

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, You have the capacity to create a universe in the palm of Your hand; yet You listen to us day by day, You help us day by day, You stand beside us all the time and You raise us up even though we do not always know it. We praise You for the glory of Your gracious presence; and may we never take for granted the cost of Your love and support. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Striving for what is right

Ask the Lord to inspire His people to develop a keen sense of justice and what is right and wrong within the Kingdom of God. Pray especially for leaders and teachers within the church, who have the task of speaking prophetically to all God's people about how to put their faith into action. May they keep 'justice' alive as an important witness to the Kingdom of God.

Meditation

The physicist can calculate the number of molecules in the atmosphere;

But Wind of the Spirit blows wherever it will!

The chemist estimates the temperature at which an object will burn;

But the fire of God's Spirit sets the soul aflame!

The engineer understands how a complicated 'space shuttle' works;

But the brooding Spirit of God creates light and love.

The psychologist studies the human brain, to help mental illness;

But the Holy Comforter of God knows the spirit within.

The educationalist researches how children and adults learn;

But the Spirit of God truthfully teaches right and wrong.

The linguist examines Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Dickens and Greene;

But the Spirit gives tongues with infinite power of expression.

The wise professor knows what is not known, and the foolish do not;

But the Spirit is Wisdom itself, in the power of the Word.

Thank God for human endeavour in every style, shape and form;

And thank Him for His Spirit, who brings everything to light!

Bible Study - Hebrews 4:12-16

¹² For the Word of God is vigorous and full of life; sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to divide soul from spirit, and joints from marrow, discerning the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ There is nothing created which is hidden from Him, and all are exposed and laid bare to the eyes of the One to whom we must account. ¹⁴ We therefore have a great High Priest who has passed over to the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our limitations, but we have One who has been tested in every way like ourselves; and yet is without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore let us come near to the Throne of Grace with confidence, to receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

Review

Hopefully, you will recall that yesterday, we concluded that Hebrews was concerned about people who claimed to have faith and be part of the people of God, and yet had not entered into the full experience of God's 'rest'; meaning the assurance of salvation and eternal life. The wonderful and memorable passage we have read today follows on directly from this, making it clear that the truth of God's Word is inescapable (4:12,13) and that we cannot claim 'weakness' as an excuse for not knowing our full salvation, because our Saviour has experienced the same. Finally, the writer issues a direct challenge to those who are shy about their faith and yet remain within the church. He says 'let us come near to the Throne of Grace with confidence ...' In other words, there is no room for half-heartedness in the one true family of God.

Yet the colourful and poetic manner in which this is portrayed is extraordinary, and provides us with a wonderful example of the work of God's Spirit. It also reveals aspects of the work of the Spirit which are unique to this passage of Scripture. You will have heard the expression 'the sword of the Spirit', which is one of the items of the 'whole armour of God' written about by Paul in Ephesians (Eph 6:17). It is the only piece of soldier's equipment which is designed for attack rather than defence, and the sword is the 'Word of God'. In other words, we are defended by our faith, the Gospel, righteousness etc. but we can only 'attack' with God's Word, by which we normally mean God's revealed and written Word, the Bible.

Here in Hebrews, a similar combination occurs. However, the writer does not describe the Word of God as a 'two-edged sword'; rather, he compares its work to that of a sword, saying that it is 'sharper than a two-edged sword'. In other words, the likeness with the sword is not the point; it is what the Word of God does that is important. Its sharpness and accuracy 'penetrates' (4:12), significantly between 'soul' and 'spirit'. Now, today, too many people think of the soul and the spirit as the same thing, so it is somewhat obvious that we need the sharpness of God's Word to prise the two apart; that is, in our understanding of them! The 'soul' means you or me as a complete 'living being' existing on earth. The 'spirit' means our 'God-breathed' nature which gives us self-conscious life and also connects us with God, because our own spirit has been given to us by God's Spirit.

This all sounds very deep, but the simple truth of this passage can be explained in a number of ways. The Word of God has been at work when we suddenly realise the difference between our natural selves and the breath of God within us: or when we become conscious of a deep desire to study God's Word to satisfy our hearts or have a need to pray because we love the Lord: or when you become aware that the sins in your life are unacceptable to God, your spirit within wants no more to do with them and you will do anything to dispose of them from your life forever.

The rest of this remarkable passage dwells on the nature of Jesus Christ, who understands the nature of humanity because he was human; he became a 'god-breathed' body, with a soul like you and me, and with a spirit which responded to Almighty God. As our Saviour He is therefore understanding of all human conditions and longs for all, especially the hesitant, to come to the 'Throne of Grace'. This is the place of forgiveness and peace where every human heart can find rest and assurance, where the work of Jesus as our great High Priest is fulfilled for all who will accept it. It is a place to which we may come in 'confidence' (4:16).

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What is your understanding of the difference between the terms 'soul' and 'spirit'. Has this study helped or hindered your understanding of his?
2. There is a great deal within this passage of Scripture. In your group, discuss those parts of it which you feel are significant, apart for the 'two-edged sword' analogy.
3. Do you believe you have the 'full assurance' of your faith? What does this mean to you?

Discipleship

We must all account for what we have done before God. This is a very sobering thought, and one which is worth keeping in the back of our minds throughout all we do. Yet true peace with God is found when we no longer feel this to be a pressure because of the confidence we have in Jesus Christ because of our salvation. It may be that there are times when you do feel confident, but also times when you are not so sure. If this is the case, spare no effort to deal with the problem if at all possible. If it is rooted in some sin which needs to be sorted out, then come before the Lord and allow Him to help you.

Final Prayer

Gracious Lord, listen to our prayers, and grant our requests.

.....
And when we wander away from the faith we proclaim,
Speak through Your Word and bring us back to You : AMEN