

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY FIVE)

“THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT” (PART 2)

EPHESIANS 6:13-17

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

In this evening’s Lesson we will continue our study of the “**Sword of the Spirit**,” the only offensive piece of equipment in the **panoplia**-the “*whole armour*” of God.

In verse **17** Paul writes, “*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*”

The Greek word translated “*sword*” is **machaira**: (**makh’-ahee-rah**), which refers to the Roman **gladius**, a short sword made from iron, about 2 feet, or 60 centimetres long, which was used for close hand-to-hand

combat. Its relatively short and double-edged blade made the **gladius** ideal for cutting and thrusting in the confined space of hand to hand combat on the ancient battlefield. The fact that it was two-edged made it possible for the Roman soldier to strike on either side without changing its position in his hand, and its razor-sharp point could pierce armour.

Greg Laurie has observed that in the listing of a Christian Soldier's spiritual armour, the sword stands alone as an **offensive** weapon. He says, "When I go into battle, I don't beat my enemy with my shield or try to defeat him with my belt or chase him down with my sandal or throw my helmet at him. I pull my sword out of the sheath and I use it. **Ephesians 6:17** tells us to take up the sword of the Spirit. When we are tempted, the most effective weapon that God has given to us as believers is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

Ephesians 6:17 provides insight into the interaction between the Holy Spirit and the believer. Paul says "*And take....the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*" It is the believer who has to take the "sword," and yet it is the Spirit's sword, not the believer's. Merely memorizing or quoting Scripture does not make it effective in our hearts, or in our hands. It is the Holy Spirit alone Who enables the believer to use the Word of God effectively. But **He** will not make **His** sword effective unless **we** take it up.

Paul clearly identifies the **Word of God** as the sword of the Christian soldier. The Greek word translated "*Word*" is **rhéma**: (**hray'-mah**), which refers to any sound produced by the voice which has a definite meaning. It speaks of a specific statement.

Commenting in respect of Paul's use of **rhéma** in this verse, **John MacArthur** says, "The term Paul uses here for word is not **logos**, which refers to **general** statements or messages, but is **rhema**, which refers to **individual** words or **particular** statements. The apostle is therefore not talking here about **general** knowledge of Scripture, but is emphasizing again the precision that comes by knowledge and

understanding of **specific** truths. Like Jesus did in the wilderness, we need to use specific scriptural truths to counter specific satanic falsehoods."

While the Greek word **logos** refers to the **total** utterance of God, or the **complete** revelation of what God has said, the word, **rhéma**, means a **specific** saying of God, a passage or a verse that has special application to an immediate situation. It implies an application of the Word of God to a **specific** experience in our lives. Just as a Roman soldier's **gladius** was applied with skill and precision to a vital area of the body of his enemy, so the Christian soldier must use the Word of God carefully and expertly, applying **specific** principles from it to every situation he or she faces.

The Holy Spirit supplied **rhéma**, is the razor-sharp, two-edged sword which is placed in the hand of the believer. It is the Spirit's specific, well-chosen answer to the attack of the devil. Like a Roman soldier with a **gladius** in his hand, the Spirit brings a flashing, sharp, double-edged Word to our mind to both parry the enemy's sword-thrust, and to strike decisively with a skillful and deliberate thrust of our own.

Martin Luther, the German theologian and seminal figure of the

Protestant Reformation, made the following remarks in a sermon he delivered in 1531:

"Christendom must have people who can beat down their adversaries and opponents and tear off the devil's equipment and armor. Warriors are needed, who are thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures and can contradict all false interpretations and take the sword from false teachers—that is, those very verses which false teachers use, and turn them round upon them so that they fall back defeated.

But as not all Christians can be so capable in defending the Word and articles of their creed, they must have teachers and preachers who

study the Scriptures and have daily fellowship with it, so that they can fight for all the others. Yet each Christian should be so armed that he himself is sure of his belief and of the doctrine and is so equipped with the sayings from the Word of God that he can stand up against the devil and defend himself, when men seek to lead him astray."

Brothers and sisters, the Bible is the **Word of God**. When we open the pages of the Bible and read its contents, we must be conscious that it is God Himself Who is speaking to us! God is the author of the Bible, not the men whom He used to write it. In **2 Peter 1:19-21** we read the following:

19 Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

20 Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination,

21 for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

(New English Translation)

Verse **21** informs us that the men whom God used to write the Bible, were "*carried along by the Holy Spirit.*" They were merely human agents moved by the Holy Spirit Who used their own personalities. Therefore, when we receive the Word of God, we are in a sense receiving God. And when we reject the Word of God, we are rejecting God!

In **2 Timothy 3:16** Paul writes,

16 Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

17 that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work.

(New English Translation)

In this passage, Paul informs Timothy that every part of the Scriptures is inspired by God. The phrase, “*is inspired by God,*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “God-breathed.” The entire Bible, every part of it, represents the “God-breathed,” inspired Word of God. Because it is “God-breathed,” it is absolutely trustworthy. The Bible is our standard for testing everything that claims to be true regarding God, His person and His operations. It is our safeguard against false teaching and our source of guidance for how we should live. It is our only source of knowledge about how we can be saved and be pleasing to God.

After informing Timothy that every part of scripture is “God-breathed,” Paul advises him that the scriptures are, “*useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*” The word of God accomplishes all of this, all by itself.

When we read the Scriptures, we must believe in our hearts that the veritable Word of God is “breathed out” to us in them, and we must apply them to our lives. When we do so, we will be, “*capable and equipped for every good work.*” As **Frank Cooke** rightly stated, “The foundation of every reformation of the Holy Spirit is the Word of God made plain to the people.”

Brothers and sisters, it is the **Word** of God that does the **Work** of God, in the **People** of God, by the **Spirit** of God, for the **Glory** of God.

In order for us to understand the connection between the sword and the Word of God, it is important that we understand the power of God’s Word. In **Hebrews 4:12**, the writer says, “*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart*” (**New English Translation**).

Commenting on this verse, **Warren Wiersbe** made the following remarks:

"In comparing the Word of God to a sword, the writer is not suggesting that God uses His Word to slaughter the saints! ...The Greek word translated 'sword' means 'a short sword or dagger.' The emphasis is on the power of the Word to penetrate and expose the inner heart of man. The Word is a 'discerner' or 'critic'...

Of course, God sees our hearts (**Hebrews 4:13**); but we do not always know what is there (**Jeremiah 17:9**). God uses the Word to enable us to see the sin and unbelief in our own hearts. The Word exposes our hearts; and then, if we trust God, the Word enables our hearts to obey God and claim His promises. This is why each believer should be diligent to apply himself to hear and heed God's Word. In the Word we see God, and we also see how God sees us. We see ourselves as we really are. This experience enables us to be honest with God, to trust His will, and to obey Him."

The author informs us that Word of God is "*living and active.*" The Word of God is a living, breathing entity! It has a "pulse." It has the mind of God in it. As Martin Luther stated, "It speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me." The Word of God is alive, actively alive, and constantly active.

All other books, no matter how well written, are "dead." Because it is alive, the Bible speaks to every person, in every culture, in every country. It addresses them where they are, and informs them of exactly who they are and what is required of them. There is no other book that is as relevant to a person's life as the Bible. Consequently it should be read more than any other book, by every person!

In **1 Peter 1:23-25**, the Apostle writes,

23 You have been born anew, not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

24 For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass; the grass withers and the flower falls off,

25 but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was proclaimed to you.

(New English Translation)

The Bible is active, effective, powerful, productive and capable of causing things to happen!

Not only is the Word of God, *“living and active,”* but it is also, *“sharper than any double-edged sword.”* The Word of God has an incisive and penetrating quality.

Steven J. Lawson says that the Bible is, “the sharpest weapon of any arsenal in the world! It is sharper than any surgeon's scalpel! It is two edged...there is no blunt side. Every book in the Bible is razor sharp. Every chapter is razor sharp. Every verse is razor sharp. Every word can cut deeply. There is not a dull verse in the entire Bible! There's not a blunt chapter in the entire Book...And because it's two edged it cuts both ways-it both comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. It both tears down and it builds up. It both convicts and converts. It has both bad news and good news. It both saves and it damns. It both heals and it hardens. It both makes alive and it puts to death.”

C.H. Spurgeon eloquently comments that, “The revelation of God given us in Holy Scripture is edge all over. It is alive in every part, and in every part keen to cut the conscience, and wound the heart. Depend upon it, there is not a superfluous verse in the Bible, nor a chapter that is useless. The Word of God is so sharp a thing, so full of cutting power, that you may be bleeding under its wounds before you have seriously suspected the possibility of such a thing. You cannot come

near the gospel without its having a measure of influence over you; and, God blessing you, it may cut down and kill your sins when you have no idea that such a work is being done. Yes, when Christ comes, He comes not to send peace on the earth, but a sword; and that sword begins at home, in our own souls, killing, cutting, hacking, breaking in pieces. Blessed is that man who knows the Word of the Lord by its exceeding sharpness, for it kills nothing but that which ought to be killed. It quickens and gives new life to all that is of God; but the old depraved life, which ought to die, it hews in pieces, as Samuel destroyed Agag before the Lord."

The Word of God has the ability to pierce through to the inmost recesses of our spiritual being as a sword cuts through the joints and marrow of the body. It probes the inmost recesses of our spiritual being and brings our subconscious motives to light. **Hebrews 4:12** is not necessarily trying to make a distinction between body components. Rather it is saying that God's Word operates in each department of the spiritual nature and can distinguish between a person's thoughts and intents. The Word of God produces conviction and distinguishes between the emotions of the soul and those of the spirit. The "*sword of the Spirit*" will go through anything. Nothing evades the scope of God's Word. The Word pierces to the depths of the soul and spirit, which represent the innermost facets of our **immaterial** nature, just as the joints and marrow represent the **material** aspect.

Brothers and sisters, when was the last time that we felt the point of the "*sword of the Spirit*" pierce our heart? When was the last time the "*two edged sword*" ripped our consciences, bringing us to our knees in repentance? Does the Word of God still have the ability to convict us, or are we now "*past feeling*" (**Ephesians 4:19**).

In **Hebrews 5:11-14**, we read the following:

11 There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen.

12 You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food.

13 For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right.

14 Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.
(New Living Translation)

Brothers and sisters, the Word of God allows us to distinguish between right and wrong. As a result, we can endeavour to live overcoming lives. But we cannot use the sword of the Spirit without training. Roman soldiers would not be sent into battle without receiving extensive training in the use of the **gladius**. They were first trained using shields made of wicker and swords made of wood. These items were typically about twice the weight of the normal swords and shields. The idea of course, was that if the trainee could use these heavier items skillfully, he would be at an advantage when using the real weapons, which were much lighter by comparison.

After training extensively with the wooden weapons, the soldiers were then paired against each other for further training in combat techniques and moves. The importance of the training was reflected in the food rations given by the Romans. Instructors often received double rations. Trainees who didn't achieve desired levels of skill were given inferior rations until their training evaluations improved.

As believers, we also must train and be skillful in the use of the “*sword of the Spirit*.” In this passage, the author of **Hebrews** informs us that we

must gradually become more knowledgeable and skilled in the Word of God, until we are able to use it to discern good from evil.

This level of skill—this proficiency with the sword of the Spirit—comes “*through training.*” We have to be familiar with the Bible, and we must have our spiritual senses sharpened by it in order to make full use of the weapon God has given us!

The desire to become knowledgeable in God’s Word—skilled in the use of the “sword”—has to come from within. The question is, “Do we appreciate how valuable it is, and do we desire to have a high level of skill in its use?” Perhaps the following passages of Scripture, all reflecting the rendering of the **New English Translation**, will challenge and inspire us in this regard.

Joshua 1:6-8

6 Be strong and brave! You must lead these people in the conquest of this land that I solemnly promised their ancestors I would hand over to them.

7 Make sure you are very strong and brave! Carefully obey all the law my servant Moses charged you to keep. Do not swerve from it to the right or to the left, so that you may be successful in all you do.

8 This law scroll must not leave your lips. You must memorize it day and night so you can carefully obey all that is written in it. Then you will prosper and be successful.

Job 23:11-12

11 My feet have followed his steps closely; I have kept to his way and have not turned aside.

12 I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my allotted portion.

Psalm 1

1 How blessed is the one who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of scoffers.

2 Instead he finds pleasure in obeying the LORD's commands; he meditates on his commands day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted by flowing streams; it yields its fruit at the proper time, and its leaves never fall off. He succeeds in everything he attempts.

4 Not so with the wicked! Instead they are like wind-driven chaff.

5 For this reason the wicked cannot withstand judgment, nor can sinners join the assembly of the godly.

6 Certainly the LORD guards the way of the godly, but the way of the wicked ends in destruction.

Psalm 119:9-11

9 How can a young person maintain a pure life? By guarding it according to your instructions.

10 With all my heart I seek you. Do not allow me to stray from your commands.

11 In my heart I store up your words, so I might not sin against you.

Brothers and sisters, the attitudes and approaches to God's Word highlighted in these passages are the ones that make a skilled spiritual warrior. In order to be effective the Christian soldier needs to demonstrate a hatred for evil, a love for God's Word, and a continual desire to understand and obey it. The more we dedicate ourselves to studying and living our lives according to God's Word, the better we will be at handling the sword of the Spirit on the battlefield.

