



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
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The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Excursus: The Nature of the Word

The Word of God is a preached word. It must be spoken. As it is spoken, the Word does stuff. For example, in the Old Testament, the word תורה (i.e., Torah) is used for God's Word, especially referring to the whole of the Pentateuch. With that said, "The noun torah comes from the verb, yarah, that means to throw something, a javelin, say, so that it hits its mark. The word that hits its mark is torah." Within the New Testament the penetrating nature of the Word is also shown in Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Peterson) Take special note the words 'active, sharp, piercing' in Hebrews 4:12. Indeed, the Word "breaks through and wounds. It takes away every ground of trust and ascribes redemption solely to the blood of Christ; it pricks and wounds the soul. This is a health-bestowing wound, for these weapons kill in order to make alive." What this means is that God's Word has aim. "God's word is not a reference book in a library that we pull off the shelf when we want information. There is nothing inert or bookish in these words. God's words,

creating and saving words every one, hit us where we live. . . . These words get inside us and work their meaning in us." (Peterson) God's word is charged with power – it is fearfully alive to work positive spiritual good, often in ways that pastors and preachers do not intend but always in ways that the Holy Spirit wills to bring forth fruit.

Keep in mind that what makes God's Word different from other words is that God's Word is inspired, whereas other words are not divinely inspired. "The Holy Spirit wills to be present with his power in the Word and to work through it." "The Holy Spirit wills to be efficacious and to give strength, power, and ability through the Word." (FC:XI) Yes, the proclamation of the Word and the hearing of the Word "would be in vain, and no conversion would result from these efforts, if the power and action of the Holy Spirit were not added to them. For the Spirit enlightens and converts hearts through the Word." (Pieper) Otherwise stated, due to inspiration, God's Word possesses divine

properties and divine attributes. "This divine power does not operate outside or alongside the Word, but through the Word and therefore inheres in the Word." (Pieper) Consequently, the effectiveness of God's Word is its ability to affect man in ways that exceed human power, namely repentance, and faith. Non-Biblical words do not have the power to pierce a person inwardly to transform these changes, for they are not inspired words.

The images of a javelin, sword, and a hammer are all very appropriate for the Word of God. These images capture this living, active, aiming, delivering, penetrating, and effectual nature of the Word. The Word is not a mere motionless walking stick that is held in the hands of mankind. Instead, it is the "nature of Scripture to be 'political,' that is, formative. It is the nature of Scripture to want power over our lives." (Willimon) Yes indeed, God tears us down that He might heal us through the Word. He strikes us down so that He will bind us through the Word. He takes us to hell to bring us to heaven, and He kills to bring life. That said, God does not merely kill for the sake of killing, His killing is not separate from His bringing to life. God kills 'so that' he may bring to life; He strikes down 'so that' he can bind up. Hence, He acts upon mankind through His divine effectual Word granting repentance and creating faith; it is a motif of death and resurrection.

As Christians we come to worship to be ever reformed by the Word. Do not fall into the temptation of gathering together for just social or fellowship reasons. Without the Word the church is no different than a common rotary club. It has even been asserted that a church untested by the Word of God "can be demonic." (Willimon) This is not who we are! We are a people of the Word, people shaped by the Word. Therefore, know this, when you go to church do not be surprised or even offended when the Word of God comes at like a javelin, penetrating your ears, hearts, lives, and narratives. Expect an invasion of the Word unto repentance and faith, for this is the nature of the Word and this is good. We need to be gifted repentance and faith daily!

Thank God that His Word breaks through and wounds the soul; a health-bestowing wound. It "takes away every ground of trust and ascribes redemption solely to the blood of Christ." (Luther) This is praiseworthy, for it truly kills in order to make alive.

