

The Sword of the Spirit – Part 1
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I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Well, we're going to press on today in wrapping up the book of Ephesians, continuing on in our study of the armor of God in chapter 6. As we begin, by way of context, we remember that Paul is giving us his final instructions on how we can walk worthy of the calling we've received. And he tells us, beginning in Ephesians 6, verse 10, that in order to walk worthy we must learn to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might...not to try to be who God calls us to be by our own willpower and fleshly effort, but by learning to rely on God in everything, walking by his Spirit, and allowing his power to turn our weakness into great strength.

And Paul tells us that we become strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might by putting on the full armor that God has made available to each person who has trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. When we learn to put this armor on, we become able to resist the most intense attacks of Satan and his forces and can stand firm and immovable in any circumstance by God's power.

So far we've examined the first 5 pieces of armor. First, we've put on the belt of truth, understanding that there is one absolute and unchanging and completely relevant source of truth in this world that contains all the wisdom we need to walk through life and it's the perfect Word of God found in the Bible. We put on the belt when we immerse ourselves in and meditate on the truths of Scripture, allowing them to provide us with all we need to know about life and about what God is like and how to walk with him.

Secondly, we've put on the breastplate of Christ's righteousness, understanding that we are acceptable to God and forever secure in him not because of our perfect performance or our ability to abide by a list of rules, but because Christ's work on the cross is completely sufficient. Having repented of our sin and accepted God's free gift of salvation through faith in Christ, God now sees us as holy and righteous because of Christ. Our heart and vital organs are forever

protected from Satan's daggers when we rest in Christ's work on the cross and not in our own perfect performance.

Thirdly, we've put on the boots of peace, understanding and accepting the amazing truth that having been born again through faith in Christ, we now have forever peace with God. We're no longer people under his constant wrath and disapproval, but his own beloved children whom he loves like a only a perfect Father can...with a steadfast love that never gives up, that disciplines when necessary, and is always for working for our good and for his glory.

Fourthly, we've taken up the shield of faith, choosing to trust God through all the mysteries and complexities and pain of life, knowing that he is completely good and can always, always, always be trusted. We take up the shield as we choose to trust him no matter what we face in life, and when we continually draw near to him to listen, believe what we hear in his Word, and take action on what he directs us to do.

And fifthly, we've put on the helmet of salvation, understanding that having trusted in Christ alone, our salvation is secure and eternal and already accomplished from God's perspective. We saw that in God's view we are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places and absolutely nothing can now separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. This salvation has also given us a permanent new identity as beloved, adopted children of God, members of his household with boldness and confident access to the King. Your identity and true self is no longer an immoral, impure, covetous person who lives in slavery to idolatry, but instead you are, right now, a permanent child of God, holy and dearly loved. And with the God of the universe on our side, eternal salvation and ultimate victory in the battle is guaranteed. These truths, believed in our hearts, are the helmet we need to put on for our battle with the deceiver and accuser who's coming against us with the most evil intent we'll ever encounter in life.

So those are the *Cliff Notes* on our armor of God study so far. Obviously, there's so much more to each of these pieces of armor, and you can review what else we uncovered in the sermon audio or text on our website, but at least this helps get us back to where we left off. Today and next week, we're going focus on the 6th

piece of armor, found in the last half of verse 17 of Ephesians, chapter 6: the sword of the Spirit.

Let's begin by reading verses 10 through 18 of Ephesians, chapter 6:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,...

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word.

II. VERSE ANALYSIS: THE SPIRIT'S SWORD IS THE WORD OF GOD

So let's begin by making a few simple observations about the 2nd half of verse 17: And take...***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*** Fortunately, Paul doesn't leave us in the dark here at all about what the sword is. We don't have to do in depth research and extensive cross reference studies to decipher what Paul means. He states it simply for us: the sword is the word of God. The word of God is the sword given to us for our battle against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

And it's very important to remember, from the context of our passage, that the sword is not to be used against other people, because our battle is not against flesh and blood. We're not to use the sword to try and take down and destroy people we think are our enemies. No, this sword is to be used, instead, to battle

the spiritual forces of wickedness. The enemy isn't people. It's the accuser and deceiver who's using people as his pawns to wage war against God and his church.

Secondly, the sword is not ours...it's the Spirit's sword. The sword is to be used by the power of the Holy Spirit because it's his and only he enable us to use it appropriately and for the purposes for which it was intended. You might compare this to little kids and sharp knives. It's very important, isn't it, to keep knives safely out of reach of toddlers? Were they to gain access to the knife drawer and start experimenting without the direction and guidance of their parents, the results could be deadly.

When my daughter, Hailey, was little, she had watched me use my razor to shave my face several times. She enjoyed seeing my shaving cream beard and liked to watch me clean it all off with the razor. However, one day she found my razor and decided to try and shave her own face. In short order we were alerted to a major problem by blood-curdling screams coming from the bathroom. We rounded the corner only to find a bloody mess in the sink and a very traumatized little girl. Another time she found a monkey-shaped potato peeler and proceeded to peel off the tip of her finger as she played with it.

Sharp things can be extremely dangerous if handled carelessly and without proper supervision and instruction. And this is definitely the case with the Spirit's sword, the word of God. If not handled carefully, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, it can be twisted and cause great damage to ourselves and others. It can be used for selfish purposes or taken out of context to support our own false ideas. It can even be used to try and tear down other people or point out their faults, while we ignore our own.

The importance of handling the sword of the word carefully, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is driven home to us clearly in that well known passage from 2nd Timothy chapter 2, verses 14 to 17. Paul says this:

14 Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word

of truth. 16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene.

In using the sword of the Spirit, we need to use it carefully and wisely and always under the direction of the Holy Spirit. If handled carelessly or used for our own purposes, it can lead many astray, cause division, and spread false teachings like gangrene.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE SWORD

Jesus, during the Last Supper with his disciples, emphasized to them the important role of the coming Holy Spirit in relation to the sword of the word of God. In John chapters 14 through 16, he told them that the Spirit would abide with them forever. He would be taking up residence within them and would stay there not just for a few days or a year, but forever. During this intimate conversation with the disciples, Jesus twice calls this coming Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. Truth is his specialty. Jesus tells them that the Spirit would guide them into all the truth. He would be their personal guide into the word of God and into all forms of truth. He would also teach them all things and help them remember the words of Christ.

The importance of the Holy Spirit in the handling of the sword God has given us for the battle cannot be overstated. God has given us an incredible gift in the Holy Spirit and the Spirit is the One who can make the Word of God come alive to us, enable us to understand it and apply it to our lives, and use it to fight the daily battle we're facing. He can keep us from using it carelessly or for our own selfish purposes. He can seal the truths of Scripture in our minds so that we can recall them later and use them in the battle.

It's so easy for us to just pick up the Bible and start reading with no interaction with the Holy Spirit. So often we just pick it up, read our chapter or 2 for the day and then go about our business. But I'd like to challenge each of us today and every day, to begin all Scripture reading with prayer, pausing for a moment to ask the Spirit to guide us into the truth and show us what God wants us to hear. And as you read, continue interacting with the Spirit and asking for his wisdom as you go. His specialty is guiding you into the truth. He does it infinitely better than anyone else. Don't leave your guide behind and try to figure it all out on your

own. You'll waste a lot of time and miss a lot of amazing things God wants to show you.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A SWORD

So let's think for a minute now about the significance of this specific piece of the armor of God called a sword. If you think about the previous 5 pieces of armor that we've looked at already, they're all focused primarily on defense and protecting the vulnerable parts of our spiritual body as we head into battle. But now, suddenly, an offensive weapon has been introduced. The rest of the armor has been intended for wearing and for passive protection from the enemy's weapons, but this piece is intended for active use, for engaging the enemy, fighting him off and even advancing against him and his forces.

The Greek word translated, "sword," described a short, double-edged sword or dagger. According to the *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, the double-edged sword (or *gladius*) was between 20 and 24 inches long and was a weapon used when close battle was joined with the enemy and the javelin-type weapons were no longer practical. So the Spirit's sword is a weapon used in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy. And it does no good if it stays in its sheath and is just worn like the other pieces of armor. It needs to be taken out and put into action.

I think of the difference between the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit this way: 1) The belt of truth involves putting on confidence in our one sure source of truth in the world, the word of God. We recognize it as the very Word of God and begin to read it and believe it and grow in our knowledge and grasp of it. 2) The sword of the Spirit, on the other hand, is taken up and used when we start putting God's word into action, acting on what God tells us to do, and using it aggressively to fight back against Satan's lies.

We take up the sword when we begin to live and breathe the word of God, using it's truths to counteract the lies and deception that Satan is always trying to bring into our lives. We take up the sword when we begin to boldly speak the word of God into our lives and the lives of others. We take up the sword when we go to battle for the souls that are held captive by the enemy and need to know the freedom that only Christ can bring. And we go to battle by the power of the Holy Spirit united with the power of God's Word.

V. THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT'S SWORD

I'd like to spend a little time now considering what Scripture has to say about this incredible power contained in the Spirit's sword, God's Word. I think we have a major disconnect these days in our thinking when it comes to our practical view of the God's Word, the Bible. If I were to ask the question today: what's the best way to grow your relationship with the Lord and walk with him more closely? I can guarantee that most of you would probably list studying the Bible as one of your top two ways to grow in the Lord. We all know we should do it. We all know the Bible is supposed to be the very Word of God and has everything we need for life and godliness. But do we really believe it in a practical sense? Do we really believe it's as powerful as God says it is? Do we really believe that when we allow the Spirit to guide us into it, we will know God like never before and find what we need to thrive in any circumstance and walk through life in the very power of God?

At youth group lately, we've been encouraging young people over and over again to be in the Word and to allow it to guide and direct their lives...to make sure they're reading it on a regular basis and asking the Spirit to guide them as they read. They know they should. They know that's what preachers say. And I'm sure some of them have taken it to heart and tried to do more regular study. But for many of them and probably for many of you today, knowing you should do it doesn't always translate into actually doing it. Life is busy. The "tyranny of the urgent" often rules supreme. And many times the reading and study we actually fit into our schedule is dry and uninspiring. Or we're just too distracted to really focus on what the word is saying.

Well, as I finish up today, I'd like to share with you a few truths from Scripture that I hope will help transform your perspective on the power of the word of God and what it has to offer us when we approach it carefully and with open hearts, asking the Holy Spirit to be our guide. What awaits in God's Word is more than we can imagine, and I'd like to just whet your appetite as we wrap up today, doing what I can, by God's power, to transform our often lackadaisical attitude toward Scripture reading into a passionate hunger to hear God's voice and know him more. Then next week, Lord willing, we'll look at how we use the sword of the word in battle and what will happen when we learn to use it effectively.

The several verses we're going to examine now are probably all quite familiar to you, but I want to invite you to listen with fresh ears and challenge yourself to actually believe what they have to say. The first one is found in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 12 and uses the same sword terminology we've been studying today. It says this:

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.

Quite a familiar verse, isn't it? But we learn a lot about the power of the Spirit's sword in this verse. First of all, the word of God is living. It's not dead words on a page that have no relevance to the modern world we live in. The word of God is alive and speaking as clearly and relevantly and personally to you today as it has to every other person in history who cared to open its pages. It will never be out-of-date or need updating. The word of God endures forever!

Secondly, it's active. God is using it to speak personally into the lives of each person who is willing to read what it has to say with humility. When we read it regularly with dependence on the Holy Spirit, God will use it to transform our lives and do a powerful work within us.

Thirdly, it's sharper than any two-edged sword. The sharpest human sword in existence can do nothing compared with what God's word can do within us. Our secrets and sins and selfish intentions can't hide from the ability of God's word to uncover them and root them out. We're pretty good at hiding those things from other people, but when we come to God's word in humility and allow it to speak the truth into our hearts, it clearly reveals and sheds light on the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. And we realize we can't hide them from God. He knows it all already.

Maybe that's one of the reasons we easily resist regular reading of God's Word. It can be quite convicting sometimes. And it calls us to change, which we don't always like to do. But it's also filled with hope and joy and great news about who God is and how he loves. And any conviction God brings as we read his word is always meant to bring freedom and not chain us up to despair. The Spirit's sharp,

double-edged sword reveals the secrets of our hearts, but it always shows us the way out and the path to freedom, if we're willing to listen.

The second passage of Scripture I'd like to share with you relating to the power of God's word is found in 1st Corinthians 1, verses 18 to 21. This is what it says:

18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,

***"I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,
AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."***

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

In this passage, we see the power of God's word to bring lost people to eternal life with God. In the Bible we have life-giving truths that have the power to bring the dead to life, move people from God's wrath to God's love, make the foolish wise, and reunite the created with their Creator.

The wise of the world like to mock the simplicity of the gospel message and elevate man's wisdom over God's. They like to think that man has evolved and finally figured out how the world works and how we got here without a Creator. But in doing so, they've become the biggest fools ever and have staked their lives and eternity on the ridiculous idea that millions of years of random chance and accident working with nothingness resulted in all that we see around us today.

Yet in our hands God has placed an amazing book containing his very words that when boldly spoken out and shared can bring life and wisdom to even the most hard-hearted skeptic in the world today. The simple word of what Christ did on the cross for us is the very power of God that we've each been called to share with the world, even when we're mocked or persecuted for it.

God's Word is alive, it's active, it reveals the secrets hiding within people, and it has the power to bring the dead to life. Do you believe that today? May God cultivate in each of us a passionate hunger for it, a commitment to studying it regularly and deeply, and a humility that allows the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us as we do. And may God make us bold in proclaiming it at every opportunity to the people around us. We have a sharp sword that's waiting to be picked up and used by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I want to close today, by reading one final passage with the continued goal of revitalizing our practical view of the power of God's word and of how desperately we need it. It's found in Isaiah chapter 55, verses 8 through 11. This is what it says:

***8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.
9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.
10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.***

You see, you and I don't have within ourselves the big picture and exhaustive knowledge about what's happening in the universe today, what happened in the past, and what will happen in the future. But God does and he's shared with us in the Bible everything we need to know to walk with him and navigate through life successfully...what we need to fight and win the battle...what we need to resist and stand firm through all of life's challenges.

The Word of God is the sword he's given us, and we need it desperately because our view is so limited and we're so easily distracted, led astray and deceived by the enemy. Are you using it effectively? If not, are you ready to pick it up and

start using it? I can promise that it will accomplish what God desires as you know it and learn to use it. Don't let it be on your back burner anymore. Don't let Satan keep you from the incredible gift God has given you in his word. We'll talk more about the practicalities of using the Spirit's sword and what will happen when we do, next week!