

**THE WORD OF GOD
AND
THE LIFE OF HOLINESS**

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CHAPTER FOUR -

THE POWER OF THE WORD TO GIVE VICTORY OVER SIN

THIS WORD OF GOD is a Book of Redemption. It finds man in his sin, bound with it, stained with it, a slave to it, leading to judgment and the wrath of GOD; and it comes to him with a message of mercy and cleansing and deliverance and redemption from sin: and that is what we have been looking at. I have already mentioned six ways in which the Word of GOD exposes or reveals sin. Now may I mention six ways in which the Word of GOD deals with sin as a whole? There is something more than exposing sin; thank GOD, there is something to be done about it.

First of all, as we have seen, the Book reveals or exposes and diagnoses man's sinful condition. Secondly, it convicts of sin. I remember a banker in a small town in Virginia, a very heavy man, who over-ate. The doctor said to him, "Some day you are going to die with a stroke, right on the floor of the bank." "Well," he said, "if I do, I will do it with a full stomach." The banker was rightly diagnosed; that is exactly the way he did die. He did not get any conviction on the matter: he got proper treatment from the doctor, but he was not going to do anything about it.

- First, this Book diagnoses.
- Secondly, it convicts.
- Thirdly, this Book presents the sinless man, the Lord JESUS;
- Fourthly, it reveals a redemption from sin through CHRIST JESUS.
- Fifthly, the Book gives us the assurance that we in CHRIST may live victorious over sin when we are redeemed and it is this I want to speak about this afternoon;
- Sixthly, the Book tells us of a time that is coming when sin will for ever be put away.

This is the way the Bible deals with sin. Incidentally, it is the only Book of any great religion in the world that has a doctrine of sin. Even Judaism does not have a theology of sin; there is no doctrine of the fall of man in Judaism to-day. Mohammedanism deals with it very carelessly; many modern cults omit it: this is the one Book which, though it presents a SAVIOUR and demands holiness, really deals with the sin problem. I would like to discuss the power of the Word of GOD in giving us victory over sin.

Look at two passages, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament.

First, Psalm 119:11, "**Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee**"; and because I want to put most of the emphasis on the New Testament verse, I will only outline this verse. Note that it contains one-syllable words from beginning to end, except the little word "against;" It is a very simple verse, but it has some remarkable truths in it.

First of all, the Psalmist has a desire not to sin. "**Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee**" - and if we do not have a desire for victory over sin, we will never have it.

I was told years ago in regard to a famine in China, that there is one thing more terrible and more fatal than hunger, and that is when the body has been too long without food, and the hunger ceases, and the victims no longer want to eat, but lie down in the road and die. When the desire for food has gone, then a man is surely going to die; and when the desire for victory over sin is lacking - I am not talking about salvation now - there will be no victory.

I wonder whether we should not be frightened about this? Years ago one of the greatest Bible teachers in America, a man of GOD, was under the bondage of sin; he was under it for years, teaching the Bible with power, yet under this awful, terrible bondage. At one time Dr. Torrey, who loved him, wrote to him, "Do you want the Lord to deliver you from this bondage?" and he replied, "I am not so sure that now I do. For many years I fought this, and I lost, but I do not know now whether I want deliverance or not." He got it later; but when you are in that hour, you are of all men most miserable. The Psalmist wanted to live triumphantly over sin.

Second, the Psalmist recognizes that if something is not done, he will continue in sin. He says, "**Thy Word have I hid in mine heart**," I have done something, "**that I might not sin . . .**" It was as though he said that, if he did not do it, then he would continue in his sin. He is talking about his heart. This is what our Lord meant, when He said, "**But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man . . .**" (Matthew 15:18-20). He was not talking about the gangsters, but about normal man. And so the Psalmist says, "This I have done that I might not sin"; and unless this is done, I will be just like the man that our Blessed Lord is talking about.

Thirdly, there is a recognition here (and I should have placed this first) that sin springs from the inner life, and it is with the heart that one must deal. In other words, something external will not change this situation; no culture, no education, may I say no marriage, nor home, nor art, nor a change of environment, nor a higher salary, nor washings, nor ablutions, nor new clothes, nor any of these things will change us. Something has to get into the inner life of men. "**Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee**."

He wants deliverance from sin; he knows if he does not have something outside himself, he will continue in sin; he knows that this life of sin must be dealt with in the heart - and this brings us to the fourth point.

Fourthly, the Psalmist opens his inner life to the Word of GOD. You will notice that he does not say "a word, a poem, a passage of Ruskin, a page of Shakespeare, a paragraph of Carlyle have I hid in my heart." He is talking to the Lord, "**Thy Word**." GOD's Word comes with power and

purity, exposing the heart, giving new life, new light, and new energy. "**Thy Word**" something that is more powerful than I am; something which can deal with things that I cannot deal with, this sin which is too strong for me; but GOD is able, and "**Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.**" And, beloved, may I say this as a man who has lived in books from the cradle: there is nothing, however beautiful or lovely, how ever inspiring, more satisfying than the Bible.

Oh, you say, many books are inspired; but our Bible does not say that it is inspired, it says it is inspired of GOD, which is a little different. I sometimes think that Milton and Shakespeare were inspired. Try to write as they wrote, and see if they are not above you and me; they have a genius which you and I do not have - they are inspired, something remarkable and above the ordinary. But no drama, no prose, no elegance of style ever changed a human heart: it is "**Thy Word . . . in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.**" If there were other things, if it is a matter of writing, or of learning, or of wisdom, or of skill, then we can look at other books; but when it comes to a matter of sin and deliverance of sin, there is only one volume that can adequately deal with that problem: and it is the Word of GOD.

Fifthly, what do you mean when you say, "**Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee?**" What does it mean? It does not mean automatically memorizing verses. In the town where I was a pastor years ago, we had a printer who printed all the material for the churches in the town. He was a wicked man, an immoral man of the worst kind. He had a lovely wife and three dear children, but he was notoriously immoral; he was kind at home, if you want to say an immoral man can be kind; he was gracious, never got drunk, always paid his bills, belonged to three or four lodges, but he was dominated by lust. He was the son of a Presbyterian minister.

They told me that in the lodges he would quote ten or twelve verses from the Word of GOD in a joking way. He knew scores and hundreds of verses in the Bible. The Word was memorized, but it was not operating in his heart.

To illustrate, may I talk very simply here?

Let us say that down in our heart we have a council table, and around it sit all the forces that make for the decisions that we finally render: and there are lots of them. I think the devil sits at the council table, too; then our sinful desires are there, and they are sometimes terrific, and they pound that table and demand this and that. Then at the table also are our habits. Then I think sometimes deceit sits there, saying, "The first time won't make any difference; just this once more, and then you can quit."

Then I think also the customs of other people sit at our table, and, maybe, the kind of home in which we were brought up; and the examples of others, and sometimes a desperate need for money. For instance, a man in a bank has got tangled up in something, and he needs money desperately; he can change the figures in his books for a while, and he is pressed, and this need in his heart cries out, "You will not get caught; you are clever, just take a couple of weeks and take another thousand, put it on the horses, and you will clear this all up and have something for yourself as well." We had five banks in the State of Pennsylvania which had embezzlements of over a quarter of a million dollars each, within seven months, which had gone on over a series of

years. There were voices in those cashiers' hearts, and they spoke so loudly that those men falsified books: and now they sit in the penitentiary.

We have lots of voices in our hearts which do not come from the Lord; they talk, they demand, they command.

I was never very good at getting a lot of power out of resolutions; I need something more than that, more even than a change of environment. We need something vital, outside ourselves, coming in.

Now, the Psalmist says, "**Thy Word**," GOD's Word, have I put at that council table, "**that I might not sin against thee**"; and if we recognize this as the Word of GOD, and the Word of GOD speaks, then no matter how loud and how insistent those other voices are, if we are giving heed to the Word of GOD, the decision will be for good; and if He is presiding in our hearts through His Word, and we are obedient to that Word, then we will come through. "**Thy Word have I hid in mine heart**," where the decisions are made, "**that I might not sin against thee**."

I will give you an illustration out of the life of Joseph. Notice how he overcame the tremendous temptations to which many are falling to-day. When Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him, there were some very strong voices speaking in Joseph's heart. He must have been flattered, for he was a Hebrew slave and she was the wife of a very wealthy Egyptian; and anyone would have been flattered, especially a slave.

Obviously she was not a good woman that is why her husband did not kill Joseph; he knew what kind of a wife he had, otherwise he would have killed him. But there is no doubt she had a pull in high places, even in the royal palace, and Joseph could possibly have had many preferments through the wife of this man Potiphar.

He might have said, "I am away from home, nobody knows me; everybody else lives this kind of life, why shouldn't I; what difference does it make?" Then it says, in Genesis 39:8, 9, "**But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?**" It was the voice of GOD in his heart that kept young Joseph.

What a wonderful reward he got for it! He got more than she could ever have given, for he became the Premier of Egypt.

Now look into the New Testament. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul says: "**Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**" Now look back at v. 10, "**Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.**" I am not going to dwell on this, but these words, "strong," "power" and "might", are different words for "power" in the Greek language.

When Paul wrote this Epistle and spoke of the whole armour of GOD, he exhausted the vocabulary of the Greek language to tell us how strong we ought to be. Look at the verse: it would be wonderful to live it!

"Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." That, is a whole lot better than slapping someone on the back and saying, "Be a man"; the Lord is in this. **"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand again the wiles of the devil."**

We will look at one or two of these words, as a background for the phrase, "**the sword of the Spirit.**" This word "**wiles**" is in Greek *methodias*, from which we get "method," meaning strategy. John Eadie, on this phrase, "**the wiles of the devil,**" says: "*The great enemy of mankind, fierce and malignant, has a method of warfare peculiar to himself. His battles are the rush of a sudden ambuscade, of sudden assault, and by cunning onslaught.*"

After I had read that, I stumbled on something else that I want to bring to your attention. Dr. Alexander Whyte, in *Not Against Flesh and Blood*, a booklet which he wrote during the First World War, stresses the point that in that war we were not fighting Germany or the Kaiser, or Turkey or the Sultan; he said, "*We are fighting the demons which live in these men, we are fighting the powers that are behind these men.*"

It is more true to-day, with the terrible demon of communism, than it was then. Whyte goes on, "*All the time we must not be so occupied and absorbed with our war with Germany as to lose sight of a far more holy war that goes on unceasingly within our own souls. If we have been recruited to CHRIST, and have been harnessed by His HOLY SPIRIT for His holy war within our own souls, let us, then, remember this, that that inward war must always come first. For this present German war, like all outward wars, will soon be over; but our inward war, once entered on, will never come to an end in this world. At the same time there is one thing in which our inward spiritual war is not unlike the outward German war*" - and this is it - "*We read from time to time in the dispatches from the front, that for some days there has been little doing, and suddenly the whole scene is changed: in a moment hell is let loose, till the amount of carnage cannot be counted. And your inward war, my brethren, and my inward war, is often like that other war: we also have comparatively quiet days and comparatively quiet nights, and then, like at the front, sometimes without a moment's warning, the devil himself is let loose in all his fury in our souls. There is no good mincing this. Hell itself will sometimes in a moment burst up within our innermost souls. The Apostle Paul, the chaplain of the Ephesian host, knew all that to his lifelong cost.*"

This is what Paul says: "**Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles**" [strategies] **of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.**

Do you know the one word which covers all of this? Every one of these words is an offshoot of one word, the word "power"; these are powers, principalities, rulers. A power is powerful, and a world-ruler is powerful, and spiritual hosts are powerful. These are superhuman forces; they are demon forces.

When some of you people of my age were born, we did not have this word, "world ruler"; you cannot find it in the dictionaries of the early twentieth century, but we have got it now, and we are going to have more. Again, "spiritual wickedness" - what do you mean by that? "Spirit" has

to do with our spirits; and when you get spiritual wickedness you have spirits whose like and worth and purpose and commission and desire and passion and ambition are to do evil; and those spirits can get into our spirits; and it is a spiritual wickedness that can really affect us most powerfully.

Now Paul says these are the things with which we wrestle. I wonder what they do? What do you think these things do? Well, I think they can cause inertia, for one thing, in Christian life.

The other day, in reading the life of a great missionary, the question came to me which I am putting to you. Why do we not pray more powerfully, prevailingly, and perseveringly? Now, my dear people, with the exception of a few of you, our prayer life is a pretty sad thing. We go down on our knees, and we check over what we prayed for, and then we get up. We seldom get great results, for we are on our knees for such short times. This has shocked me; and I would not be a bit surprised if Satan has evil powers to keep us from prayer.

Beloved, there is Victory over this; GOD is bigger than anything in this world, and when we feel cold and depressed and that we are not getting anywhere, we are wrestling with evil powers; and we should stay there even if it costs blood, until we get results.

"**We wrestle**," and maybe some of our anaemic life is due to these evil powers. There are many other things - a sense of defeat, of shame, of chagrin; are we never going to win?

That is of the devil. I will tell you something else, beloved, and may I say this kindly: this business of a world-religion is strongly of the devil, a religion that is going to put Buddha and Mohammed and JESUS and some of the demons from Tibet in one great mess of porridge, strip our Lord of His uniqueness, His Deity, His atonement, His resurrection; this is of the devil.

Professor Laski, of Oxford, said, "We need religion, and we need it desperately, and the world needs it; but let us not go back to the old supernatural religion of Christianity." The more the world knows it needs religion, the greater will be the danger that it makes a world religion, and not the faith of the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

This is dangerous; for as we have the United Nations, and seek world government, so we have a world religion. In Revelation 13 we have the world-ruler; they have a lot of religion in it, they worship the beast, the dragon, and the devil. We shall have a religion in the world in the next few years, but it will not come from the Lord JESUS unless we have a revival.

You and I in Christian work have to wrestle against something else, in order that we never get diverted from the supremacy and the uniqueness and the triumph of the Gospel of the Lord JESUS CHRIST; and no programme for world peace, and no propaganda for prohibition, and no programme for this or that, should ever divert us from preaching the Gospel which alone can save souls. GOD knows we need world peace, and we need prohibition; but, as my father said to me years ago, when I said that it would be wonderful if we could have our country dried from whisky, "If every whisky saloon was closed, every man would still go to hell unless he was saved by JESUS CHRIST."

We wrestle against world-rulers, powerful beings which would take us away from this great

reality. Now, said Paul, "**take... the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.**" This is the only offensive weapon in this armoury; and it is something that you and I have to handle ourselves. Someone can clothe us; but no one can wield a sword for us. GOD can give us the shield, and the helmet, and the shoes; but when we take this Book into our hands - which is a metaphor for taking it into our hearts - then we will be soldiers fully equipped, and will go out to battle. A sword is used in hand-to-hand combat; this is for dealing with Satan and his terrible host.

Let me illustrate this. When our blessed Lord came face to face with Satan in the wilderness, Satan tempted Him in His hour of weakness and desperate need, and said, "**Command that these stones be made bread.**" The devil began to quote Scripture, as he can, to tempt Him again and again; and each time JESUS had one weapon: "**It is written.**"

Beloved, no greater tribute to the power of the Word of GOD to deliver us from the strategies of the devil could ever be given, than was given by our Lord in the wilderness. He did not say, "I am the SON of GOD; what are you talking to me like that for?" He could have said, "I can turn a mountain into bread, but I don't need it." He could stand on His own feet; He could have cried to GOD, and the devil would have left Him; but He said, "**It is written.**" He leaned on the Word; and when the devil - began to quote Scripture, He said, "**It is written.**"

As Dr. Campbell Morgan once said, "Every dirty heresy has hung its filthy clothes on some peg of Scripture." "**It is written,**" said JESUS, and the devil left Him for a season. It is GOD's Word that destroys the very power with which Satan presented these temptations to Him.

Martin Luther did the same. The devil used to go into his room and say, "You are a sinner." "Yes, I know," said Martin Luther. Then he would begin to name the sin, and Luther said, "Write them on the wall, put them all down on the wall," and the devil would cover the wall with Martin's sins. "When he got tired of that," Luther said, "I said to him one thing: **'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth [me] from all sin,'** and with that, the devil left."

Some people say, "I do not have that experience." Do you know why? We are not doing the work Luther did, that is why. I would to GOD some of us did; but the devil does not bother that much with some of us!

Now I go back to our text. "**The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.**" I am not objecting to commentaries or to concordances and all the rest; but I will tell you that when the devil comes tempting us we cannot say, "Give me an hour; and I will get home and look up my Lexicon!" This is a face-to-face, hand-to-hand action, and we will need that Word in our hearts, in those hours in which the devil comes to torment us.

I am going to tell you something that has been a great comfort to me. On the day this came to me I was discouraged and defeated, and I had a very important engagement to speak to College students - and if there is any crowd of men who can look a hole through you, it is College student! I was sitting in the hotel reading Galatians. I was not looking for anything, and all of a sudden a verse came to me, and it has been a great help to me. Galatians 1:4, "**Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.**"

I said to my self, "GOD is my Father, He is my GOD, it is His will that I be delivered according to the will of GOD." Then I noticed something else: that my blessed Lord, GOD's only SON, not only died for my sins, but He died to deliver me from this present evil world; and at once I had the death of CHRIST to deliver me, and the will of my Father to deliver me - and that seemed to be the sword of the SPIRIT that chased a thousand devils out of that room. What a comforting Word!

James Fraser, of the China Inland Mission, was twenty-seven years old at the time of which I speak, and was in South-West China, all by himself, and he was not getting results. He was praying, he was living for GOD, he was learning the language, he was under discipline, he was walking with GOD, and he was not getting results. Then his prayers began to mock him, and he asked, "Does GOD answer prayer?" And he goes on to say, "This got larger and larger until it tormented me. Does GOD know where I am? Does GOD care? Then the devil came along, and he said, 'What is your expectation; what is the outlook?' and an awful darkness came. The devil said, 'Maybe you have been mistaken; are you sure you are in the will of GOD?'" All the forces of hell seemed to overwhelm him.

A magazine that he had never seen before came to his desk, called *The Overcomer*, and in it he came upon two verses: "**And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it,**" and "**They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.**"

Now, Fraser thought, I am an engineer, I want to see things work. People will tell you after a helpful meeting that such and such a truth is the secret of victory; no, we need different truths at different times. Some will say, "Leave it to the Lord"; others will say, "**Resist the devil,**" but Fraser was finding this Word saying that the Lord Himself resisted the devil, and he said, "I am going to do the same thing; the Lord overcame the devil, and I am going to do the same thing."

Then awful thoughts came to him, wicked thoughts. Here is no lounging missionary, no spindle-chair Christian; he is out there, in paganism, alone, and look what he does. He says, "Evil thoughts came to me while I was preaching."

"I went down to a gully on the hillside, one of my prayer haunts, and there I took my determined resistance to Satan; I claimed deliverance on the ground of my Redeemer's victory. I went back to Colossians and I said, '**triumphing over them**'; I went back to the Book of Revelation and I said, 'We will conquer in His precious blood.' I shouted responses to the devil and all of his thoughts."

Here is a man wrestling; here is a man in the clutches of the powers of darkness, and he is fighting his way out with the sword of the SPIRIT. "The obsession," he says, "collapsed like a pack of cards. James 4:7 is in the Bible: '**Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**'"

Our Lord spoke with a loud voice when he called Lazarus to come out of the grave; He cried with a loud voice when he was on the Cross. In times of conflict I have been going out, and, being alone, have talked to the devil in a loud voice. The sword of the SPIRIT brings me victory.

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. . . . Wherefore take unto yourself the whole armour of God. . . and the sword of the Spirit."

One word of comfort, and I shall finish. 1 John 2:14, "**I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.**" McLaren says it is in the past tense - "**ye have overcome the wicked one,**" because, he said, if the Word of GOD abides in us, it is an absolute certainty that we are going to overcome the evil one.

What if we don't say, "**Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee**"? I will tell you. Every soldier of my country in an imprisonment camp to-day, who cannot help it; every captive soldier of your land also, is of no use any more in the war in which we are engaged: and a Christian who is in the power of sin is of no use to the Lord JESUS.

- He cannot join as an ally,
- He cannot wield his sword,
- He cannot witness with power,
- He cannot pray prevailingly,
- He cannot win souls to CHRIST,
- He cannot be an ambassador.

What an awful thing! Years ago my friend Peter Joshua, son of Caleb Joshua, of the Welsh Revival, met one of the greatest revivalists of the early twentieth century, on the streets of London. He had not seen him for fifteen years, and he said, "I am so glad to see you." Peter Joshua said, "Would you not like to come up to my hotel room, and have a time with the Word, and prayer?" And this man, once so powerfully used of GOD, said to him, "No; I am on my way to the theatre. These things have no interest for me to-day."

He was a soldier-incapacitated, a castaway. May GOD deliver us from Satan's imprisoning in such a way as this, when we are so desperately needed.

~ end of chapter 4 ~
