

## Where Do You Stand on This?

### *How Do You Make Your Decisions?*

I don't remember how old I was when I first started reading my Bible, but by the time I was 18, I had decided to read the Bible through from front to back that year and I have continued the practice to now.. What this did was help me see for myself what the Bible actually said and then make decisions about my lifestyle based on my discoveries in the Bible. Each year I find something I had not noticed before. Whether it helps my preaching I cannot say but it certainly helps me see things from the Bible view. One year when I was nineteen or twenty, during my regular reading I came across a verse that I had never spotted. Up to this point I did not see anything wrong with Christians swearing. I cursed on the basketball court and while hanging out with my friends. I certainly didn't when I was at church or around my mom. I for some reason never saw swearing as really bad. But then I "stumbled" upon this verse. **But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.** (Colossians 3: 8 NIV) Suddenly I was left with a decision to make, and the Bible was very clear on this. Either I stop swearing altogether and live with God leading me or keep cursing and reject the Bible as inadequate for building my life. It was quite a day of reckoning. It took me almost six months to stop cussing completely but because I believed Jesus was Lord, I eventually did. If I were to give you a Bible right now and ask you to do with it however you chose, what would you do with it? How would it impact your life on a day-to-day basis? Our Big Idea is this. The Bible is the word of God and is crucial to your life.

As we complete our study on the armor of God, we come to the last part of it. **Take.... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** (Ephesians 6: 17b NIV) The item translated sword is precisely as rendered. It is a large knife, a sword, even the large sword of an executioner. This is an instrument of violence, of death and we certainly would not expect it as part of the armor of God. When you consider that it is a metaphor picturing the word of God, it seems quite odd. Before we dive deeply into this specific bit of armor, it needs to be pointed out that the Greek term translated 'word' is rhema. The other important Greek term rendered word in the New Testament is logos. This is the more famous of the two and the most commonly used. There are certain well respected and popular Christian preachers and organizations that see a significant difference in the shading of each of these terms. Highly influential teachings have sprung out of their interpretations, but the truth is that rhema and logos are practically the same in meaning and usage. Let me give an example to show the Bible does not make a distinction between the two. **...to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them,** (Hebrews 12: 19 NIV) The first term translated "words" is rhema, and the second term translated "word" is logos. They are interchangeable. Rhema and logos are simply words like jacket and coat which depending on the term you prefer at the time is what you use to say the same thing. So in our verse, the word of God using rhema, could just as easily be word of God using logos and there would be no difference at all in meaning or spiritual implications.

Let's turn to something which I believe is far more interesting to discuss and that is this connection between violence and the word of God. The Word of God is most certainly used as a title for Jesus in Revelation. **He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.** (Revelation 19: 13 NIV) Many times in the Old Testament the expression "word of God" means something God speaks directly to His people. In the New Testament, regardless whether the Greek rhema or logos is used, it describes either Jesus or the Bible. Consider the same metaphor used for word of God in Hebrews as in our text on the armor of God. **For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.** (Hebrews 4: 12 NIV) Here, the word of God is not just any sword, it is much sharper and more effective than even a double-edged sword. Notice it is just as violent. We will return to this aspect of the word of God shortly but for now we need to notice that the word of God is the Bible, and it is violent in nature.

Jesus made a provocative statement that we tend to ignore. It was quite expected by the disciples who believed that the Messiah, who they now knew was Jesus would destroy the enemies of Israel and generate a world-wide kingdom. That was the expectation of nearly all Jews who believed the Bible to be true. Yet, even for the more warlike disciples, Jesus' words were shocking. **"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."** (Matthew 10: 34-36 NIV) That of course was not the sense of war the disciples expected. This is a description of civil war within the home. How could this be the Prince of Peace speaking? Yet it was. Again, we have a sword

mentioned and although it was in fact literal at times, it is a metaphor here too, in the same line of thought as the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God as well as the sword sharper than a double edged sword in the Hebrews verse. It foresees the violent separation of people. We tend to think the Bible, maybe hope, brings people together, that it creates peace, but Jesus warns otherwise. Haven't we seen it, perhaps personally. Children despising the Christian faith of their parents, families split by the word of God. Sometimes it's a peaceful rejection of the word of God, whether by parents or children and other times it is a violent, ruinous destroyer of relationships. We cannot and must not shy away from the impact Scripture has on others. **Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.** (1 Corinthians 6: 18 NIV) When told that the definition of sexual immorality is any sexual relations outside marriage, it is very hard for many to accept. **"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse — the whole nation of you — because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.** (Malachi 3: 8-10 NIV) How well is this statement received, that if you are not giving the first tenth of your income to the work of the church, you are stealing from God? And what of this? **...yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.** (1 Corinthians 8: 6 NIV) Try reading that to someone who believes all religions are good and that each person decides what God to choose to follow and we should respect each person's choice.

The Bible is divisive. It is not inclusive in the sense many think of the term inclusive. Consider Jesus' response to the rich young ruler. He asked Jesus what he needed to do to gain eternal life. Jesus mentioned the Ten Commandments and the ruler quickly noted that he had been keeping all of them since he was a boy. Jesus then brought the sword of the Spirit upon him. **When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** (Luke 18: 22 NIV) That is a tough requirement. Brutal for some. It was not inclusive at all. Quite exclusionary. Jesus watched as the young man went off sadly. **Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."** (Luke 18: 24-25 NIV) The Bible is not apologetic on its strong statements regarding right and wrong. Whether you are wondering about abortion or homosexuality, the Bible is clear and does not back down. Jesus did not go chase down the rich young ruler and do an about face on His demand. Jesus knew that the rich young ruler, although nice and gracious had the poison of greed in his heart and until that was attacked, he could not function in eternal life. God could never be first for Him and that is what makes eternal life, eternal life.

The struggle over right and wrong is a true battle today and the battlelines are drawn in our society and societies around the world. The Christian doesn't have to apologize for being on the Bible side of things. Some will love you for it, others dislike you and there will be those who even hate you. But if you are Christian then you are on God's side without equivocation. We must all learn one of the most important lessons in our lives from the Israelites who were told by God to enter the Promised Land. Twelve spies were sent to help the leaders of Israel become familiar with how the land was before the invasion began. But when they returned, the spies turned the people against the word of God and became fear mongers, decrying the command and arguing the people living in the land they were to conquer were too fierce and strong to defeat. Like the Israelites, many Christian people are afraid of embracing the word of God because it seems too strict, too rigid, unreasonable. Satan will wreck you if you do not defend your life and the lives of those you love with the word of God. If you put it down because it seems too fierce, too strong, you take a huge risk of being like the Israelites who wasted away in the desert because they would not trust the word of God and make it the rule of their lives. If you ever come to a point where something the Lord declares in the Bible seems hard or hard to believe, rather than doubting God, question the logic behind your opinion. As you in faith trust the Bible, God will begin to bless your faith and show you the reasonableness of what He is declaring. Paul has said it quite eloquently what is the mind of those who walk with God in salvation. **All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** (2 Timothy 3: 16-17 NIV) The big idea to take with you is this. The Bible is the word of God and is crucial to your life. Live by it.