

Introduction

One of my enjoyments in life is funny words. Let me give you a sampling of those: *bloviate* (brag); *gongoozle* (stare at); *gobsmacked* (surprised); *lickspittle* (toady); *slangwhanger* (loud abusive speaker); and *smellfungus* (perpetual pessimist). Those are funny words and I enjoy learning them. But I'm not preaching about funny words today. I'm preaching about wonderful words instead. So let's turn to our text and learn what those are and how we should respond to them.

Jesus' Words Are not Dogma or Law

Verses 26-58 record what Jesus taught a crowd of people that included many professed disciples of His. He claimed that He was the bread from heaven and that they must eat of Him to have life. He was speaking metaphorically. He meant that they must know Him intimately in order to live well. That claim of His alienated many of His disciples (verses 60-61) who abandoned Him because of it (verse 66). They were taken back by the expanse of His claim and judged Him not worthy of it.

Jesus responded in verses 62-63. He declared in verse 62 that they would one day grasp His worthiness – when they saw Him ascending to **"where He was before."** His resurrection and ascension, in other words, would confirm His worthiness. He then asserted in verse 63 that they'd also confirm **"the words that I have spoken to you."** He was referring particularly to His words in verses 26-58 and generally to all His words. When I say all His words I mean all the principles, precepts, and propositions in the Bible, which He Himself wrote.

Those are His words and in verse 63, He teaches us what they are. They're two things, both of which we need to know.

Jesus' Words Are Spirit

First, His words are **"spirit."** The word **"spirit"** connotes what is

non-material or unnatural. It conveys that Jesus' words have an effect that the words of no one else do. They have a supernatural effect. Think of it in terms of "**seizing**." Normally, hearers seize the words that are spoken or written to them. But Jesus' words seize the hearers. They grip them. They impact their mental, emotional, and volitional processes in ways that the words of no one else do.

There's a primary reason they do. It's because Jesus never leaves His words alone. He is always present with them. He unceasingly directs His thoughts and will to them. Or to use a popular idiom, He always gives us a piece of His mind and of His personality in and through them. The result is that His mind touches our mind and His personality touches our personality as we engage His words. That in turn transforms the persons we are and the lives we live. Innumerable followers of His, past and present, have experienced what I just described.

John Bunyan wrote a book titled *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. In it, he recounted some of his experiences with Jesus' words. In one of those, he was musing on Hebrews 2:14-15. He explained what happened as he was this way: "**I thought that the glory of these words was so weighty on men, that I was both once and twice ready to swoon as I sat, yet not with grief and trouble but with solid peace and joy.**" Notice the terminology he used to describe the effects of Jesus' words, "**swoon**" and "**weighty**." Jesus' words seized him, generating what he called "**solid peace and joy**."

Countless others have had similar and ongoing experiences like Bunyan's. They illustrate that Jesus' words are inherently and unnaturally powerful. They seize us in a supernatural way, transforming our persons and lives in the process. They are "**spirit**."

Jesus' Words Are Truth

But they aren't just "**spirit**." According to verse 63, they're "**life**" as well. That means that they substantially link us with real life. They do so in two ways.

One is that they're relevant. They address life issues with which people have been struggling for at least three thousand years.

The ancient Greeks, for instance, despised all manual labor. They considered it so dishonorable and debasing that only the lowest of the low, slaves, should do it. Jesus spoke to that issue through Paul in Ephesians 6:7 and Colossians 3:23, stunning the world with His words.

Work represents the kind of issues that His words address. They're the ones that concern people the most in day-to-day life: influencing people for good, responding to evil, defending law suits, being good parents or spouses, handling criticism, competition, rejoicing when others outshine us, carrying on conversations, laziness, and much more. Jesus' words speak to the issues that matter most to people. They're relevant.

They link us to real life in a second way. They're true. Or to say it differently, they're "**perfect sanity.**" That's profound. Jesus' words are perfect sanity, which means they come into our real world with a reality that's as real as it is. Please grasp the magnitude of what I just said. It's vital and precise. His words are just as real as our real world is.

Christian grandparents I know have an evil daughter-in-law. She wants her out of town parents, not them, to be the "**'A' grandparents**" and so, rarely lets them see their grandchildren. She also poisons their grandchildren's minds, saying bad things about them that are untrue. Listen to two statements. #1 – What the daughter-in-law does is evil. How many of you agree that statement is 100% true. It is! #2 – The best way to overcome that evil is with good. Jesus said that in Matthew 5:44 and Romans 12:21. How many of you agree that statement is 100% true? It is! My point is this. That the best way to overcome evil is with good is just as real as that evil itself exists in our world.

What is so about those particular words of Jesus is so about all of His words. They're just as real as our real world is. They're actually pictures of reality. They reflect how things really are in our universe, our world, and in human life itself. Thus, when we understand and conform to them, we're understanding and conforming to reality. That

necessarily means that when we understand and conform to them, we considerably benefitted. But when we don't understand and conform to them, we're considerably harmed.

We now know the nature of Jesus' words. They're spirit and life. They supernaturally affect us and are relevant and true.

Believe Jesus' Words

According to verse 64 though, many of His professed followers in the first century didn't believe that. And the fact is that many today don't either. They don't take His words to be spirit and life.

They take them to be something else instead – dogma and/or law. Dogma is what we have to *believe* whether we actually believe it or not. Law is what we have to *do* whether it's actually good for us or not. I say **"have to"** believe or do because we think God will punish us if we don't.

Dogma and law have a common thread. Both view Jesus' words as **"arbitrary"** and unrelated to real life. They make day-to-day life more difficult, sometimes even dangerous, but He requires us to believe and obey them anyway.

Let's go back to the Christian grandparents and their evil daughter-in-law. They came to me, explained the situation, and asked my advice. I answered by quoting Jesus, **"Overcome evil with good."** I told them to start with that general guiding principle and then descend into the details of it as it applied to their situation. I'll never forget the grandfather's incredulous reply, **"Get real!"**

His reply reflects what he thinks about those particular words of Jesus. They're dogma or law. They're arbitrary and unrelated to real life. They simply don't work. In fact, they'd make his life harder not easier, his situation worse not better, if he followed them. He believes that those words of Jesus and others are not spirit and life.

Hopefully, however, we believe they are. We experience them quite differently than those who believe they aren't if we do. Knowing Jesus is utterly lovely and competent, we don't take His words to be something

that we have to believe and do because God will punish us if we don't. Instead, we take them to be something so beneficial that we'd be fools to disregard them. We're enthusiasts, therefore, when it comes to them. We eagerly do two things, both of which I'm going to explain.

Hang on and Live by His Words

First, we "**hang on**" Jesus' words as we say it. That's what we do isn't it when we consider words to be reality and vital information. We hang on them.

After my wife Jill's colon cancer surgery, we kept an appointment with an oncologist, Dr. Knight. We believed something as he was speaking to us. It's that he was competent about cancer, which made his words reality and vital information. So we listened intently to everything he said in order to understand it.

It's the same with Jesus. That His words are spirit and life necessarily means that they're absolute reality and the most vital of all information. And if we believe that, we'll hang on them. We'll listen intently to everything He says in order to understand it.

We do that, as a practical matter, by carefully interpreting the words, sentences, and verses in the Bible. I don't mean just reading them as in reading the Bible through in a year. I mean carefully interpreting them in order to understand them. The *Biblesmith* study under the *Disciples 'R' Us* tab on our church's website will assist you with that. So will paying attention to good sermons, Sunday school lessons, books, and articles that competently interpret Biblical texts. That's how we hang on Jesus' words.

If we believe His words are spirit and life and thus reality and vital information, we eagerly do a second thing. We live by them.

Unfortunately, many if not most regular church attenders don't. Consider a sampling of what Jesus says. Overcome evil with good. Receive criticism with gratitude and joy. Live simply not extravagantly. Forgive those who wrong our loved ones. Eliminate anger from life.

Don't desire or seek the praise of others. Don't be insulted when we're slighted. And don't gossip. Those are words of Jesus but the fact is that a large percentage of regular church attenders have little or no intention of living by them.

I remember something a long-established Christian told me after a school teacher wronged her daughter: **"I'll forgive you for hurting me. I won't forgive you for hurting my children."** Jesus says she should, but she doesn't. It isn't because she tries and fails. It's because she doesn't even intend to. And she doesn't intend to because, like many, she believes those words of Jesus and others aren't spirit and life.

But many of us believe they are. Consequently, we live by them. Because Jill and I trusted Dr. Knight's competence, we hung on his every word. We then went out and lived by his every word. We did literally everything he told us to do. Again, it's the same with Jesus. If we trust His competence and character, we hang on His every word. We then go out and live by His every word. I mean by that, we intend to do literally everything He says and try and train our best to do it.

I hung on Jesus' words, for instance, in Philippians 2:5. I carefully interpreted and applied them. I should root for my competitors. As foreign, as unnatural, as doing that was to me, I've trained and am trying my best to do it. I don't live by those words of His because I have to. I live by them because I want to. I know I'd be a fool not to.

Conclusion

I leave you in closing with the words of an old hymn that go like this: **"Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life. Let me more of their beauty see, wonderful words of life. Words of life and beauty, teach me faith and duty: beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life."** You and I should hang on and live by Jesus' words because they're precisely what that hymn says they are. They're wonderful words. They're spirit and life!