "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." And you know what that verse means? It means that you shouldn't go home and prop your feet up all the time when you're alone. It means you shouldn't go home and turn the TV on when no one's watching, and shut your family out. Because God sees it. He knows how you parent. He knows what goes on when no one's around, but you and those little lives. Colossians three, verse 21, also says, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so they will not lose heart." And you know what that verse means which is even more convicting? It means you shouldn't go home at night and yell at them. It means you shouldn't walk through the door, and lose your temper with your kids. Why? Because God sees that too. You can't hide that part of life from Him. He sees it like it's plain as day. Deuteronomy six tells you to teach these things diligently to your children; He tells Israel that do it all the time, do it every day because God sees you every day. But the point in all this is the Bible wasn't given just for you to read when you're at church, it was given for you to read when you go home to everywhere, wherever you go. Because it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And it does that to cleanse you and purify you and sanctify you. It judges you in order to rip the sin out of your life. So you can be a better parent and be a better father and be a better man of God. It's been said that I've read a lot of books before but no book has ever read me like the Bible, Amen? It tells me things about myself I never knew were there. But it does it for this reason, so you can repent and change.

A father once asked his son, "Why do you keep punching your brother?" I know none of you have ever had that conversation before. And the little boy said, "Because I want to." The father said, "Well, what would make you want to stop punching your brother?" And he said, "I guess if something made me not want to." True. I need something to change my heart. That's why the Bible was given to you, for God put it in your hands to change your soul.

Which brings you to another reason why you need to keep studying the Word of God today, just to review these other ones. First, you do it because it's living and active. Second, you do it because it's sharper than any two-edged sword. Third, we study the Bible because it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart, which is alarming. I mean, all these texts are alarming. But that one really is. I think we would all like to hide our hearts from God at times. I think there are times when we're all failing, and we'd like to cover them up. But you can't. And that brings us to another reason why you need to keep studying the Word of God. And that is because all things are laid bare before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. If you want to write all that out, it's in the passage here. But a fourth reason why you need to keep studying the Word of God is because all things are laid bare before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Which means that everything is laid bare before God with a violence. And you'll see what I mean, as I read this is done with a fury. And if you read on it says this is exactly what it says in the passage starting in verse 12, "For the word of God is living, active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, both joints and marrow and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight. But all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." This last phrase, it's very powerful here because it's the great crescendo of the passage. This is what it all boils down to. Which is why I put this in a separate category in our notes here. Because the phrase *open and laid bare* is a term that was used to describe something that was laid open by coercion. It was laid open whether you want it to be or not is the idea. When you study it in the original Greek, it's actually quite frightening. I was startled when I read this because depending on where it's found it can refer to a wrestler who grabbed his opponent by the throat and shoved him on the ground. It makes you change the way you look at your bibles. Then it refers to a boxer who had punched his adversary, like you are in a fight and knocked him down, punched his teeth out. Or in a more serious way, it refers to a soldier who was hauling a person to trial, having him stand before the judge. And in order to force him to look at the judge eye to eye, he would put a knife under his chin and leave it there for the whole trial. So he couldn't do anything but face his accuser face to face. And the idea here is that this is what the Bible does for us. It doesn't just cut you with a knife, it puts one under your throat. So you have to look at God. You have a knife under your throat and can't look down, can't look over there, can't look over here, you have to look straight at it so that you can't escape.

Some of your translations start off this verse this way, it says, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and exposed." And that's a good translation because it means strip naked or stark naked without any clothing at all to protect you. It's the reason you wear clothing, you wear it to hide things. You're concealing what's really there. The Bible is given to take that away from you. It pulls away all the outward stuff we've been talking about, all the veils that cover up our sin, and it makes you see what's happening underneath. One commentator said, what the passage is saying here is that as far as men are concerned, we may be able to wear our trappings and disguises, but when it comes to God, all that fades away in his presence, because there are no disguises that are strong enough that He can see through. And just to show you how blunt this is, the word *laid bare* in Greek is the word *trachelizo*, from which we get the word trachea or windpipe. Because the idea is that

this is what God grabs you by in the Bible, He grabs you by your windpipe, so you can't breathe and He can get your attention.

I don't know if you've been in a courtroom before. But if you have, this is a good description of what it's like to stand before a judge. I had to go into a courtroom one time to do jury duty. I wasn't guilty. I didn't do anything wrong. I was on the jury. But every time the judge talked to me, I lost my voice. I was so scared I was going to say something wrong. The Bible has that kind of power. "All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." That's a strange way to end the passage because it's open ended and it makes you wonder with whom we have to do? What am I held accountable for? And the answer is everything. God is the one who will hold you accountable to every little detail of your life. No matter what it is, good or bad, big or small, public or private, God sees everything.

It mentions God's eyes in here as well. Earlier it talked about the Word of God, now it mentions His eyes. Everything is open and laid bare to the eyes of Him. To remind you, God is watching, He is looking. The passage uses the phrase *all things* to show you the comprehensive nature of this. This is what God is looking at with His eyes. *All things*, nothing escapes His notice, which would be frightening if it wasn't for what he says next. I came to this passage and I remember studying and thinking, where is the hope in this? God, what am I going to do? I mean, if you see everything I do, how in the world am I not going to go to hell? I'm a sinner I fail all the time. How am I going to escape Your damnation? And if you look in verse 14, it tells you how. The author knew what you're thinking when you read this. He understood the struggle that you have and in verse 14 it says this, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest, a man who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession." If you're wondering why that passage is in here, the answer is simple. And that is because this is the only way you're going to escape the judgment of God. This is the only way you are going to get through it. And that is through Jesus Christ. You're not going to do it for your good works because they're not good enough. And you're not going to do it for your efforts because they're not strong enough. You're not going to do it by going to church, being a good person, all those things we talked about. You are going to get it through Christ. You need someone who has passed through the heavens for you. You need a high priest who has gone into His presence, and that is what you have here.

Verse 15, also says For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. That's what you have in Christ as well. He has been tempted by all things and overcome that for you. He has been confronted by all these kinds of evils in the world and been victorious so you can do the same. Verse 16 also says He brings you before the throne of grace, not the throne of judgment, but the throne of grace, not the throne of violence, where the jailer puts a knife at your throat, but the throne of Mercy where He will hug you and receive you and embrace you in His arms. But the point is that the only way to get that is through Christ. You have to go running to the cross. That's the point of the Bible, friends. That's the point of Scripture. It was written to draw you to Christ, because the way it works is that you read it and feel guilty and you come running to Christ for salvation. You study it and you feel convicted, because you have done wrong. And you go straight into His arms. I'm afraid so many times we get this backwards because we read the Bible and we're tempted to feel proud about that, right? We read the Scriptures, and we're compelled to walk away feeling smug and hearty and self-satisfied. That's not the point of the Bible. The point of the Bible is to humble you. The point of the Bible is to take away all your pride, and show you that you are the worst sinner in the room so that you can flee to Christ.

In the early 1900s, there was a preacher named Billy Sunday, whom you might not have heard of. His name has been largely forgotten, but he was pretty famous in his day. And on the inside of his Bible, he had this statement: "I entered through the portico of Genesis and walked down through the Old Testament's Art Gallery, where I saw the portraits of Joseph, Jacob, Daniel, Moses, Isaiah, Solomon, and David hanging on the wall. Then I proceeded to enter through the music room of the Psalms and the spirit of God struck the keyboard of my nature, until it seemed to me that every reed and pipe and God's great organ of nature responded to the harp of David, and the charm of King Solomon. Then I walk into the business room of Proverbs. Then I walked into the observatory of the prophets, and they are sort of photographs of various sizes, some pointing to far off stars or events, all concentrated upon one great star, which was to come and atone for sin. Then I went into the audience room of the King of kings. And I got a vision from four points of view from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I went into the correspondents room and saw Peter, James, Paul and Jude writing their epistles to the world. I went into the Acts of the Apostles, and saw the Holy Spirit forming the holy church. And then I walked into the throne room and saw a door at the foot of a tower and going up, I saw one standing there, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And I found Him to be the truest friend that man ever knew. Because where everyone else is false. He is always the same." Friends, I tell you that story, because he's right, Jesus is the truest friend you will ever know. Where everything else is false, He will always be the same. But it's for this reason, because He came to show mercy to you. He came to give you grace, so you won't have to face the judgment of God on your own. Will you come to Him today? Let me pray that you would.

Heavenly Father, as we come this morning, to the Lord's table, we do want to come on this note. And that is the note that we have all fallen short of the glory of God. And we've all failed you many, many, many times more than we can even remember. And yet you and your kindness and mercy have brought us salvation to us. That takes care of all of it in Christ. Lord, I pray that we would have a deeper reverence for Him this morning, I pray we would have a deeper appreciation for what He has done. And in all we've said this morning, Lord, I pray that we would be a Bible reading church. Not to be haughty or proud, like we talked about, but so that we would be throw ourselves at the foot of the Saviour. Lord, thank you for giving us a book like this. Thank you that you have opened our eyes of all people to the truths in the Bible, that we may have life and I pray if there's any here today who did not have this life, they would be convicted. If they've never come face to face with you and seen their sin. You would do that today in a way that draws them to Christ and saves them for the very first time. We would love to see more conversions by Your power and grace and mercy and we pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.