

This guy Thorpe was apparently pretty good at doing impressions, and he knew all of Whitefield's mannerisms and gestures, so he eagerly volunteered to take a turn. He was chosen as the final contestant, so he got to watch the first three guys perform.

Nothing was deemed sacred. Blasphemy, buffoonery, bad language, and base morals all flowed as freely as the beer. Everyone, including John Thorpe, was laughing hysterically, completely untroubled by this open display of sacrilege.

When Thorpe's turn came, he stood in the center of this pub and crossed his eyes and waited till the laughter died down. Then he brashly announced, "**I shall beat you all.**"

Someone handed him a Bible, and it fell open to Luke 13. His eyes went straight to verse 3: "**Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**" He began to read the text aloud, fully intending to deliver a humorous message mocking Whitefield's style. But as soon as he read the text aloud, Whitefield's biographer (John Gillies) says, his mind was affected in a very extraordinary manner. The sharpest pangs of conviction now seized him, and conscience denounced tremendous vengeance upon his soul. In a moment he was favored with a clear view of his subject . . .

And as he began to preach on that text, the whole pub fell silent. Thorpe said later that his mind was filled with sudden insight on that text, he delivered a full sermon on it, not as a burlesque, but with genuine gospel passion.

**The Word of God had pierced John Thorpe's own heart, and when he finished his sermon, he sat down, trembling and broken-hearted. In John Gillies' words, "Instead of entertaining the company, [that sermon] spread a visible depression, and [by the time Thorpe finished speaking, there was] a sullen gloom upon every countenance."** John Thorpe himself later testified that when he read that text and it gripped his conscience, his hair stood erect. He confessed the truth of the gospel and gave his heart to Christ right there in that pub. His aim was to taunt and ridicule, but he accidentally converted himself! Or rather, **the power of the Word of God penetrated his soul and cut him to the heart. He became a preacher himself and quite an effective evangelist, because he knew firsthand the power of the Word of God to penetrate hardened hearts.**

Look at the text again. "**The Word of God pierces to the very depths, [even] to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**" It probes to the deepest recesses of the heart, no matter how hardened or how closed the heart might be. In fact, only Scripture, the Word (Jesus) can do that.



**"For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Hebrews 4:12**

### "THE WORD OF GOD IS PRECISE"

Notice how this verse describes the ministry of the Word of God as precision surgery, not wanton destruction. Now, obviously, surgery is ordinarily done with a scalpel, not a sword. Scalpels are small and precise, and razor sharp—just like the Word of God: "**Sharper Than Any Two-edged Sword.**" The surgeon uses a scalpel with great care to cut precisely, sometimes dividing fine layers of tissue with remarkable precision.

That is exactly what is described here. The Word of God divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and it is capable of great discrimination. It discerns "**The Thoughts And Intentions Of The Heart**"—something that is not even visible to the human eye.

We cannot look upon the heart—the innermost part of the human soul. First Samuel 16:7: "**Man Looks On The Outward Appearance, [Only] The LORD Looks On The Heart.**"

Did you know that you cannot even correctly discern the thoughts and intents of your own heart? Jeremiah 17:9: "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?**" We are all subject to self-deception and blindness when it comes to judging our own hearts. But the Word of God reveals what is really in our hearts, and it correctly assesses our thoughts and intentions. It shows our motives and our imaginations for what they really are. And that is why the Word of God is capable of such precision surgery—even in the deepest recesses of our souls.

Just like the "**Joints And Marrow**" of your bones and the "**Thoughts And Intentions**" of your heart, these things are so inextricably linked that it's impossible to separate them without destroying one or the other. They aren't separate entities that exist apart from each other. They aren't distinct human faculties. There is overlap and interdependence. But the Word of God is precise and exact, and it cuts with painstaking accuracy. It divides what cannot otherwise be divided. **It is sharper than any two-edged sword, and yet more precise than any surgeon's scalpel.**



### "JESUS PIERCED THE DARKNESS"

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only Son, Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14



Word of God is not a dead Word or an ineffective Word. It has life in it. And because it has life in it, it produces effects. There is something about the Truth, as God has revealed it, that connects it to God as a source of all life and power. God

loves His Word. He is partial to His Word. He honors His Word with His presence and power. If you want your teaching or witness to have power and produce effects, stay close to the revealed Word of God. And if you're using a modern version, it will say "**The Word of God is living.**" That's the correct sense. It speaks of vitality, life, activity, energy. **The Word of God has a life-force that is unlike any merely human book. It is not only alive; it has the power to impart life to those who are spiritually dead.** Jesus said in John 6:63: "**The Words That I Have Spoken To You Are Spirit And Life.**"

### "THE STORY OF A MAN WHOSE HEART WAS PIERCED BY GOD'S WORD"



Preacher of the  
"Great Awakening."

There's a story in the biography of George Whitefield about a man named John Thorpe, who was a bitter opponent of everything that is holy. By some accounts, he was a member of the "**Hell-Fire Club.**" That was a

notorious society of free-thinkers and pagans that flourished in England and Ireland in the 18th century. Members of the Hell-Fire Club would gather in mobs to commit open acts of deliberate public blasphemy. They would also meet clandestinely in private gatherings to commit secret acts of gross immorality. They reveled in all kinds of wickedness, and they absolutely hated Christianity.

They were the evil counterpart to the "**Holy Club.**" That was the nickname of a fairly small group of young college men who had been organized at Oxford under the leadership of John and Charles Wesley. That name was pinned on them by other students who despised what they stood for. It was meant to be derogatory, but that's what the original Methodists came to be known as: The Holy Club. So you had "The Holy Club" and the "Hell-Fire Club" at opposite extremes of English culture.



THE HOLY CLUB

George Whitefield was drawn to the "**Holy Club**" (out of curiosity at first) while he was a student at Oxford, and it was there that he began to study Scripture and read Christian literature, and it wasn't long before he was converted. And of course he became arguably the greatest preacher of the 18th century and one of the greatest preachers of all time,

preaching to untold thousands on both sides of the Atlantic.

When it was clear that the preaching of Whitefield and the Wesleys was having an impact in British culture, the Hell-Fire Club hammered them with opposition.

Now, I should mention that George Whitefield was not a physically attractive man. He had a great voice, but he wasn't much to look at. For one thing, he had severely crossed eyes. Contemporary woodcut images of him sometimes show his crossed eyes, and it always looks cartoonish. You might think the artists were deliberately exaggerating to make him look funny, but I don't think so. Evidently his eyes were profoundly and permanently crossed. (One writer, making fun of him, said his eyes were perpetually making the sign of the cross.) Whitefield's enemies nicknamed him "Dr. Squintum."

That kind of mockery seemed to follow Whitefield everywhere he went, and he handled it magnanimously and courageously. When he opened his mouth, people listened and were captivated, so he just kept preaching. And everywhere he went, people were converted under the power of the Word of God. But in every town, it seems, there were these groups of young ruffians, hooligans, and members of the hell-Fire Club who opposed him. They would accost him on the streets, ridicule him publicly, and do anything they could think of to try to make his ministry a reproach.



John Thorpe

When Whitefield came to the town of Rotherham, in central England, **John Thorpe and a little gang of young, rebellious thugs decided to make a burlesque of his ministry in a crowded pub.** They were drinking and laughing, and making fun of Whitefield and Christianity in general. And someone suggested they should have a contest to see who could mimic George Whitefield the best. Four guys would open the Bible at random and preach a mock-sermon on whatever text he opened to.