

HEBREWS – LEVITICUS
“The Word of God”
Hebrews 4:12-13
May 14, 2023

Hebrews 4:12-13

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.¹

“This is the Word of God” – “Thanks be to God.”

As Christians we seem to be drawn to a narrow collection of illustrations, mascots, and images when we seek to define or promote something. It seems that 98 percent of all Christian schools have as their mascot either a lion, eagle, or some form of soldier with a sword and shield.

Honestly, I like eagles and lions and swords and such.

As we look at this verse, there are images that come to mind. As a Christian who remembers the Living Epistles t-shirt line and all the Christianese merging with graphic designs ripe for the silk screen machines of the 1990s, I cannot help but remember images that were supposed to illustrate this passage. Open Bibles with swords shooting out of them, often with flames apparently designed to create something motivational, or perhaps just to look like an 80s hair band’s rock concert t-shirt for Jesus were the results. Yet, often little more than marketing kitsch as an attempt to flood the sub-market of church youth groups with more Jesus junk. Not to mention, often evoking a message that is far

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Heb 4:12–13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

from what the passage intends. Goofy graphics are one thing. Wrong messages marketed as right messages are another altogether.

If our faith, or understanding of truth, is little more than a t-shirt or poster graphic, or today's version - a meme or a post or a verse plastered on an image, our understanding of God's Word will be shallow at best and could even leave us with a false understanding of the hope, life, and way that defines us.

Simply put, let's be careful not to build our personal theology on random verses, overly repeated phrases that sound biblical, questionable Christian music (even if it is popular,) movies, streaming series, and social media posts. Thus, we go to the one inerrant, immutable source of truth – God's Word. And in this Word we are reminded today of

GOD'S COMMAND TO REST

Last week we looked to the command of Sabbath from Leviticus and Christ who is our Sabbath as the Hebrews writer explains.

Today's focal verses are not separate from that section on rest. These verses explain why the recipients of the letter, and all believers, should strive to enter God's rest and why they should avoid unbelief and disobedience.² Therefore, this word on the word being like a sword is to remind the listeners that disobedience is nothing to minimize. Simply put – sin is fatal. It's not just a little issue. It's not something that is able to be ignored out of existence.

Rest is our goal – rest in Christ as our Savior, our hope, our rescue, our Lord, our redeemer. Rest is not just something to strive for, but to step into in obedience. The Sabbath command was just that a command – “Remember the Sabbath” was not something that just meant “Hey, remember that there are seven days. Don't forget there are seven and the

² Schriener, Thomas R. *Hebrews: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 146.

last day of the week is the seventh. Don't forget that it's a Sabbath and it would be good, if you could, to take a rest."

That's how it often seems it's viewed.

But for the Old Testament children of God, the Sabbath was non-negotiable. It was God's command that his children were to rest and focus and worship him on that final day of the week. The work is done...just as the work of creation was completed in six days. Therefore, upon completion of the work...be like God and follow his command – rest.

The severity of this command is lost.

The legalism created by religious fear-mongers that surrounded this gift of a law grew and even in Christ's day, the Sabbath was idolized and used a tool of guilt rather than received, rested upon, and viewed as a gift from God.

But...it was a command and to not rest was severe.

Why? Because God commanded it. To ignore God's command places us in the center of our story, making us gods in our minds and thus...living out the humanist manifesto daily, even in our good, evangelical Christian lives.

And...as the Hebrew writer states, under God's inspiration, the rest for the child of God is not found in a day of illustration any longer. The Sabbath gift has been made complete in the one who is our rest.

Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle

and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” ³

Christ is our Sabbath – our immediate and eternal rest.

GOD SPEAKS CLEARLY

Thus, the writer continues. The emphasis on rest is clear. Do this. Rest in Christ. Don't devolve back into the law. Don't let legalism work its way into your faith journey. But...know that even under grace, there are guardrails for living.

The word of God speaks. Thus, when the word speaks...God speaks. The word of God is living and active.⁴

Sometimes I miss how amazingly blessed and loved we are by God. Don't get me wrong – I know we are loved. I have read the scripture that affirms that. I pray and know he hears my prayers. I find great joy in the gathering of the church, in the time of pause we have together each Lord's Day. The worship through song. The fellowship of the redeemed. The hope in Christ.

But to be loved by God is a truly amazing thing.

To be loved is a gift.

Some of you get this reality more than others. For many here to be loved is a given. Your parents love you. Your spouse loves you. Your children love you. You feel this. You experience this. You know this.

But for others...that concept of being loved is, if not foreign, not a given. You have what the world calls “loved ones” but in truth...they're just “ones” because you don't experience the love. You don't feel loved.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 11:28–30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁴ Schriener, 146.

It's tragic, but there are children and teenagers...and even adults here...who have longed to hear their fathers and mothers say, "I love you" and know they mean it. There are some who have heard things so opposite of that three-word phrase that to be loved is just a concept.

Spouses who voiced vows of forever love to the one who was to be their "til death do us part" have seen that turn into "til I decide I don't want you." Some have had what was promised ripped away. Others feel trapped and even frightened because the safest, most loving, biblically-modeled relationship of love, respect, and sacrifice that a husband-wife relationship is supposed to be is everything but.

So, I don't say this lightly.

To be loved is a wonderful thing.

To be loved and to know it is true is even better.

A frightening thing would be to know there is a God, but to wonder if he really loved us. It would be dark and despairing to know there is a God, but for God to be silent and to never speak.⁵

But God does speak. He has spoken. He is speaking. He will speak. And this is a way he reveals his love to you and me.

God spoke all that is and ever was into being. God spoke to his image bearers as greatly loved children in the Garden. They sinned and were cast out of the paradise, but God continued to speak. He spoke to the prophets of old, the people of Israel, the leaders and the paupers, the rich and the poor, the men and the women. He spoke through the body of flesh that is Jesus Christ.

⁵ Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. Hebrews 4:12-13. <https://albertmohler.com/2010/11/28/hebrews-412-13>

In fact, as stated in John 1:1, the Son is the embodiment of the spoken as he is called the Word.

In the early church, he spoke through the Spirit to those who penned the words we read today.

And today, he speaks through his Word – timeless, unchanging, without error and worthy of reading, studying, and believing.

GOD SPEAKS JUDGMENT

The issue with all those t-shirts and graphics with swords and even with our simply memorizing the key verses today is that the context of the full message is lost. This message is one of hope, but one of discipline and judgment.

This is not mean. This is not uncaring. This is the great warning from the God who speaks. To those who refuse to enter into Christ's rest, judgment is coming.

For those struggling with how that phrase sounds, think of it this way – Christ offers hope, a way, life. He is in fact the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father...he said this in the gospels. No one...not you, not your mama, not your child, not your bff, not your husband, not your celebrity crush. Not even...especially...your pastor comes to the Father. No one comes to eternal rest – the fullness of Sabbath – the completion – the life – the love – the redemption – the rescue – no one comes to the Father but by him. No one comes to heaven, to hope, to eternal rest except through the door, the narrow gate, the single-file line on the way who is JESUS CHRIST.

This is judgment certainly.

This is clarity thankfully.

This is love.

To speak judgment is a loving spoken word of warning and our loving God, our heavenly Father speaks.

GOD'S LIVING WORD

Hebrews 4:12

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ⁶

The word of God is compared to a two-edged sword, a double-edged sword. Thus here the word of God has a role and here it is front and center. Perhaps the writer is imagining the swords of the Amalekites and Canaanites of old? These were people groups who had cut down Israel after they ignored God's word that they could not take the land, but they sought to anyway.⁷ This is not a statement just to give good word-pictures and ideas for modern graphic artists. This is something ripped from the Hebrews family history that highlighted their own ancestors disobedience and the fact that the God of the Old Testament is not a different God from the New.

What does the author mean when he says "piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow?" According to language scholars on the Greek verbiage here "Strictly speaking there is no one point at which joints and marrow may be separated."⁸ And even in other Old and New Testament passages, it is not clear that there is a division between soul and spirit. So, what is meant here? This explanation by theologian Philip Hughes says it well:

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 4:12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁷ Schriener, 147.

⁸ Lous, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies) 177.

Our author is not concerned to provide here a psychological or anatomical analysis of the human condition, but rather to describe in graphic terms the penetration of God's word to the innermost depth of man's personality.⁹

GOD'S LOVING WORD

Hebrews 14:13

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.¹⁰

God speaks because he cares. He speaks because he loves. He loves you. And this verse reminds the reader and us today that he is sovereign over all. He is the God who sees...all! He is the God who knows...all!

Your secret sin...he knows.

Your thoughts that aren't nice...he knows.

Your attitude that leaves others turning the other way when they see you coming...he knows.

Your frustrations, your actions, all the parts of you that you wish were not they way they are...he knows.

But get this. Even though he knows. He loves you.

His word is powerful, strong, a tool of judgment, a road to hope. So, don't resort back to a broken worldview and religion that is less than what you need, than what he wants for you. Trust him. Repent and hear this word today.

⁹ Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 165.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 4:13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.