

Bethel Christian Church
Charis Group

The Word of God

(Discussion from the last Charis Group Bible Study)

Words

Words are tricky things. The words we speak may vary greatly in meaning and substance. They can be rich, empty of substance and effect, theoretical, abstract, powerful, meaningful, impersonal etc. We become accustomed to thinking that all words, God's included, must fall into these categories. Undoubtedly God 'speaks' in many ways and many forms (Hebrews 1:1ff), but his words are never empty, theoretical, abstract or impersonal.

Images and Words

Throughout our age image has come to dominate word. We are the society of small visual grabs. Words are now reduced from stories to headlines or captions under pictures. Human sciences insist that because we think in images therefore images are primary to communicating, learning and being in community. We have become intolerant of description, word textures and the huge pallet of meanings and nuances embedded in words. Multi dimensional words have given way to one dimensional images. Yet if we ask our loved ones whether they would prefer an image (symbol) of our love or words expressing that love", the answer would generally be give me the words.

God's Words

The Scriptures liken the word of God to a;
two edged sword,

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 (Hebrews 4:12).

a hammer, a fire,

"Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock? (Jeremiah 23:29).

a mighty waterfall

Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me (Psalm 42:7).

etc. These are images of power and action that act upon humanity.

God's word has always been God present doing what he is saying. His speaking is an event not simply information about himself. There is no gap between the word spoken, the intent of God's heart and the action produced by the word. Where we treat God's word as needing to be supplemented by an action, applied, be made interesting or made practical by an analogy or testimony then it means we have reduced the word of God to the word of man. An illustration. When God spoke a word creation came into being. That word did not need to be applied by another party or further explained to the creation. The creation did not say, "Can you run that by me one more time!" "What exactly do you mean by light?" It just got created, came into being. When Jesus spoke what he said was made so. When he spoke the word of forgiveness, forgiveness impacted and changed the recipient immediately. It needed no application, analysing, or group discussion to make it real.

When the Apostles preached the word of grace then grace appeared and operated in the depths of the listeners. The word brought them to rebellion or repentance, a change of mind. It was not just a word for them to examine, agree with and then apply. It applied itself to them. This was what delivered them into trust. They did not make some leap of faith, a leap into the dark but saw through the word of revelation the truth about the Father and the Son. The Spirit took this to their depths, then they were able to say “This is the Father that has loved me from before the foundation of the earth”. This is the Son who is full of the life of the Father”.

Communion and Words

We see in the creation account and in God’s continuing dealings with Israel and his Church that we were created for communion. This communion consisted of God present and speaking to his creatures. God spoke and the couple heard and responded (Genesis 2:16–17, see too Gen. 3:2–3). This picture is expanded in Genesis 3:8–10 where we note that the word ‘sound’ is translated ‘voice’ by some translations. In other words God was speaking not just rustling the grass.

They heard the sound (voice) of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ He said, ‘I heard the sound (voice) of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’

God’s words were an essential part of His communion with them. This principle is continued in God’s covenant relationship.

Now therefore, if you obey my ‘voice’ and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine (Exod. 19:5).

Then the LORD ‘spoke’ to you out of the fire. You heard the ‘sound’ of words but saw no form; there was only a ‘voice’ (Deut. 4:12).

For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of? Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived? (Deut. 4:32–33).

From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, while you heard his words coming out of the fire (Deut. 4:36).

If the ‘voice’ of God is central to our experience of his presence and power then opposition to the voice of God, is resistance to true communion.

And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, ‘Go up and occupy the land that I have given you,’ you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God, neither trusting him nor obeying him [lit. obey his voice]. You have been rebellious against the LORD as long as he has known you (Deuteronomy 9:23–24).

To have no word from God was a total disaster for Israel. It was not simply a loss of direction but a loss of purpose and essential being, their wholeness in communion.

The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to

east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it (Amos 8:11–12).

When there is no hearing of the word then a community once strong in the community of God's love becomes frantic and distracted. Hence Paul's warning to Timothy

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:2-4)

Obeying God's Word

When it comes to comprehending the nature of God's words then two things must apply. We must be relating to him as true Father and we must understand his words through the power that the Spirit supplies.

Against popular belief, hearing God's words is more an issue of the hearer's heart than their intelligence.

Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, "When your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work. "For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. "Therefore I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into My rest." (Psalm 95:6-11)

Likewise in the NT the heart is central to hearing

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul (Acts 16:14)

Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts (2 Corinthians 3:15).

Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:18).

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. Ephesians 4:18

The Church of God was/is formed by the Word and Spirit

The words of Jesus, "I will build my Church" give us a clear picture of what lies ahead after Pentecost. It would be the Spirit taking the Word (the word of the cross) which would create a whole new people as the Prophets had declared.

At Pentecost the Church was created in exactly this way. As Peter proclaimed the Word of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, revelation occurred and even before Peter had finished preaching, before any challenge to commit or convert could be given. Not that Jesus had ever taught his disciples to go down that path.

Why was it that Jesus did not continually sort out or confront his disciples about their obvious immaturity and lack of faith? Was he casual about their eternal security?

Hardly. On occasions he simply stated the fact of it but never set upon them to force the issue of faith. Jesus behaved in the same fashion with those who came to him for salvation. What we make of this is important if we consider that we are followers of

Christ, if we say that our faith and practice follows the clear precedents in him and later the Apostles. Why then did Jesus never throw people back on themselves to make an intellectual decision? Why did he never confront people with the fear of their position or the fear of hell, both things which he was of all men most qualified to speak on and present? Was Jesus slack? Was he so aware of the grace of God that he became laze fair. Did he not have a heart for evangelism, or the proclamation of the Kingdom? We would never lay such a charge against him. Why then do we alter the methodology of the Son of God? What drives us to place ourselves as better judges of what needs to happen for people to be joined to Christ's Church? I suggest a combination of human logic and a depreciation of the power of God's word?

Human logic moves us away from the way Christ worked. It would be biblically more correct to say 'faithless reason'. It seems highly plausible that God would work in the following way. Provide us with information concerning salvation, impress that the delivery of this information be done with good communication skill, expect that the deliverer would then challenge the congregation or individuals to receive the information as true and give their hearts to Christ. This is then followed by the urgent necessity to keep provoking the receiver of Christ to be active in their new faith, worship and outreach. This, to the world, is the way of moving people into new situations and experiences. For many believers it has become the highly vaunted 'truth' of how the Gospel is proclaimed and holiness encouraged. However, as we have seen it was not the way of Christ.

Does the way matter? If people are receiving Christ does it matter how they come to it? If the question was, "If people are being converted then does it matter what way they come?" the answer must be an emphatic no. But the reality is that many who 'receive Christ' have never received the gift of repentance (the gift of seeing Father God reconciled to them), and therefore never grow in their knowledge and experience of being totally reconciled. How can this be so dogmatically maintained? A couple of ways. There seems to be a steep drop-away factor when it comes to those who have received Christ or given their heart to him. Secondly, many of these people come into the church but often spend their Christian life never really assured in the faith. Crises come and faith crumbles. This is counter to what the Bible shows us about true faith. True faith is not shattered by difficulty and suffering but actually strengthened. Thirdly, we live in a church culture in which the Father is just a back-ground figure or a romantic idea garnered from what we would like our fathers to have been. Where the true knowledge of the Father is lacking then the dynamic chore element of what it means to be the Family of God is absent. This lack will leave a people slack and casual about the true nature of the Church. This in turn leads back to the continual need for the Pastor to challenge, cajole and even bribe conformity to what the Bible calls church. In turn this either leads to a puffed up "You must come to our church because we are really alive" or to people becoming tired and disillusioned and gradually dropping out the back door.

An appeal to

In reality the Word of God is not something for a sinner to rise up to but a command to be obeyed. The notion of the Word being a truth to accomplish is based upon the serious error that our hearts are free and our wills able to decide for God.