

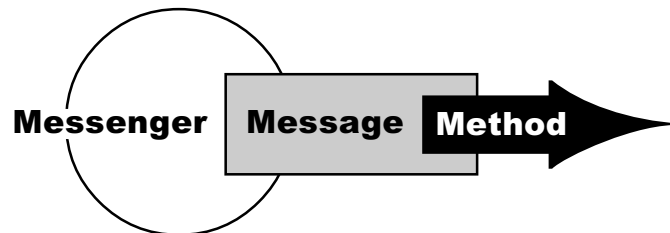
How to Teach God's Word

2

Teaching the Living Word

In the last lesson, we saw that there are three parts to the effective communication of any truth from God's Word:

- ➔ The Messenger
- ➔ The Message
- ➔ The Method



In this lesson, we will begin looking at the message we bring. And in particular, we will be examining the *pathos* of the message. It is this *pathos* that Paul referred to when he wrote in **1 Thessalonians 1:5**:

“...our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.”

The Living Message

Read John 6:63

Jesus here describes his teaching ministry as far more than just informing people about the kingdom of God. His stated objective was for the Holy Spirit, through his words, to bring life to the people.

“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”

This was the charter of Jesus' teaching and it is also your charter as you teach God's Word. Jesus was called “the Word of life” (**1 John 1:1**) and the Word which we preach is also called “the word of life” (**Philippians 2:16**).

Do you remember what Jesus said in **Luke 6:40**? “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” Jesus is our model for the effective teaching of God’s Word. Let’s take a look, then, at just one example of Jesus teaching from the Word and see exactly what it meant when Jesus said, “The words I speak to you are spirit and life.”

Read Luke 24:26-27

This passage records one of Jesus’ appearances to the two on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. Luke records that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

Verse 32 records their reaction to this teaching:

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Two things are revealed in the response of these two people to Jesus’ teaching:

- Jesus *opened* the Scriptures to them
- Their hearts *burned* within them

Far more than just teaching *from* the Word of God, Jesus *opened* the Word of God to their understanding. Jesus didn’t aim for their heads, by teaching *information*. He aimed for their hearts, by teaching *revelation*. This is what Jesus meant when he said his words “are spirit and they are life.”

- **His words are *spirit*** – The teaching style of Jesus aims at the heart, at the *spirit*, that part of man that was created for fellowship with God.
- **His words are *life*** – The teaching style of Jesus doesn’t just *talk about* the life of God, it *produces* the life of God.

Condensing these two concepts into one phrase, we could say that the teaching style of Jesus *makes spirits come alive*. This why his hearers responded, “our hearts [were] burning within us.” They were experiencing the impact of teaching that was spirit and life.

The Holy Spirit as Teacher

Only the Holy Spirit can make a person’s spirit come alive. We saw in **Module 101** how the Holy Spirit who originally inspired Scripture is the same Holy Spirit who now continues to breathe life into Scripture as we read it or hear it. He is the one who makes the Word of God a living Word.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-14

Let’s take a look at what Paul is saying in this passage:

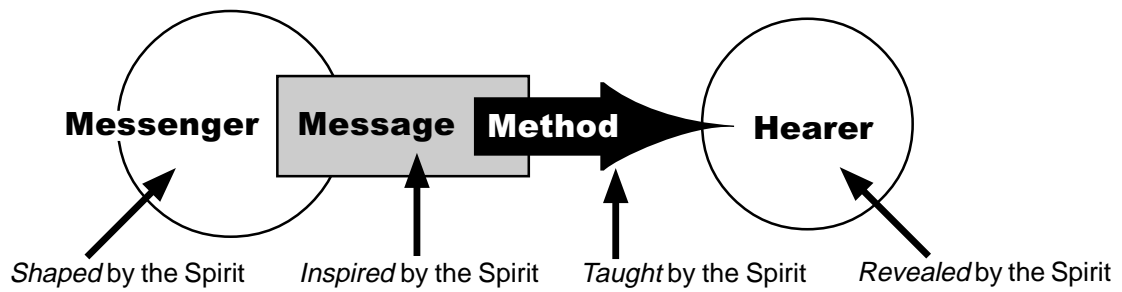
- **Verse 9** – This is a quote from Old Testament concerning the plan God has for your life. It is a description of the wonder of the Gospel before the Gospel had been revealed.

- **Verse 10a** – Paul now qualifies the Old Testament verse with a New Testament reality: “...but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.” What was a mystery in Old Testament times has now been “disclosed to the saints” (read **Colossians 1:26; Romans 16:25-26**).
- **Verse 10b** – The same Holy Spirit that has revealed God’s secrets to us is the same Spirit who “searches all things, even the deep things of God.” He is the one who also enables a human being – both the teacher and the hearer of God’s Word – to search the deep things of God.
- **Verse 11** – When Paul says that the Holy Spirit “searches...even the deep things of God,” he does not mean the Holy Spirit is lacking in knowledge of the deep things of God. He is in fact saying the opposite. He gives the illustration of the spirit of man – how it is only the spirit of a man who knows the deep things within him. “In the same way,” Paul says, “no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. In other words, if you – either as a teacher or a hearer of God’s Word – are to understand the thoughts of God in his Word, you need the Holy Spirit’s help.
- **Verse 12** – This is why you have received the Holy Spirit. One of his principal aims is to help you “understand what God has freely given [you].”
- **Verse 13a** – Paul now says, “*This is what we speak...*” An understanding of how the Holy Spirit reveals the heart and mind of God influences the way that you now teach the Word of God.
- **Verse 13b** – Paul says that he preached God’s Word “not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit...” Paul had a total reliance on the Holy Spirit to communicate the Word of God, “expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.” In order to communicate with the spirit of man, the Holy Spirit teaches the teacher to frame spiritual truths in spiritual words. By this, we don’t mean religious jargon. Rather we mean words which touch the spirit of a man.
- **Verse 14** – Paul here identifies the key component on the hearer’s side which enables the Word of God to become “spirit” and “life.” He says that God’s Word is “spiritually discerned” and therefore the hearer needs the Holy Spirit to *reveal* or *open* God’s Word to him.

In this passage, we see the crux of Paul’s teaching style. He was totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit, in every stage of the process of teaching God’s Word.

Can you see the inherent danger in simply learning rules and techniques for teaching God’s Word? There is nothing wrong in learning helpful hints which assist us in communicating truth, but oh, let’s be careful that we don’t start relying on “human wisdom” in the communication of God’s Word (**verse 13**).

As we shall later see, “method” is an important part of the “messenger-message-method” equation. But for God’s Word to be effectively taught as “spirit” and “life”, then every part of the equation is moulded by the action of the Holy Spirit.



God intends for the two middle components of communication – the message and the method – to be shaped by the Holy Spirit into a sword that will pierce the heart of the hearer.

The Sword of the Spirit

Read Hebrews 4:12

This verse describes the result when God brings his “living and active” Word to bear upon the heart of a person open to him. Different versions of the Bible describe this dynamic capacity of God’s Word in different ways:

New International Version: “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.”

New King James Version: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

God’s Word: “God’s word is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword and cuts as deep as the place where soul and spirit meet, the place where joints and marrow meet. God’s word judges a person’s thoughts and intentions.”

New Century Version: “God’s word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and the spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts.”

New Living Translation: “For the word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are.”

The Living Bible: “For whatever God says to us is full of living power: it is sharper than the sharpest dagger, cutting swift and deep into our innermost thoughts and desires with all their parts, exposing us for what we really are.”

The Living Word

There are two Greek words used for the English word “word.” Each has a slightly different meaning, and understanding the difference can help us understand how God’s Word works.

The first word is **logos**. This refers to the Word of God in its totality. When the Bible calls Jesus “the Word” (**John 1:1,14**), the name it uses is *Logos*.

When you are reading a particular passage of the God’s Word, you are reading the *logos* – the general Word of God. It is divinely inspired as a whole, but it has not yet become a direct revelation to you personally.

But there is another Greek word used by the writers of the New Testament, and that is the word **rhema**. It also means “word,” but it has a slightly different meaning.

Rhema describes that part of the Word that the Holy Spirit causes to come alive as you are reading the *logos*. While *logos* is the general Word of God, *rhema* is the specific Word of God.

Read Matthew 4:4. The Greek word used in the phrase “every word that comes from the mouth of God” is *rhema*. And when Paul calls the sword of the Spirit “the word of God” (**Ephesians 6:17**), he uses the word *rhema* – the specific Word of God given for the specific occasion.

In **Hebrews 4:12**, it is the *logos* which is “living and active, sharper than any two edged sword.” But the sharp edge of the *logos* is the *rhema* word that God seeks to bring into a specific situation.

When you teach God’s Word, you are teaching from the *logos*, but the sharp edge of revelation is the *rhema*. It is the *rhema* that forms the core of your message and the point of challenge for your hearers. It is the *rhema* which you are seeking to impart to produce life and change.

New Testament in Modern English:

“For the Word that God speaks is alive and active; it cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword: it strikes through to the place where soul and spirit meet, to the innermost intimacies of a man’s being; it exposes the very thoughts and motives of a man’s heart.”

The Message: “God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon’s scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God’s Word. We can’t get away from it – no matter what.”

The Amplified Bible: “For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power – making it active, operative, energizing and effective; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [that is, of the deepest parts of our nature] exposing and sifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart.”

Out of this verse we see that God’s Word has a number of qualities:

- God’s Word is *living* – it is charged with God’s life.
- God’s Word is *active* – It is “energetic, active, productive.”¹
- God’s Word is *sharp* – it is as sharp as a sword, a scalpel or a knife.
- God’s Word *penetrates* – it pierces the heart.
- God’s Word *exposes* – it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

As a teacher of his Word, God wants you to learn how to wield this sword. But how

does God expect us to use this “sword of the Spirit” (**Ephesians 6:17**) so that it will indeed “[penetrate] even to dividing soul and spirit”?

Since the New Testament writers use the weapons of their day as illustrations of how God’s Word operations, let’s take a page from a military training manual of their day. An ancient Roman army training manual states:

“A sword slash rarely kills...”

It then goes on to explain that by slashing blindly at an opponent, very little harm is usually done. What is needed, says the manual, is a direct thrust to the vital areas of the human body.

There are two ways we can approach the teaching of God’s Word:

- Slashing blindly
- Piercing to the heart

It is this second way – piercing to the heart of the hearer – that is the key to the effective teaching of God’s Word.

Read Acts 2:36-37

Note the effect that Peter’s teaching had on the crowd on the day of Pentecost? It says the crowd was:

- “cut to the heart” (NIV)
- “pricked in their heart” (KJV)
- “cut to the quick” (NTME*)
- “stung...to the heart” (Amp†)

The Lord’s intention is for his Word to be razor sharp. But the way that he sharpens his Word is by sharpening you! (**Isaiah 49:2**). He hones your life to a fine razor edge so that your words will then have a fine razor edge. If your walk with God is blunt, then your words will be blunt. But if your walk with God is sharpened each day (just like a self-sharpening knife), then the words you bring as you teach his Word will also be sharp.

The Secret to Effective Teaching

There are a number of different ways you can teach God’s Word, but the two principal ones are called:

- The *topical* approach to teaching
- The *expository* approach to teaching

Let’s briefly look at these two types of teaching styles.

* The New Testament in Modern English.

† The Amplified Bible.

‡ Exegesis is an academic term which means the analysis and explanation of a passage of Scripture to determine the original intention and meaning of the writer. To exegete means to do exegesis.

The topical approach

Topical teaching means teaching by topics. You pick a topic, such as “The Love of God,” and then you search the concordance to find every occurrence of the word “love” in the Bible and observe how those verses relate to God’s love for us. In a topical approach to teaching, you draw from the entire Bible, using a topic as your theme.

The expository approach

Expository teaching means teaching by following through a passage of scripture. You choose a portion of the Bible, say **1 Thessalonians chapter 1**, and you exegete[‡] that passage. In the expository approach to teaching, you step through passages of the Bible, verse by verse, showing how each verse relates to the others and how the overall meaning of the passage relates to the hearer.

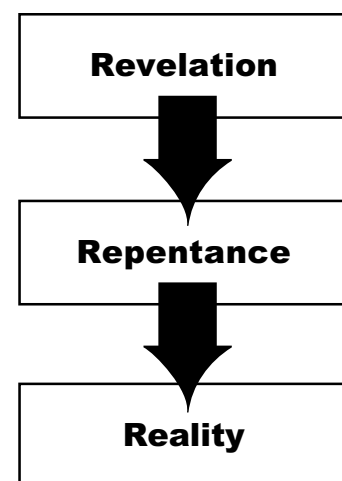
Both these forms of teaching have their value, although there are varying opinions as to which approach is more effective. You will note that we employ a combination of both at the Online Bible College. Most evening studies are topical in approach, but you will notice that in many lessons we also do an exposition of selected passages of Scripture (note how this is done on pages 2-3, where we examine **1 Corinthians 2:9-14**).

The secret to the effective teaching of God’s Word, however, does not lie in the teaching style, but in the revelation that comes through that teaching style. Revelation is the key. Without the impartation of revelation, both these approaches are merely the conveying of information about the Bible or about God.

We encourage you to use a combination of topical and expository approaches to teaching, even within the one message. If God has been speaking to you about a particular passage in his Word, then search out the nuggets of revelation in that passage, and then use that passage as a springboard to search for other veins of revelation in the rest of God’s Word.

Revelation should flavor your teaching, no matter which approach you take. Revelation must be the source of your message, the driving passion of your message and the goal of your message – the impartation of revelation to the hearts of those who are listening. Revelation is the cutting edge of the sword of God’s Word. It is Spirit-inspired revelation that makes the Word “living and active.”

We have already seen how there is a three-step process in the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. This same process is now in effect through your teaching! God is wanting to lead those who will be learning from you through the



same process of revelation, repentance and reality. Without that all-important first step – revelation – there can be no repentance and no reality produced in their lives.

Teaching the Word of Life

Read 2 Corinthians 3:6

Notice what Paul says about his ministry. He defines his competence as a teacher of God’s Word on the basis of the New Covenant (note also **verses 4-5**). Do you remember the two ways we can live the Christian life – in the old way of the written code and in the new way of the Spirit? (**Romans 7:6**). Well, there are also two ways you can teach – in the old way of the written code and in the new way of the Spirit.

In **2 Corinthians 3:6**, Paul compares these two ways of teaching God’s Word:

The Old Way of the Written Code	The New Way of the Spirit
The Old Covenant – Law	The New Covenant – Grace
Of the “letter”	Of the “Spirit”
The letter kills	The Spirit gives life

Depending on which covenant style you teach out of, you can produce either life or death.

Read Proverbs 18:21

Your tongue, as a teacher, holds tremendous power. The words you speak have the power to bring life or death to people’s lives. We can either minister faith or we can minister struggle. We can either produce God’s righteousness or we can produce condemnation.

Let’s have a brief look at the “life and death” issue of teaching God’s Word:

The word of death

Read Romans 7:9-11

Note that there was nothing wrong with the commandment itself. The Law of God is described as “holy, righteous and good” (**Romans 7:12**), yet it only produced death. The word of death focuses on where the hearers are, where they need to change. It is doing-focused and self-focused.

The word of life

When you teach God’s Word, the starting point is a revelation of God himself, not of man’s depravity. It is in a genuine revelation of God that your hearers will have

a revelation of how much they have “fallen short of the glory of God” (**Romans 3:23**). The word of life focuses on the Lord himself and the promises that he has given to conform the Christian to the full likeness of Christ.

Becoming a Partner in Construction

Read **2 Corinthians 10:8**

Read **2 Corinthians 13:10**

When you teach God’s Word, there are two approaches to using your delegated authority:

- Tearing down (**Galatians 5:15; 1 Corinthians 3:17**)
- Building up (**Ephesians 4:29; 1 Corinthians 14:26**)

Jesus said, “I will build my church” (**Matthew 16:18; Hebrews 3:3**). He is in the process of constructing his Church to be “a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (**Ephesians 2:20-21**). As a teacher of God’s Word, you can either partner with the Lord in his construction work or partner with the Enemy in his demolition work (note **John 10:10**). The message you bring can either be a demolition ball or a mortar trowel.

Read **1 Corinthians 14:12**

There are three things mentioned in Scripture which “build up” the Church:

- Bringing a word of encouragement (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**)
- Speaking the truth in love (**Ephesians 4:15-16; 1 Corinthians 8:1**).
- Teaching the word of grace (**Acts 20:32; Hebrews 13:9**)

Read **Hebrews 12:12**

The Living and Enduring Word

Read **2 Peter 1:4**

By now this should be a very familiar verse. But note what Peter says is the source of our ability to “participate in the divine nature” and “escape the corruption in the world.” It is “his very great and precious promises.”

The word of life, drawn from revelation in God’s Word, does not just *tell* people to escape the corruption in the world. It shows them how they can participate in the divine nature! The word of life doesn’t just inform people of the corruption in the world. It opens the way for people to embrace the grace of God in their lives!

Read **1 Peter 1:23**

The Word of God is described as “living and enduring.” It is this word that brought you to the new birth experience (note again **James 1:18**), and it is this same “living and enduring” Word which causes us to grow in Christ. As a teacher of God’s Word, you have become an agent of the “living and enduring” Word of God.

Read Ephesians 4:15-16

God has planned that his Church will “in all things grow up into...Christ.” And the way this happens is by “speaking the truth in love.” This is the objective of your teaching – so that the Body of Christ may “[build] itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

You have a role in building up the Body of Christ in love. When you teach the living Word, out of a revelation of who God is, the effect will be “spirit” and “life” in the lives of others.

¹ Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rodgers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p.676.

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