

“The Wonder of the Word of God”
Rev. Timothy C. Geoffrion, Ph.D., D.D.

The following sermon was originally written and delivered for the Grayson Chin Baptist Church, outside Dallas, Texas, on May 14, 2023. I’ve modified it for the MIT Annual Magazine and the Myanmar churches.

What does the Word of God mean to you?

Now from the beginning, I want to make clear that when Scripture refers to the Word of God, the writers are not simply referring to a book to be read. God’s Word has been at work in the world from the beginning of time, from creating the universe to redeeming humanity. In Genesis chapter one we read, God created the world by his spoken word, saying, “Let there be light,” “Let there be water and land,” “Let there be vegetation,” and other such declarations. God has also spoken words of judgment and promise over the centuries through his prophets, as we find in the Old Testament, and through Jesus’s apostles, in the New Testament. Almost all of these words were spoken aloud in the hearing of the people, before they were ever written down.

Perhaps the greatest expression of the Word of God is Jesus himself. The Apostle John famously said, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In other words, the Word of God is Jesus Christ. And we experience the Word of God, when we come to know Jesus personally.

Not surprisingly, then, we read in Hebrews 4:12-13 that the Word of God is alive and active and sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates to the deepest part of our being and judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. In other words, the Word of God is equated with the work of the Holy Spirit, who touches our hearts and leads us to faith and to repentance.

Now, this is not all that the Holy Spirit does in our lives, but in Hebrews, the author is focusing on one aspect of the living, active Word of God. He is teaching his readers that God is actively calling them to repentance, which is why he adds that nothing is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before God’s eyes. And, each of us must give account to God for how we live our lives.

He’s telling them this so that they can understand how the Word of God works in practice and what God’s intention is by speaking to them through his Word. The Word of God does not just inform us about God, but it leads us to encounter the living God and to be changed by that encounter.

Now, most of us have had the experience of being convicted of our sins. We know we’ve done something wrong, and the Holy Spirit of God pierces through all our lies, false justifications, sinfulness, and selfishness to reveal the truth. Now all this may seem frightening or negative. But when Word of God pierces our heart and drives us to our knees in remorse and repentance, it is the first step toward our salvation.

Do you remember what happened after David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, killed? Nathan the prophet went to him and told him a story about a rich man who stook the only lamb of a poor man in his village and sacrificed it for a guest. When David heard this story, he was enraged and said, that man should die! And what did Nathan say, he looked him in the eyes, and said, “You are the man!” (2 Sam. 12:7). Nathan spoke the Word of God to David by exposing

his sin and thereby calling him to repentance. And what was David’s response? He was instantly humbled, and he admitted, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Sam. 12:13a).

The writer to the Hebrews surely wanted to evoke a similar response from his readers. He had already told them in an earlier verse to be responsive to the Word of God when God spoke to them. In quoting from the Old Testament, he said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 4:7b). And why did he say that? Because he wanted to turn them away from their disobedience so that they would be able to enter God’s rest (4:11).

The Apostle James said, the Word of God is planted within believers and saves them (James 1:21). He’s conjuring up the image of a seed that is planted in a garden or field, which grows and blossoms. Whether he had in mind a flower, vegetables, rice, or some other crops, the main point is the same. The Word of God has the power to touch our hearts and change our minds, leading to faith, repentance, and obedience. What God plants within in us, he makes it grow until it produces the fruit of eternal life.

In his second letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul adds another aspect of the Word of God that we need to understand. What God communicates through nature, Jesus Christ, and his Holy Spirit, he also expresses through the Bible. For this reason, Paul instructed his young disciple by saying:

Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. (2 Tim. 3:14-17)

Once again, we see that biblical writers understood the Word of God as living and active, a force from God to change our lives for the better. However, in this case, Paul is talking about the written Word of God. He’s saying that the powerful Word of God that created the universe, which was manifested in Jesus Christ, and saves human beings from eternal damnation, also comes to us through Scripture. And the result is our faith, repentance, obedience, righteousness, and ultimately salvation. In paraphrasing 2 Tim. 3:16, my pastor from my childhood used to say, “Scripture teaches what is right, what is not right, how to get right, and how to stay right” (Rev. Cal Lyons).

In summary, Scripture teaches us that the Word of God is actively at work in wonderful ways throughout the universe and throughout all time. Regardless of your level of education or mine, everything in the universe depends upon the Word of God, everything from creation to salvation.

1. The Word of God is manifest in nature and can be readily observed throughout our physical world.
2. The incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, teaches us more about who God is than we could ever know just by looking at the stars or studying biology, chemistry, physics, and geology. By looking at Jesus, we learn about God’s character. We see the extent of God’s love. We have a role model of what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
3. Then, third, the Word of God changes human lives through the proclamation of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who hear the Word with an open heart become convicted of their sins and need for redemption. But they do not stay trapped in guilt and shame, because the Word of God also convinces them of God’s love, forgiveness, and the mercy.
4. And, finally, through the written form of the Word of God, we can learn so much about who God is and how God works among those who call upon his name. Indeed, there is no other

book like the Bible. Everything we have been talking about today in this sermon comes from the teaching in the Old and New Testaments.

Two Caveats

However, as Baptists, we must remember that it is not the Bible itself that we worship, and it is not enough just to learn what the Bible teaches. We worship the God who speaks to us through the Bible. We do not look to the Bible to save us or to change our lives. We read the written Word of God so that God may transform us through the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ himself, and the Holy Spirit. As Paul explained, nonbelievers read the Bible and get nothing from it. They hear the Gospel, but they think it is foolishness. But when the Holy Spirit speaks through the reading of the Bible and in the preaching of the Gospel, then, and only then, will that person be transformed. (See 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16.) Why is this point so important? It’s important because the church can only come alive and fulfill the will of God if the Word of God is continually renewing and transforming our hearts, attitudes, and actions, in daily practice.

And we also need to acknowledge that some things in the Bible are hard to interpret, and sincere followers of Christ have different opinions about how to apply some of its teachings in the church today. Some parts don’t apply to the 21st Century, such as teaching about animal sacrifices or managing slaves. Some modern-day problems and issues are not even addressed in the Bible, such as the internet, ecology, the major religions of the modern world, and many other current concerns. All this means that followers of Christ today must take care to interpret the Bible thoughtfully and appropriately.

This is why the church has appointed scholars and teachers to teach and equip its ministers to handle the Bible well. Biblical scholars help students to properly read the texts in their original contexts. Theologians help students to know how to interpret the messages about God and how to talk about God in the Myanmar context. Church historians inform students about the various ways that the church has applied the Word of God over the centuries. Practical theologians and pastors prepare students to apply biblical teachings and messages in the church, home, and society in meaningful ways. And missiologists discuss all the ways that Christians have taken the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world over the past 2000 years and how sharing the Gospel and mission might look like in the Myanmar context.

The task to learn all these things may seem overwhelming, but that is why schools like MIT and other Christian colleges and seminaries exist. In the language of this year’s MIT theme, MIT provides a place for students to learn about the Word of God, to gain wisdom on how to interpret it and apply it to their daily lives, and to become prepared to proclaim the Word of God as leaders in church and society as followers of Jesus Christ.

You may not have attended MIT or some other Bible school. You may not have had the privilege of studying with Bible professors and theologians. But remember, the Word of God is alive and active throughout the universe for those whose hearts and minds are open to the Spirit of God. No matter how much education you may have had, you can commit yourself to reading the Bible and learning everything thing you can from it as part of your daily spiritual practice. You can ask God to penetrate your heart and mind through his living, active, life-changing Word. You can ask the Holy Spirit both to convict you of your sin and to convince you of his grace and salvation. You can keep cultivating your relationship with the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, through worship, prayer, and Christian fellowship. You can keep asking the Holy Spirit to reveal spiritual truth to you so that you can know, love, and serve God more and more fully and faithfully as a follower of Jesus Christ. In all these ways, the wonderful Word of God will be your daily bread, and God will sustain and nourish you from day to day. Amen.