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A Meditation

on

Hebrews 4:12

By

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"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged 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."

How is it that so many Christians can neglect the book that tells them about the source of their joy? Why is it that so many Christians are just as frustrated and as continually worried and upset as those who do not know our God? Why does life continue to be such a trial and why can we never find any rest? In the fourth chapter of Hebrews, indeed from 3:7 through 4:13, the writer is telling us that God promised us that we may receive rest and that the only reason we don't receive it is because we really don't believe and claim God's promise. Furthermore, the writer states that we fail to believe and claim the promise because we are stubborn and harden our hearts.

Yes, even Christians can harden their hearts against God's word. Whenever we decide to do something without giving thought to God's will we are doing just that. And that also has something to do with why we neglect the Bible:

"For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." (John 3:20).

But, you say, that's talking about unbelievers who refuse to come to God, not about me. True. But it does also apply to Christians who refuse to live according to God's plan and try to live the way they want to live without concern for God's will. Christians can still do evil even though they are saved. In fact, they cannot avoid doing evil if they rely only on themselves:

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." (Romans 7:18,19).

Thank God that he has made a way of escape from this trap:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9).

And thank God that when we confess our sins and are forgiven and cleansed, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and enjoy the fruit of that relationship:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22,23).

The Holy Spirit indwells us and convicts us of the sins we commit in the flesh so that we can confess them and be forgiven and cleansed. And, he uses the word of God to do so. That is the point of Hebrews 4:12 - The word of God pierces us with the knowledge of our sin and convinces us that we need to confess and be forgiven and cleansed. That is the only way we can obtain the wonderful peace and joy that God wants us to have.

The word of God is "quick." In the original Greek, the word is "zao" which literally means "to live". It is the same word used in II Timothy 4:1:

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

The word of God is alive. It is real. It is true. It is important to our daily lives, to our every thought, to our every deed. And, it is also alive in another sense:

'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).

The word of God is "powerful." The Greek word is energes which literally means active or operative. Elsewhere in the scriptures, the word is also translated as "effectual". (See especially I Corinthians 16:9). The word of God is active. It is active in our hearts leading us to confession.

The word of God is "sharper than any twoedged sword." The Greek for sharper here is tomoteros which literally means "more keen".

The word of God is "piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." The Greek diiknoumenos literally means to reach through or penetrate. The word of God does pierce us. It does reach through our self-righteous defenses and penetrate to our very souls, telling us that we are not right with God and calling us back to the wonderful joy God has planned for us.

The word of God "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The Greek kritikos, here translated as discerner, literally means decisive or discriminative and is the source of the english word "critical". And how discriminating and critical the word is: it does not allow us to hide our sins and thus be overcome by them. Thank God that the word brings our sins to our attention so that we can be cleansed of them. How horrible it would be if the word didn't bring them to our attention and we blithely went on our way never knowing that we were grieving the Spirit and never being able to experience the wonder of the filling of the Spirit that is our joy.

Of course, discovering sin in ourselves does not initially seem very pleasant. We berate ourselves for our failure and feel ashamed of ourselves. But God uses this to increase our joy beyond our capacity for understanding:

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons....Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:5-8, 11).

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, let us not continue to be overcome by the cares of this world and our own frustrations and failures. Let us go instead to the word of God and discover the inheritance of joy that that he has placed there for us.

"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalms 118:24).

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