

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

A Discourse Delivered on Lord's Day Afternoon, December 27, 1840, at Trinity Chapel, Alfred Street, Leicester

"For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged 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."
Hebrews 4:12

If we look at this passage in connexion with the context, there appears at first sight some ambiguity. What are we to understand by the expression "the Word of God?" If we read the verse that immediately follows the text, "the Word of God" seems to be a person. "Neither is there any creature which is not manifest in his sight but all things are naked and opened **unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.**" The pronoun "**his,**" and the words, "the eyes of **him** with whom we have to do" clearly point out a person; and yet no person has been before mentioned but "the Word of God." But again, if we look to the effects ascribed to the Word of God in the text, they seem more applicable to a thing than a person. So that we may say that there appears at first considerable doubt whether by "the Word of God" we are to understand the Incarnate Word, the second Person of the glorious Trinity, of whom John speaks in the beginning of his gospel, as "with God" and as "God;" or whether we are to understand the written Word, that is, the Scriptures of truth, the lively oracles handed down to us from our fathers.

Now, I conceive that this very apparent ambiguity has a great beauty in it, and throws much light on the meaning of the text. Much is said in our day about the Scriptures, and wonderful effects are ascribed to them. By their

instrumentality and universal diffusion, it is expected by many that the whole world will be gradually converted. But whilst so much is said in praise of the written Word, little is said in praise of the power of the Incarnate Word, and men talk and preach as though the Scriptures possessed in themselves some inherent power to regenerate the nations. Now the written Word has no power whatever but in the hands of the Incarnate Word; no, no more power than a sword has to leap out of the scabbard and slay a man, independent of the arm that wields it; no, no more power than a law passed by Parliament has to execute itself, or a medicine to administer itself. Thus I look upon this very ambiguity, if ambiguity it be, as full of beauty. Paul, speaking of the effects of the written Word, and how it acts as a two-edged sword, immediately glances off to the Incarnate Word, in whose hands it is alone effectual; just as a man describing the edge and temper of a Damascus blade, would turn from the sword to the swordsman, from the dead weapon to the living hand, without whose skill and strength its sharpness were of no avail. So that if we look at the words of the text they describe the written Word as producing certain powerful effects; but only so when wielded by the Lord of Hosts, the King of armies, the Word of the living God, who rides forth, girt with his sword upon his thigh, conquering and to conquer. And that this is the true meaning of the passage is clear from **Re 1:16**, where, in the description of the Son of God, as seen in Patmos by John, we read that "out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword;" implying that the written Word is then only a two-edged sword, when it comes out of the mouth of the Incarnate Word into the hearts of God's people.

Bear in mind, then, that all the effects which in opening up the text I shall ascribe to the written Word, are to be ascribed to it wholly and solely as an efficacious instrument

in the hands, and out of the mouth of him, who is Lord and King in Zion.

"For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged 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."

Now, if you and I have ever felt anything of the power of God's truth in our souls we shall be able, if the Lord shines upon his own work, to trace out in our own experience some of those effects, which the Holy Ghost here ascribes to the written Word in the hands of the Incarnate Word.

1. The first word, then, that demands our attention is the expression, "quick." "The Word of God is quick." But before we go into the meaning of this expression, we are stopped at the very threshold with this question—Does the written Word of God, of which the text speaks, mean the very letter, the exact text of Scripture as it stands in our Bibles? In other words, is it **the letter** of Scripture, or **the substance** of Scripture, that is a two-edged sword? and must a man feel the direct application to his conscience of the exact words of the Bible, or is the substance and meaning of the words sufficient? I believe, for my own part, that however sweet and beautiful the exact words of Scripture are, yet that the substance of them is sufficient to do God's work in the soul. What does the Lord say? "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." It is the truth, then, contained in the Scripture that produces the effect, and we may have the substance of the truth, without having the very exact letter of truth. I grant that it is more clear and satisfactory when we have the very words of Scripture; but I believe we have many spiritual feelings, the first entrance and subsequent maintenance of which in the soul it would be somewhat

difficult to trace up to the application of exact passages of Scripture, and yet they are spiritual feelings, and have been produced by the power of the Holy Ghost working in and through the Scriptures, for we know and experience nothing aright which is not in, or out of, the Scriptures. For instance, we carry about with us more or less of a sense of God's heart-searching eye, and of his unblemished purity, and hatred of sin. Whence arise our feelings of guilt and trouble under the burden of sin, but from some such consciousness in the secret chambers of our heart? But if we were very strictly and closely questioned what were the precise Scriptures in the exact letter, chapter and verse, by the direct application of which these feelings were produced, we might, some of us at least, be much puzzled to put our finger on the very passages. And yet how should we know that God was the searcher of our hearts, and hated sin with perfect hatred, if he had not told us so first in his Word, and then told us so out of the Word in our consciences? But it is the truth, not the letter of the text,— "I the Lord search the heart and try the reins," "I the Lord hate evil"—that has produced that inward consciousness; and I, for my part, would sooner have the spiritual feeling produced in my heart by the substance of truth, than a doctrinal knowledge produced in my head by the letter of truth. The light cast into the heart from the word of truth is like a ray of light reflected from a mirror; there is no light in the mirror itself, but it casts upon that object to which it is directed a ray from the sun. So the Word of God has no light in itself, but only reflects that light which the Sun of righteousness communicates to it. Now, suppose a man were to take a number of small pieces of looking glass, and so adjust them that they each should reflect their separate rays on one object, and meet in one focus; then there would be an assemblage of various rays, each intermingling its light, and it would be difficult to say from which piece of the looking-glass all the light came. Thus

one text speaks of God's heart-searching presence, another of his infinite purity, another of his hatred of sin, another of his inflexible justice, and so on. All these detached texts, when shone upon by the Divine Spirit's light, and brought to bear in one focus on a sinner's conscience, cast a mingled light within, in which he sees light, and he falls under the convictions which this light produces. But how can he turn to a text, and say, "This passage showed me God's presence, and that verse convinced me of God's purity," and so on, when he is too much occupied with the feelings themselves to analyze them rigidly, much less to examine how they were produced? Paul fell to the ground under the light which struck him down on his way to Damascus, and I dare say did not stop to examine whether it came north, south, east, or west.

I speak this because I know that many of God's people are often exercised because conviction or consolation has come into their minds without the exact letter of Scripture, or even without the Scripture itself. A word or sentence from the pulpit not in the language of Scripture, or a line from a hymn, or a passage in the writings of a good man, has afforded relief; but this not coming in the exact words of Scripture, Satan and unbelief have pulled at it till they have pulled away all its consolation. Well, but if it be Scriptural, if it be in strict accordance with Scripture, if it be contained in other parts of God's Word, why need we care because it did not come in the very letter of Scripture? We want power, not word; spirit, not letter; substance, not shadow; truth, not letters and syllables; wine, not the wine glass; unction, not the oil flask. If we have the spirit and substance of Scripture, we may let the letter and form go: and though I acknowledge, to have both is more sweet, abiding, and convincing, as coming in a more direct channel, yet if I can have but one, I would sooner have the feeling without the word, than the word without the feeling.

Now, the first thing that is said in the text of "the Word of God" **that is, as I understand it, the truth of God in the hands of the Spirit**, is that it is "quick." What is meant by this expression? That it moves with swiftness and velocity? It is certainly said of God's Word **Ps 147:15** that "it runneth very swiftly;" but that is not the meaning of the word "**quick**" in the text. It there means "living," and corresponds with the expression **Ac 7:38** "lively **or living** oracles." It is an old English word signifying "living;" as in the expression, "who shall judge the quick and the dead" **2Ti 4:1**—that is, the living and the dead. So we read of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram "going down quick **that is, alive** into the pit." **Nu 16:30** So the Lord is said to have "quickened **that is, made spiritually alive** those who were previously dead in trespasses and sins." **Eph 2:1** The word "quick," then, means not moving with velocity, but living, or rather communicating life, and thus distinguished from the dead letter. Truth, as it stands in the naked Word of God, is lifeless and dead; and as such, has no power to communicate what it has not in itself, that is, life and power, to the hearts of God's people. It stands there in so many letters and syllables, as lifeless as the types by which they were printed. But when the Incarnate Word takes of the written Word, and speaks it home into the heart and conscience of a vessel of mercy, whether in letter or substance, then he endues it with Divine life, and it enters into the soul, communicating to it a life that can never die. As James speaks **Jas 1:18**—"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." And so Peter—"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which **liveth** and abideth for ever." **1Pe 1:23** Eternal realities are brought into the soul, fixed and fastened by an Almighty hand. The conscience is made alive in the fear of God; and the soul is raised up from a death in sin, or a death in profession, to a life heavenly, new, and supernatural.

But now we come to the experience of this life. How do we know that it has been communicated? How, I might ask, do we know that we are naturally alive? Why, we perform certain actions that can only be performed by living persons. I eat, I drink, I breathe, I talk, I walk, I think, I feel. All these are living actions, and I have besides an inward consciousness of possessing life. So spiritually if there is life, there will be the movements and stirrings, the breathings and actings, that are peculiar to that life.

Let us look a little back, then. Can we find a beginning to our religion? And if so, when and what was that beginning? A good clear beginning is a blessed evidence, when the Lord shines upon it, to help us through many a dark day; and I believe that a good beginning usually goes on to a good middle, and terminates in a good ending. But all God's family cannot find this good beginning,—at least not such as is good in their eyes; for their good beginning is a striking beginning, and God does not give to all his children this striking beginning. We must come, then, to fruits and effects. If the fruit is good, the tree must be good; if the effect is spiritual, then must the cause be spiritual; and if there is supernatural life in the soul, then there must have been a beginning in that supernatural life. What I want is to put my hand on that life, and touch the secret strings and chords of Divine feeling in your conscience, that when I strike the keys, as a player on an instrument, there may be a sound in your soul, an echo in your heart, that shall thrill and vibrate under the touch.

Now, what is the first fruit and effect of Divine life? Is it not the fear of God in a tender conscience; according to those words, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?" Now, what fear is this, filial or slavish? for we read **1Jo 4:18**

that "perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment." But surely one grace of the Spirit cannot cast out another grace; and, therefore, the fear cast out by perfect love is not the filial fear that is the beginning of wisdom, but the slavish fear which is a member of the old man. But the fear which is a grace of the Spirit is a new covenant blessing, and put into the heart by the Father of mercies; according to those words, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." **Jer 32:40** But before perfect love casteth out slavish fear, both kinds of fear work in the hearts of God's quickened family; and it is sometimes very hard in soul experience, to find out the difference between them. We see this slavish fear working in Peter's mind, when, struck with the miraculous draught of fishes, "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." **Lu 5:8** Here the very same fear worked in Peter's mind which Job speaks of as in the mind of the reprobate, "who say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not a knowledge of thy ways." Filial fear does not drive the soul from God, but carries it up in solemn reverence to God. Therefore we read that "in the fear of the Lord is strong confidence" **Pr 14:26**; and that it is "a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." So we read of the Churches "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." **Ac 9:31** Then what is the cause of slavish fear? The law of God, as a ministration of death and condemnation and gendering to bondage, produces this slavish fear, which works in the carnal mind, until cast out by the Spirit of adoption and perfect love. Filial fear will be manifested by a holy reverence of God, by a trembling at his word, by a desire not to offend him, by solemn feelings of his presence, by a hatred of hypocrisy and deceit, and by honouring him in our inmost thoughts. But, say you, "How

am I to distinguish between these two fears? I feel myself a guilty, filthy wretch, an unclean monster of iniquity, and I am afraid I shall be cast into hell, and be damned for ever. Is this filial or slavish fear?" Now, let me ask you, how does this fear work? Does it work by faith? Does it bring you to God, or drive you from God? Does it work in sighs, cries, groans, desires, pantings after God, and hungerings and thirstings after Christ or does it work in a kind of reckless despair that never keeps you from sin? If it works in the latter way, then it is slavish fear which hath torment. But these two kinds of fear are, after all, so blended, that we can hardly distinguish them; but when the Lord, after a time, brings Christ near, and a sense of his mercy is tasted, then slavish fear slinks back, and filial fear goes forward; slavish fear retires into the depth of the carnal mind, and filial fear goes upward with faith, hope, and love, into the presence of God.

Thus when the Lord by his Spirit condescends to visit the soul, it is like the magnet which approaches the iron filings on a table; every grace of the soul leaps forward to meet him—faith, hope, love, humility, filial fear. But this same heavenly magnet repels slavish fear, because, being of the old nature, it can have no union or affinity with the Lord. If ever you have had your affections drawn forth to Jesus, faith has received him, hope anchored in him, love embraced him, and fear revered him. You did not say, "Depart," but, "Come near," you did not cry, "Torment me not," but "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." And I firmly believe that this filial fear must exist, and does exist, before there is the spirit of adoption to cry "Abba, Father," as a child may fear his father, before he can call him "father," or know him as his father; but when the Spirit of adoption comes, it will be more fully known as filial fear, and will be fed by and work with the spirit of adoption. Now, if you have anything of

this filial fear, the Word of God has been made life to your soul.

Again; wherever the life of God is in the soul, there will be faith. Now, the province of faith is in the depths of the heart. There is all "the work of faith with power." For faith is "the substance," that is, the realisation, of "things hoped for;" and where can the truths of God be realised and turned into substance but in the heart? and it is likewise "the evidence of things not seen," that is, by the natural eye; and therefore this evidence must be a witness within to the truths without. Again, it is said, "to purify the heart," and therefore must be in the heart that it purifies. Faith then realizes and bears testimony to those truths which the Holy Spirit takes out of the Word of God, that vast magazine and storehouse of truth, and turns them into food and substance. Faith, therefore, can never outstep the Spirit's inward teaching. The moment that faith sails abroad into the letter of the Word, and steps beyond or aside from the Spirit's inward teachings, it becomes presumption. Thousands of dead professors are here, whose faith stands not in the power of God, but in the wisdom of man. They stand in presumption from first to last, beginning, middle, and end; and all their religion, so called, is one enormous act of presumption. Aye, and the child of God, too, may be, and I believe often is, entangled in a snare, by being thrust beyond his own experience into a presumptuous faith. But say you, "Can a child of God be entangled in presumption?" Not so as to damn him, not so as to reign and rule in him, but certainly so as to entangle and cast him down. Let us hear the prayer of a child of God. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." **Ps 19:13** Had David no fear of presumption when he poured forth this cry? Surely he had felt its secret workings, and had

groaned under it as the great transgression. And I believe, from what I have known and felt of the matter, that there are two classes of sins which cut deepest into a living conscience—the base lusts of the flesh as carnal sins, and presumption and hypocrisy as spiritual sins. There is no sin more rife among the Calvinistic Churches, than that of presumption; and it is the besetting sin of Calvinists, as self-righteousness is the besetting sin of Arminians. But whenever a child of God gets upon this ground, he has an internal conviction that he is on trespass, that he is treading in slippery places, and he fears lest an earthquake should open under his feet. He therefore has to fall back upon the blessed Spirit's teachings, and has no more religion than he feels his Divine operations. Faith, therefore, being thus hemmed and shut in, walks only as the Spirit leads, and feeds only on what the Spirit gives. As the Spirit unlocks the storehouse of God's Word, faith receives the provision as it is dealt out. When the Spirit opens a promise, faith advances; when he applies a rebuke, faith draws back; when he brings home a precept, faith bows its neck and puts on the yoke; and when he makes Christ known, faith leaps into the Saviour's arms. Thus faith and fear work together in every quickened soul, and he that knows nothing experimentally of these things is destitute of the life of God. I am not setting up here a standard six feet high, and cutting off everybody's head who cannot reach it, but endeavouring to put my hand into your conscience, that I may touch the secret springs of life in your soul. What know you of a spring of living water within, such as the Lord spoke of to the woman of Samaria? "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" not a rain-water tank, not a dead pool of doctrinal knowledge, always stagnant and often stinking, not a cistern of human wisdom, not a reservoir of creature ability, but a spring of living water, ebbing and flowing, sometimes out of sight,

sometimes running over, but always fresh, and more or less as the Spirit secretly calls, "Spring up, O well" bubbling and gushing forth in living actings towards a living God. He that has felt anything of this springing well, has experienced that the Word of God is "quick," he having been quickened by it into the inward life of God. The next thing said of the Word of God in the hands of the Incarnate Word, is that it is **powerful**. "The word of God is quick and **powerful**." By "powerful" is here meant its efficacious work in the heart and conscience of the elect. "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power;" and it is through the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit, that this kingdom is set up in the soul. All God's people are agreed on this point, that they have no more religion than they have inward power. And all the living family are sighing, each according to his measure and season, after the manifestation of this Divine power in their souls. Those that are under the law, and toiling under heavy burdens, are sighing after relief, and for that relief to come in Divine power—power that shall cast all their sins into the depth of the sea. Those who, having tasted that the Lord is gracious, have lost their first love, are at times breathing out their inmost desire after power to revive their souls. Those who are beset with powerful temptations, and struggling, often ineffectually, with base lusts, are crying after power to deliver their feet from the fowler's snares. Those who are hard, need power to soften them; those who are doubting and fearing, need power to give them faith; the backsliding need power to return, and the sinking need power to swim. By power I understand something solid, real, substantial, heavenly, supernatural. How do we measure the capabilities of a steam engine? We say that it has so many horsepower. But who in his senses would construct a steam-engine of two hundred horse power to break sticks, and pick up straws? We measure power by its effects. We proportion the one to the other. Now, the Holy Ghost, the God of all power and might,

would not put forth his mighty and efficacious hand to break sticks and pick up straws in the soul. No. His work is worthy of a God; a "work of faith with power," because springing from a God of power. The God of Israel is not a Baal that is sleeping and needs to be awakened, or gone a journey and therefore too far off to come when needed, but "a very present help in time of trouble." By this secret power, false hopes, are swept away, rotten props removed, creature righteousness brought to an end, and the soul helped and enabled to lean upon the Lord. This power is not noise and rant—**if I speak loudly now, it is only that I may be heard**—but the still small voice of Jesus in the soul. The people of God want no outward voice **though they often are so earnest after the blessing, that they look and listen with almost suppressed breath, as I have sometimes done, hoping and expecting some voice to sound behind, or around them**, but they are seeking after that secret voice of atoning blood in their conscience, that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. The inward whisper of heavenly love sounding in their soul—not the earthquake of terror, not the fire of Divine wrath, but the still small voice of pardon and peace—makes them bow themselves before the Lord, and wrap their faces in their mantle. The Queen of England need not shout aloud in her palace, to give her commands effect. Where the word of a king is, there is power, whether from an earthly monarch or from the King of Zion. We want, therefore, no noise, bustle, and excitement, no raving and ranting about religion; but we want inward feeling, the very kingdom of God set up in the heart.

3. But we come now to another distinguishing mark and test of the power of God's Word when divinely applied. It is said in its effects and operations to be "sharper than **any** two-edged sword." Here it is not only compared to a sword, but is

said to exceed any two-edged sword in its sharpness, and piercing, penetrating effects. Wherein consists this sharpness? Why, in this; that the sharpest blade that human artificer ever forged, however fine its temper, polished its surface, or keen its edge, never could do more than divide asunder soul and body. A natural sword can never produce anything greater or higher than natural effects. But "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." But how does this two-edged sword divide asunder soul and spirit? I believe in this way. A natural man has but two things, a body and a soul; but a spiritual man has three things **the third being superadded in regeneration**, body, soul, and spirit. Therefore the Apostle says, "I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." **1Th 5:23** Now, in natural men who have a natural faith, and hope, and love, and so on, where is the seat of this natural religion? Surely not in the body, which is but a lump of flesh, sinews, blood, and bones. The seat of their natural religion, then, must be in their soul; for that alone can think and feel. The word translated, "natural," in **1Co 2:14** "the natural man", means literally "the soul man," or rather "the man possessed of a soul" and no more, in contradistinction to "the spiritual man," who has "a spirit," or a spiritual nature; according to those words, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with **our spirit**" **Ro 8:16**—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." So the same word is used **Jas 3:15**. "This wisdom is not from above, but is earthly, **sensual**, devilish;" where the word "sensual" literally means "belonging to the soul," as opposed to that which belongs to the spirit. I look upon "the soul," then, in this passage, and in others where it is distinguished from the spirit **for sometimes it is used synonymously with it**, to signify the seat of natural religion. Now, as the elect have two kinds

of religion in them, natural and supernatural, fleshly and spiritual, the religion of the first Adam in their natural conscience, and the religion of the second Adam, as a quickening Spirit, in their natural conscience, a separation, a dividing asunder must needs be made between the precious and the vile religion that is in them. And this nothing can do but the two-edged sword of the Spirit, which with its piercing point and double edge, penetrates between these two religions, letting out the life-blood of natural faith, natural hope, natural love, and natural prayer, and rends them asunder from the work and witness of the Holy Ghost in the man. All false hopes, lying refuges, dim expectations of general mercy, self-applause and vainglory are maimed and wounded, as this two-edged sword enters. So nicely guided is this keen blade, that it never touches or wounds the life of the spirit, though it makes sad work with the flesh. But in soul-feeling this piercing sword cuts away all our religion. Were you ever here? Has this work been done in you? And if so, when and where? Did you ever lose all your religion, and stand before God without an atom, in soul feeling? If not, depend upon it the two-edged sword has never yet entered into you to divide asunder soul and spirit. Were you ever in those situations and trying hours, when natural faith, hope, and love, all gave up the ghost, cut asunder by the piercing sword of God's Word, as holding forth salvation only to the elect, and to them only as possessing a divine supernatural work in their consciences? The man that was never cut off by the Word of God, was never brought in by the Word of God; and he that was never wounded by the truth, has never been healed by the truth. "But how cruel and unkind," say some, "to cut and wound the soul!" Cruel and unkind! Is the gardener cruel and unkind to the tree, when he sees the ivy clasping and strangling it in its embrace, pulls out his knife, and cuts it to the ground? I believe in my conscience, that there are many in this town so strangled and clasped by the

ivy of false religion, so grappled by forms and ceremonies and doctrines and duties, that there is scarcely anything of life visible in them, but a few green leaves by way of tuft at the very top of the stem, which the ivy has not yet reached. But all this green and bushy religion **for you know how thick and bushy this evergreen ivy is with all its slender stem** must be cut away, and the tree left naked and bare to keep it from being strangled.

And what is a minister worth, who never uses this two-edged sword, and never divides and separates between fleshly and spiritual religion? Can he be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," who knows nothing of this work in his own soul, and never in his ministry divides asunder soul and spirit? He cannot faithfully preach the Word of God, if the two-edged sword be not in his hand.

4. But this two-edged sword is said also to divide asunder "joints," as well as soul and spirit. What are joints naturally? Why, certain hinges of the body, pivots and centres of motion, without which a man would be as motionless as a log of wood. By joints I move my arm to take food, by joints I move my limbs to walk. I understand, therefore, by "joints" spiritually what are usually called "motives." Now all that we do and say springs from motives; and as we possess two natures, so our motives will be some spiritual, and others carnal. These secret motives man cannot see. As our natural joints are concealed and buried in our body, so are our spiritual joints—the secret motives and workings of our minds—concealed from the view of others; aye, and from our own, until the two-edged sword of the Spirit pierces and divides them asunder. Oh! what a discovery is made of crooked, selfish, base, filthy, hypocritical motives, when these inward joints are riven asunder, and our carnal motives are laid naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom

we have to do! Oh! what searchings of heart as to the root and ground, the reality and spirituality of our religion! "Did I begin with God, or did God begin with me? Did I take up religion, or did religion lay hold of me? What were my motives for making a profession? Were they natural or spiritual? Was there any secret under-hand rotten motive? Was it natural fear or filial fear; fleshly convictions or spiritual convictions; the work of God or the work of the devil? Is my faith feigned or genuine; my hope an anchor within the veil, or a spider's web; my love to Christ and his people natural or spiritual?" The two-edged sword of the Spirit pierces even to the dividing asunder of these motives, and rends them apart so that they shall not cleave together. What know you of this solemn soul examination, with sighs and cries to have your heart right before God, and an inward condemnation of all your fleshly motives? For remember, that a child of God is full of crooked motives, but in his right mind he allows them not, and would fain have none but spiritual motives alive within him.

I should like to know what motives have brought you here this afternoon, and how many of them are spiritual. Some of you are perhaps come as spies, to watch something from my lips, lest I drop a word to disparage any other minister, that you may run home with it, and make out of it a wonderful tale. I am not going to gratify you, as I did not come here for that purpose, but to preach the truth, as far as I am acquainted with it. But the work and business of a man of truth is to run his sword right up into motives and lay them naked and open before the eyes of an enlightened conscience.

5. But we read of this two-edged sword piercing also to "**the marrow.**" What is spiritually meant by **marrow**? By the spinal marrow all feeling is communicated from the brain to

every part of the body. From it, as it passes down the spinal column of the back, nerves are continually given off, which communicate what is called nervous energy and feeling to every muscle, limb, and organ, internal and external. This I understand the marrow to signify "feeling;" and as the two-edged sword divides asunder soul and spirit, and rends apart the joints—natural and spiritual motives—so it pierces and separates between natural and spiritual feelings.

And here is the grand deceit and awful delusion of natural religion, that it has feeling as much connected with it naturally, as spiritual religion has feeling connected with it spiritually. Feeling, therefore, in itself is no test of true religion, as there are false feelings as well as true feelings.

I know this is tender ground, but I equally know that it is true ground. Had Esau no feeling, nor Herod, nor Felix, nor Judas Iscariot? Aye, and deep feelings too. And so a child of God may have what many think religious feelings, which are not spiritual feelings. He may have tears, and sighs, and burdens, and griefs, and sorrows, and these not produced in his soul by, nor flowing from, Divine operations. He may be melted naturally and cheered naturally, mourn naturally and rejoice naturally; and think himself all the time that his feeling's are spiritual. Now, the two-edged sword of the Spirit, opening up the secrets of his heart, divides asunder that which is natural and spiritual; and thus, when He produces heavenly feeling, there accompanies it a Divine evidence of its birth and origin. There is a depth, and a power, and a sincerity, and a reality, and a solemn feeling of God's presence, and a drawing upwards of the soul, which all stamp spiritual feelings as divine and heavenly.

But a man who has never had light shine in his conscience, to see and feel the difference between natural and spiritual

feelings, can never have had the two-edged sword in his marrow, and is as much exposed to Satan's delusions as an angel of light. Old nature has its crocodile tears, as well as its joys of crackling thorns. **Ec 7:6** But there is one test that marks them both as of the earth earthy, and that is, that they centre in self, and feed self-righteousness at the very moment that they are at work, whereas all spiritual feelings, whether of sorrow or joy, mount upward to the source whence they came down.

6. But to draw to a close; the last effect mentioned in the text of the Word of God, when spiritually applied, is, that it is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." These words seem to show that the joints and marrow have been correctly explained, as the apostle drops the metaphor, and uses once more plain language. Now these four things—motives, feelings, thoughts, and intents—may be, and indeed are, all partly natural and partly spiritual. As there are natural motives and natural feelings, so there are natural thoughts and natural intents; and so likewise there are spiritual thoughts and intents, as well as spiritual motives and feelings. Now, the word of God in the soul, as the light of life, the candle of the Lord searching its inward parts, discerns, that is, finds out the difference between natural and spiritual thoughts, and natural and spiritual intents. That is, so far as they wear a religious garb. And it passes an unsparing sentence of condemnation on all religious thoughts and intents that are not spiritual thoughts and intents.

For instance, some such flaming sentence as this is written on the conscience, "The flesh profiteth nothing," "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," "Without me ye can do nothing," "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" the substance of these revealed truths works in the soul, and as each fleshly thought and intent comes forward it is seized, examined,

tried, and condemned. No thoughts are considered good but what God gives, and no intents are deemed right that the Spirit does not prompt; and thus all a man's religion is inwardly weighed up and stamped as it passes through his heart.

And now, my friends, what know you and I of this religion? Depend upon it, if the Word of God has ever entered our heart, it has produced, more or less, some of these effects. And it is to be feared, if you never knew anything of these searching separating operations of the Spirit in your conscience, you are dead in sin, or dead in a profession. It has been my endeavour this afternoon to take forth the precious from the vile; and it is my desire that God may be glorified and his people profited; that his enemies may be covered with shame, but upon himself his crown flourish.