

The Sword of the Spirit

Ephesians 6:17b

Can you imagine a soldier carefully putting on each piece of armor to protect himself and then going into battle without a weapon? That would not only be stupid, it could be suicidal! While the other pieces of armor that we have considered were necessary to protect the soldier from the enemy's attacks, they could not kill the enemy. Only the sword could do that. The soldier without a sword wouldn't last a minute if the enemy got close enough for hand to hand combat. The sword shows us that Satan doesn't just shoot at us from a distance. He also moves in close to kill. To survive and conquer, we must take and be able to use the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

In Roman times there were two types of swords. One we mentioned last week was the large broadsword, swung with both hands to hack at the enemy. The other (mentioned here in verse 17) was a shorter, two-edged sword used to cut and thrust. Peter used this type of sword to swing at Malchus cutting off his ear (Matt. 26:51).

Paul identifies this sword as coming from the Holy Spirit and then adds that it is the Word of God. This reminds us of Hebrews 4:12, **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."**

In that verse from Hebrews, the author uses the Greek word *logos*, which is used mostly to refer to the written Word. John also uses *logos* to refer to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Here in Ephesians 6, Paul uses a different word, *rhema*, which usually has the nuance of the spoken word. But of course, the spoken word is the written Word used verbally and precisely to apply to a specific situation. In other words, the written Word is the basis for the specific sword thrusts of the spoken word. Paul's point is that the church must be armed with and use Scripture to defeat the enemy.

1. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.

This teaches us two things:

A. The Holy Spirit is the source of the Word.

By **"the sword of the Spirit,"** Paul means that the sword *comes from* the Spirit. He originated the sword, which Paul further identifies as the Word of God. Paul tells us the same thing in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."** The phrase *inspiration of God* is literally, *God-breathed*. God's Spirit breathed out the Word through human authors, using their unique styles and personalities. But the final result is that the written Word came to us from God.

Peter put it this way (2 Pet. 1:20-21), **"knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."** The Holy Spirit *moved* the human authors of scripture like the wind fills a sail and moves a sailboat.

One writer said the authorship of the Bible is so wonderful. In the Bible "there are words written by kings, by emperors, by princes, by poets, by sages, by philosophers, by fishermen, by statesmen, by men learned in the wisdom of Egypt, educated in the schools of Babylon and trained at the feet of rabbis in Jerusalem. It was written by men in exile, in the desert, in shepherd's tents, in green pastures and beside still waters. Among its authors we find a tax-gatherer, a herdsman, a gatherer of sycamore fruit. We find poor men, rich men, statesmen, preachers, captains, legislators, judges and exiles. The Bible is a library full of history, genealogy, ethnology, law, ethics, prophecy, poetry, eloquence, medicine, sanitary science, political economy and the perfect rules for personal and social life. And behind every word is the divine author God Himself."

Because the Bible comes to us from the Holy Spirit, it is as reliable as God is. It is inconceivable that the God of truth would inspire errors and contradictions. Before we leave this point, I should also point out that the Holy Spirit always works in conjunction with the Word. If people claim that impressions they have are from the Spirit, but those impressions contradict Scripture, they are deceived. The Spirit inspired the Word. He could never contradict the Word.

Also, when we come to the Word, we need the Spirit to give us insight and understanding. To study the Word academically may yield information, but not the power that we need to overcome Satan's schemes. Since the Spirit is the source of the Word, we must rely on Him when we come to the Word.

Since the Word comes from the Spirit, it is powerful, being the very Word of God.

God's spoken word is powerful. As Hebrews 11:3 states, **"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word [*rhema*] of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."** God spoke and the entire universe came into existence out of nothing!

The picture of the Word as a sword implies its power. The sword wasn't used in battle to tap your enemy on the shoulder or to hold up to threaten him. It was used to kill him! God's Word is powerful to put to death the temptations that Satan puts in front of us.

Thus the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. The Spirit is the source of the Word and therefore the Word is powerful. The *rhema* of God especially refers to God's Word as applied to a particular situation. Paul is talking about the skillful, careful application of God's written Word to a particular situation. We are not to fight the enemy with our own ideas or strength, but with God's inspired Word, properly understood and applied.

Defensively, we use the Word to ward off the temptations and attacks of the enemy. Our primary example here is Jesus Himself, who used God's Word defensively against the devil when he tempted Him. Matthew 4 records Jesus' temptations by the devil. Jesus was hungry from fasting, so the devil said (Matt. 4:3), **"If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."** Jesus answered (Matt. 4:4), **"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"** He was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

Next, Satan took Jesus up to the pinnacle of the temple and suggested that He throw Himself down. This time (Matt. 4:6), Satan himself quoted from Psalm 91:11-12, **"'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"** The devil left out a

phrase, **“to guard you in all your ways,”** but the sobering point is, Satan knows Scripture and can use it wrongly against you to tempt you. Be on guard! Jesus rebutted the devil with Deuteronomy 6:16 (Matt. 4:7), **“It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”**

Satan wasn’t through. He took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Then he said (Matt. 4:9), **“All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”** Jesus again came back quoting Scripture (Matt. 4:10, citing Deut. 6:13), **“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”**

Every time, Jesus responded with a specific, appropriate Scripture, which He knew verbatim from memory (from Deuteronomy, no less!). Jesus didn’t say, “I know that there’s a verse somewhere about that. Just a minute while I get my concordance!” He knew the Word and used it to ward off Satan’s temptations. We should do the same.

Offensively, use the Word in preaching, in counseling, and in evangelism.

God’s Word must have the primary place in the preaching and teaching of the church.

Satan repeatedly attacks the church by trying to get it to diminish the preaching of the Word. Paul warned Timothy about this danger. After commanding him to preach the Word, he explained (2 Tim. 4:3-4), **“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”**

Every great revival in church history has been sustained by a return to the expository preaching of God’s Word. If there is evangelism only, without solid teaching, converts will not endure. The seed of the gospel will be choked out by the weeds of the world. If you ever need to look for a new church, put expository preaching of the Word at the top of your criteria.

God’s Word is sufficient to help people with life’s problems.

The Bible claims to be adequate to equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and to give us everything that we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Our basic problems can all be traced back to sin. Only God’s Word tells us how to deal with our sins in a godly manner. Use it to give godly counsel.

God’s Word is powerful in the conversion of sinners. Romans 10: 17 **‘So then FAITH comes by HEARING & HEARING by the [RHEMA] WORD of GOD.’**

If you want to see sinners converted, get them into God’s Word. One of the most effective gospel “tracts” that you can give to anyone is the Gospel of John. After all, John (20:31) plainly stated his purpose in writing his gospel: **“but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”**

Have you memorized enough verses so that you can lead someone to faith in Christ when you don’t have a New Testament with you?

So, the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. Use the sword both defensively and offensively against the enemy. Finally,

To use the sword of the Spirit effectively, saturate yourself with the Word by every possible means.

To use the Word effectively, you must know it well.

The Word is not a magic charm to put on your coffee table or to carry a pocket version for good luck. You must know how to wield it in battle. John MacArthur (*ibid.*, p. 370) writes, "Unlike the shield, however, which gives broad and general protection, the sword can deflect an attack only if it is handled precisely and skillfully. It must parry the enemy weapon exactly where the thrust is made." As we've seen, Satan knows how to use the Word wrongly for his own evil purposes. So we must know how to use it rightly in each situation.

How do we TAKE the Sword of the Spirit?

1. *First, we must READ the Word.* How can anyone claim to be a Christian who does not read the Bible? Read your Bible daily. Read it repeatedly. Read it consistently. Read it comprehensively. You must, you **MUST** read the Word daily or Satan will eat your lunch.

2. *Second, we must MEDITATE on the Word.* This means reading slowly, thinking about what it says. When Billy Graham was asked what he would do differently if he had his life to live over again, he said, "**Spend more time in the Bible.**" Ps.1:2 speaks of the man who is "**blessed.**" It says, "**His delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.**"

3. *Third, we must STUDY the Word.* Paul wrote to Timothy, "**Be diligent [study] to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth**" (2 Tim.2:15).

4. *Fourth, we must MEMORIZE the Word.* Ps.119:11 says, "**Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!**" Memorizing the Word is like carrying a concealed weapon against the devil! Hit him with it!

Conclusion

Scottish pastor Thomas Guthrie wrote: "**The Bible is an armory of heavenly weapons, a laboratory of infallible medicines, a mine of exhaustless wealth. It is a guidebook for every road, a chart for every sea, a medicine for every malady and a balm for every wound. Rob us of our Bible and our sky has lost its sun**" Amen! You've got a sword. Use it against the enemy!