Double-Edged Sword?

"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." (Hebrews 4:12, ESV)

Why a two-edged sword?

The writer of Hebrews could simply have said that the Word of God is sharper than any sword. The picture would have worked. Swords are sharp. They cut. They penetrate. Yet Scripture deliberately tells us that the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword.

That description appears too often in Scripture to ignore.

Ehud made himself *"a sword with two edges, a cubit in length"* and concealed it beneath his clothing. (Judges 3:16, ESV). The psalmist describes the people of God with *"the high praises of God in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands."* (Psalm 149:6, ESV). Then Hebrews uses the same image to describe the penetrating power of the Word of God.

A two-edged sword cuts from either side. Unlike a blade sharpened along only one edge, it presents a cutting surface in either direction. It can penetrate deeply and do its work without depending upon which side of the blade meets its object.

That is precisely where Hebrews takes us. The Word of God pierces. It divides. It discerns. It reaches beyond outward appearance into *"the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* Nothing within us lies beyond its reach. The following verse makes the point even more sobering: *"And no creature is hidden from his sight."* (Hebrews 4:13, ESV).

Then John sees something extraordinary in Revelation.

The risen Christ appears before him, and *"from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword."* (Revelation 1:16, ESV). When Christ addresses the church at Pergamum, He identifies Himself as *"him who has the sharp two-edged sword."* (Revelation 2:12, ESV).

Notice where the sword is.

It is not hanging from Christ's side. It is not held in His hand. It comes from His mouth.

The sword is His Word.

That makes Paul's description of the Christian's armor especially significant. Among all the defensive pieces of armor, the believer is given one weapon: *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."* (Ephesians 6:17, ESV).

But how does a Christian wield such a sword?

The sword of the Spirit is not wielded merely by owning a Bible, carrying one to church, or placing one on a table. The Word must be brought to bear. It must be spoken, proclaimed, taught, confessed, remembered, and applied.

Jesus demonstrated this in the wilderness. Each time Satan tempted Him, Jesus answered with the Word of God: *"It is written."* The sword came from His mouth.

There is an important distinction. When the sword proceeds from Christ's mouth in Revelation, He speaks with His own divine authority. When the believer speaks Scripture, the authority does not belong to the believer. The power is not in the person speaking. It belongs to the Word being spoken.

We do not forge the sword. We do not sharpen it by our eloquence. We do not make it effective by the force of our personality. God has already provided the weapon, and the Spirit has placed it in our hands.

Perhaps, then, the question is not whether Christians possess the sword of the Spirit.

Perhaps the question is whether we ever take it out of its sheath.

Just a thought.

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