

M. David Johnson
442 Michael Manor
Glenview, IL 600254636

Approximately
1100 words

First North American
Serial Rights

THE PHRASE, "THE WORD OF GOD," IN HEBREWS THROUGH JUDE

by M. David Johnson

Copyright © 1987 by M. David Johnson

When a member of your congregation asks your opinion on some issue, what do you do? Do you give them a quick and simple response or do you ponder and agonize over the issue until you come up with something that seems "right" in view of all the factors relating to the issue?

If you're like many other evangelical pastors, you probably fall in between these two extremes. You don't trivialize the issue with a quick response, but you also don't give much credence to the opinions of a world that hates God. Do you often find yourself using phrases like "The Bible says" or "The Word of God says" as you begin your response?

The Word of God is the ultimate authority, but we need to be careful to distinguish what we mean when we say, "The Word of God." "The Word of God" is not always the Bible.

There are four primary meanings of "The Word of God" which clearly appear in the Bible:

1. The written word of God: the Bible itself.
2. The spoken word of God: the words God spoke when he created the world, the words he spoke to the fathers and the prophets, the words he spoke at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, etc.
3. The Living Word of God: the person of Jesus

Christ.

4. The exposition or preaching of the written word: i.e. the messages spoken by the prophets and apostles.

An exhaustive search of the scriptures would be required to adequately treat these four definitions in detail, but we can find examples of all four even if we restrict our investigation solely to the general epistles.

#

The phrase, "the word of God," appears seven times in the King James Version of the general (or non - Pauline) epistles (Hebrews through Jude.) In addition, the similar phrase, "the word of the Lord," appears in I Peter 1:25.

In all these passages, theos is the greek word translated as "God." Kurios is the greek word translated as "Lord" in I Peter 1:25.

Logos is the greek word translated as "word" in all the passages except Hebrews 6:5; 11:3; and I Peter 1:25. Hrema is the greek word translated as "word" in Hebrews 6:5; 11:3; and I Peter 1:25.

In Hebrews 4:12 we read, "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." Here the reference is either to the

written word of God or to the words that God speaks.

In Hebrews 6:5 we read, "And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come," Here again the reference is either to the written word of God or to the words that God speaks.

In Hebrews 11:3 we read, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Here the reference is clearly to the words that God speaks.

In Hebrews 13:7 we read, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." In this verse, the word of God is actually being spoken by the rulers of the church. It is not clear whether they were actually speaking forth new revelation as prophets, or were instead expounding the written scriptures.

In I Peter 1:23 we read, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." This is the word that was "preached to you," i.e. the scriptures.

In I Peter 1:25 we read, "But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Again, this is the word that was "preached to you," i.e. the scriptures.

In II Peter 3:5 we read, "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:" Here the reference is clearly to the words that God speaks.

In I John 2:14 we read, "I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." Here the commentators are strongly divided. Many feel that this verse refers to the written word of God. (cf. Jamieson, Fausset, Brown; C. H. Spurgeon; and Robert S. Candlish.) But others feel that the verse refers to the living Word: Jesus Christ. (cf. The Expositors Bible Commentary; The Communicator's Commentary; Matthew Henry; Adam Clarke; and Frank M. Boyd.)

#

The overall thrust of these passages confirms what we might have already suspected: in all its definitions the phrase "The Word of God" refers to authority. It is the authoritative word. The Bible is our ultimate source of communication from God and it is our rule for life. It records the authority that spoke the world into being; it records the authority of Jesus as even the sea and wind obeyed his voice; and it recorded the authority of the

apostles as they commanded, "repent and be baptized!"

Thank God that he gave us this authority and that we no longer have to flounder around in a sea of indecision if we are willing to fully submit to that authority!

#

References

Barker, G. W., "I John," The Expositors Bible Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981.

Boyd, F. M., Hebrews and the General Epistles, Gospel Publishing House, Springfield.

Candlish, R. S., First Epistle of John, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 1979.

Clarke, A., The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the New Testament, Bethany House, Minneapolis, 1983.

Dunnett, W., An Outline of New Testament Survey, Moody Press, Chicago, 1960.

Henry, M., The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the New Testament, Bethany House, Minneapolis, 1983.

Jamieson, Faussett, Brown, The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the New Testament, Bethany House, Minneapolis, 1983.

Palmer, E. F., The Communicator's Commentary: 1,2,3 John, Revelation, Word, Waco, 1982.

Spurgeon, C. H., "Unto You, Young Men," Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids,

1984.

Tenney, M. C., New Testament Survey, Wm. B. Eerdmans
Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1961.

END