

**Hebrews 4: 12 and 13; “Living, Active, and Sharper”, Sermon # 16 in the series –  
“Holding Fast Our Confession”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In verse 11 it says that each one of us must be diligent to enter into the rest which is so freely offered to us in Christ. To be diligent is to keep at it. In other words, you must be diligent to enter in to the reality of rest for your soul; the spiritual rest that Christ died to purchase for you. You really must labor in faith so that you may discover that Christ’s grace is sufficient for you in every situation of life that you go through. Let me ask you, as I begin this message, whether this is something that you are doing? For it really is essential to the strength of your faith that you exercise your faith, lest you fall according to the same example of disobedience that we read about last week; that is, those Jews who saw the mighty works of God, who were brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and yet they murmured and complained against God and Moses. In persevering in this disobedience and unbelief, they fell under the eternal judgment of God. They never really did enter in to His rest. In fact, God swore in His wrath that they would not enter His rest. God knew that He had given them every reason to enter in to all that He was prepared to give them. They had all received super-abundant uncommon measures of common grace. But in their case, it did not lead them to exercise saving faith. They still would not trust in God, and so a good many of those people perished in their sins.

There is an obedience of faith. It is when we enter in to all that God is prepared to give us in Christ. When we believe in Christ’s finished work we can then be assured that we have entered God’s rest; when we continue to trust in Christ, and see Him as our strength and our song and our victory in living the Christian life. In verses 12 and 13 we have a follow-up to this truth; a follow-up which is intended to help you on to a stronger faith. It is, that Christ knows every single thing about you; He knows everything that is going on in your heart. He is a Discerner of the thoughts and intents of your heart. So let me open up this truth to you by declaring to you, 1<sup>st</sup> of all, that the word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is living. 2<sup>nd</sup> – I want to bring to your attention that Christ the Word is active and powerful in His work of interceding on your behalf. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – I would have you to remember Christ’s piercing discernment and penetrating gaze in your heart. I believe that if you are armed with these truths, and you will meditate upon them day and night, you will have good success in seeing your faith grow stronger in the Lord.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – I would have you rejoice in the fact that the word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is living.**

There is much disagreement among commentators as to whether the phrase, “the word of God is living and powerful (or active), sharper than any two-edged sword”, refers to the written word of God (the Scriptures), or to the Essential word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. To me it appears to clearly refer to our Lord, who is here called the “Logos” of God; His very word, personified. In saying this, I do not mean to separate what the Holy Spirit and the apostle Paul clearly wanted to keep together. Let’s look at the way that this is worded here, for a moment. “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.” “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Let’s add in, verse 14 – “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.” This last statement, “seeing then”, hearkens back to the description of the two previous verses; the word of God in verse 12, and “His sight” of us in our hearts. “He is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of our hearts.” Grammatically,

when it says that the “word of God is living and active and sharp”, it seems as though an “it” should be supplied to the last phrase of verse 12, if we are to think of the “logos” mentioned here, as the Scriptures. It would read this way then: “It (that is, the written word of God) is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” This, then, would lend itself to our being able to think of the written word, the Scriptures, as being the discerning entity spoken of; if we were to read it this way.

However the word “it” is not supplied by the translators of the New King James, The ESV, or the New American Standard translation. Therefore, it is my conviction that we should receive the words, “the word of God” here, as referring in the first and primary sense, to our Lord Jesus Christ. This is not to say that application cannot be made to the Scriptures being a living word. For what we have here is a risen living Savior wielding a living and powerful word; a word which is sharper than a two-edged sword in terms of His having perfect discernment of all of our hearts, and what He knows that He will do in relation to them. And so, I personally believe that the intent of the apostle here was to deliberately bring these two things together; Christ and His word, in the use of this word logos. We need not separate them, or put them at odds with each other. The Lord Jesus is the sovereign living Lord who has all power and authority in heaven and earth, and we should think of Him as He is; perfectly discerning in relation to the effects of the preaching of His word. He really does, by His Spirit, search us and know us. He really does see whether we are responding to the good word of God as it is preached to us. He really does communicate life to His people so that they will grow in respect to the preached word.

Let’s think about this idea that the word of God is living and active. Let’s start with this proposition: Christ is living and active in terms of His discernment of what is going on in your heart and your life. He sees all things clearly, and He has the power of being able to reward each Christian according to their faith, and according to their works. This is what I believe our text is saying to us, but let’s confirm it for ourselves. Revelation chapter 1, verse 18 says – “I am He who lives, and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.” “And I have the keys of death and hades.” And Revelation 2: 8 – “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, “These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life.” The Greek of our text reads this way: “Living is the word of God.” He is living so that He might give you eternal life, O sinner. He is living, and He will most certainly give you on-going imparted grace, the gift of eternal life, dear Christian. Let it not be said that Christianity is merely a set of doctrines to be learned, or merely a Confession to be believed. These things are of great value, most certainly, to bring better definition and clarity as to what the word of God is saying. But they will only become precious to you when you have Christ’s life working in your life. Being a Christian is having the resurrection life of Christ dwelling in your heart, and your praying to know more of His blessed influences through the Spirit. When you read the promises and the precepts in the word of God, the truth becomes alive in you as you receive it by faith. And then you have the power to go about to do it and to keep it to the glory of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Blessed are those who hear the word of God and do it, Jesus says. As far as His being now, presently alive, each and every Christian ought to be able to bear testimony to this in their own experience, and they ought to be able to affirm it when they read the Scriptures.

But sometimes a person who believes that they are a Christian may have trouble confirming that they have this life. They must ask themselves whether they have ever been born again by the Spirit of God? Because if you have been born again, you have been raised from the dead spiritually in your heart. And just as the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, and is alive forevermore, you also are alive forevermore spiritually. Perhaps you have read this in the Scriptures, but the real question is: Have you also proved it in your own experience? Do you sense that as you exercise faith in Jesus, and in His blessed word, that He confirms the truth of the Bible in your heart and mind? Jesus Christ is alive from the dead. He who once was put to

death upon the cruel cross, after His crucifixion on the third day, was raised from the dead. You who were once dead in your trespasses and sins, God has made alive in Christ. “And you He made alive”; you who once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath just as the others.” “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

If you really have the life of Christ in your life, you will begin to notice a most definite change in the way that you live. You will notice a power at work in your soul and spirit which is leading you to see that being Christ’s disciple, a follower of the Lamb, is the greatest reason for your existence. You will not have a pre-eminent love for yourself any longer, but you will have a great love for the living Christ and for the Scriptures. You will begin to follow Christ as His disciple because you understand that you have His power within you to cultivate a truly spiritual life; the life of receiving grace, and learning wisdom, and praying for strength to do God’s will in relation to the truth of the Bible. In this, you will come to realize the connection between Christ’s life and your life. You are in union with Christ. You are one spirit with Him. He is a life-giving Spirit. The Living Word brings life to your heart so that you will want to turn from all of your sins, and you will desire to learn the way of righteousness. You will learn to test all things by the truth of the written word, so that God will be pleased.

You will believe the word of God which you read in the Scriptures, that you are having fellowship with the Father and the Son. You will read the Bible often to learn the truth about how you should view every temptation and every aspect of obedience to God’s commands. You will greatly desire to have that word abide in you and dwell in you richly. 1<sup>st</sup> John 2, verse 24 says: “Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning.” “If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.” “And this is the promise that He has promised us – eternal life.” “These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.” “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”

**2<sup>nd</sup> – I want to bring to your attention that Christ is active and powerful in His work of interceding on your behalf.**

The Lord Jesus is not only living, but He is also active and He is powerful. He is powerfully able to discern all things, even the hearts of men, and all of their intents, correctly. Since Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, and ascended on high, He sits at the right hand of the Father, and ever lives to make intercession for the saints. (Hebrews 7: 25) This is His activity, interceding for His people and acting as their Advocate. Why do we need Christ to do this ongoing work on our behalf? It is because our sanctification, our being made holy, involves our becoming obedient in relation to all the commandments of God’s written word. And no Christian will be able to be perfectly obedient to all of God’s commandments. There will still be sins in your heart and life that will need to be dealt with, after you have become a Christian. Receiving grace is not a license to sin. But rather it is the time when you should awake to righteousness and stop sinning. To pursue holiness is to keep short accounts with God, and to learn to repent and to forsake all known sins. This cannot simply be done on your own. Christ must help you with everything related to your sanctification. Listen to 1<sup>st</sup> John 2: 1 – “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.” “And if anyone sins, we have an

Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

I hope that you can see what a great salvation we have been given, a salvation which we dare not neglect. Those who have been called and chosen by God are those who have been born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. They now have a living relationship with their risen Lord which brings them continual hope because of this on-going work of His in the cleansing of their heart and their conscience. Dear Christian, I hope that you are aware of this, for if you are not, you will continually be feeling as though you are falling short of His glory. But I am asking the question: Is this the way that you view your Lord now; as your Advocate with the Father? Christ is your defense attorney, so to speak, before the Father, He defends you whether you fall into sin, or whether you are trying your best to be righteous. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit have holy interaction with each other concerning your progress in sanctification, or lack of it. You should know that the Lord Jesus is on your side through thick and thin. Listen to Romans 8, verses 23-28. “Not only that, but we also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” “But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.” “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.” “For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Truly these verses are good news to the vilest of sinners, and they will bring real hope to the Christian who is trying to make progress in holiness. As a sinner, you should know that you can come directly to God through Jesus Christ and find salvation; the forgiveness of all of your sins. You will be clothed with Christ’s righteousness and you will receive the gift of a New Heart and the Holy Spirit to help you to understand what you should be doing in living the Christian life. When you realize that the Holy Spirit is dwelling in you, and that He is your helper in your being able to better understand how to live the Christian life, then you also begin to see the importance of prayer. You groan within yourself eagerly waiting for the time when you will be changed to be like Christ, on the final Day; the day that He returns, but while you are waiting, you are persevering in faith and obedience to God’s word. The Spirit even helps you in your weaknesses. You don’t know what you should pray for as you ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for you with groanings which cannot be uttered. But look at verse 27. “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is...”

Who is it who searches the hearts? It is our Lord Jesus Christ who is living and active in His interceding on your behalf. He is acting on your behalf in relation to your prayers and your going about to obey His word. He searches your heart and He knows whether you are responding to the Spirit’s good work in your heart to lead you to repentance and to build and strengthen your faith. He sees where you are earthly minded and where you are heavenly minded. He sees where you have sinned and failed in your obedience and yet neither He nor His Father condemn you. He will work to bring about a better obedience in you based upon His own perfect obedience for you. He daily bears the burden of cleansing you from all sin as you confess your sins to Him. He purges you with hyssop and you are clean, and washes you and you are whiter than snow. He hears the accusations of the Devil coming against you and He defends you against all those charges on the basis of His own blood and righteousness. He makes command decisions, according to will of God the Father, regarding what He should providentially order in your life to teach you the things which will bring about the increase of your faith, the

establishment of your obedience to God's word, and He is intimately concerned with every detail which will bring you to the place where you are indeed making progress in holiness and righteousness. He makes all these things work together for good to you who love God, to you who are called according to His purpose. Truly this ought to bring you great joy; that Christ discerns your thoughts and desires correctly and works to bring you to a better understanding of what it means to do His will, and to glorify Him in the many situations where you must choose whether you will do the right thing, and how to show love in the process of that. Christ is very active, dear Christian, in His discernment of you, and what He knows that you need. You need His grace. He is active in cleansing you of all of your sins. He is active in supplying you with grace. And His grace will be sufficient for you, for His power is perfected in weakness. When you are weak, He is strong. (2nd Corinthians 13: 9 and 10)

**3<sup>rd</sup> – I would have you to remember Christ's piercing discernment and penetrating gaze into your heart.**

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." "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Let me ask you now, after all that I have told you, do you view the Lord Jesus as risen, living, and active in your life, or do you see Him off to the side, looking at you and disapproving of what He sees. Let me take you a step farther down the path of righteousness. You may be thinking to yourself: My Lord Jesus does not understand my particular situation; the pain and sorrow and grief that fill my heart over my sins, and the lack of my progress in terms of my obedience to His blessed word. Truly, I am ashamed of myself, and I greatly desire to walk with Him in white, to walk with Him in love, and to love the brethren as well. I want to overcome my besetting sins, and be made spiritually strong in my weaknesses.

Dear saint, let me assure you from the verses that I just read to you, that the Lord Jesus Christ sees your heart perfectly, and He knows your heart better than you yourself know it. His discernment of your heart is a piercing and penetrating gaze, and yet His is also a loving gaze. His gaze is sharper than any two-edged sword in that He can see down into the depths of your soul, even all the way to the division of soul and spirit where no man can see. He is well able to expose your laziness or hypocrisy, but He is also able to see whether you truly desire to overcome temptations to sin, and the allurements of the world. He can take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God and cut away all the vines and briars and branches and thorns which have grown up in your heart, and evidence themselves in your life, and cultivate the garden of your heart according to His good pleasure. Yes, it is true that you ought to fear entering in to, or being overcome by temptation. But rather than focusing on what could happen, or what might happen, why not remember how clearly your loving Lord sees you. He sees you as you really are. He knows your desires for consistency in obedience. He sees all of your struggles with, and against, remaining corruption. He is not looking upon you in a disapproving way. He died for this. He, by His Spirit will tell you, in conjunction with His word, where you need to change; where you need to repent. He is looking upon you, and thinking about what He can do to help you along in the process of your sanctification; how He can show you that bearing fruit for Him all depends upon His wisdom and His strength, not your own supposed strength.

I would have you to remember that no creature is hidden from His sight; that all the things that are in your heart and mind are naked and open to His holy gaze. He knows all the thoughts and intents of your heart. Where you need to change and grow more into His image and likeness, if you need to learn to love the brethren more, and reach out to them to help and aid them in relation to their faith or their needs, He will arrange for the circumstances to come

about. And He will set the opportunity before you. And if you, by His powerful working in your heart, perceive what He is looking for from you, He will reward you by blessing your labors and multiplying the harvest of your righteousness. Where you need to change in relation to private or secret sins in your life, He by His Spirit will point this out to you in relation to the commandments found in His written word, and He will wield the sword of the Spirit through the preaching of the word, in such a way that you will find that you will have the power to put sin to death, and your arch-enemy Satan to flight. Christ with His penetrating gaze will be able to see whether you have confessed your sins and whether you will forsake them. His seeing your willingness and desire, in this regard, you surely will find mercy and grace in the time of your need.

And lastly, by way of warning and as an encouragement to your making progress in holiness, will you not remember that someday you will have to give an account of yourself to God for the way that you have lived. Part of that account will be in terms of how you viewed Christ Himself. Did you receive Him as your Prophet, Priest, and King? Did you receive Him as your Prophet to teach you, your Priest to suffer, die, and intercede for you? Did you remember that He was, and is, your Advocate with the Father? Did you receive Him as your King to rule over you, and to defend you from all of your enemies? Have you come to terms with His penetrating and loving gaze into your heart and life? If you have not, will you incline your ear to understanding and cry out for wisdom; seek for her as for silver and search for her as for hidden treasures? Those who seek for a closer walk with Christ will find in Him a friend; One who is ready to help you on to a better understanding of yourself, and all the issues of life; issues which will determine whether you will receive a reward on the Day of judgment, or lose it because you neglected this great salvation that He died to purchase. Proverbs 8: 32 says: "Now therefore, listen to Me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways." "Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it." "Blessed is the man who listens to Me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of My doors." "For whoever finds Me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord." If you have not started yet, begin living your life to God, more that to men. Live your life to the One who sees everything in your heart clearly and yet is able to make all grace abound to you, so that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.