

Christian Warfare

The Sword Of The Spirit

Ephesians 6:12-17

12 . . . we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts 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. (Ephesians 6:12-17 (NASB))

Today, we “put on” the sixth and final piece of the “Whole armor of God”, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”. And of the six garments within the armor, this one, “the sword of the Spirit” is said to be the only overtly “offensive” weapon within the armor. All the rest are primarily defensive. And that is true. However, it is also true that God is always the “first cause”, the “initiator” of all that takes place on the earth, and never just a “defensive responder” who waits for men to first do the things they do and then reacts to their behavior. Not at all, and because that is so, all of God’s weaponry is both offensive and defensive, able to meet the need of every circumstance as we “stand firm” against the wiles of the devil.

So then, consider as we take the “sword of the Spirit” in hand, we are now fully equipped and prepared for the battle that is being waged against us by the principalities and powers and evil ones that come at us from out of the realms of darkness. We have “girded our loins with truth”, Christ Himself being our truth. We have “put on the breastplate of righteousness”, Christ’s own righteousness being imputed into our breastplate. We have “shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace”, Christ Himself being the power within and the solid foundation of the “gospel” of salvation and Christ Himself being our peace. And we have taken up the “shield of faith” to extinguish all those flaming darts of the evil one, Christ Himself becoming our shield. Then, we have put on the “helmet of salvation”, the very name, Jesus, signifying that He will bring salvation and save His people from their sins. And then finally today, we are taking up the “sword of the Spirit which is the word of God”.

And with the “sword of the Spirit” in hand, every provision has been made for the protection and the safety of our souls! And please may we understand that that is the purpose of this armor, for the protection of our souls. Because just as it was with the Old Servant, Job, when we come under attack from the “evil one”, our bodies may suffer greatly, but not so our souls. Our souls belong to God and He will preserve them! Here in today’s passage, as we are told to “take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17 (NASB)), we know that just as Jesus gave clarity to His disciples by using “parables”, here He is providing the same visual clarity to our minds with His use of the words “sword of the Spirit”. And being a visual thinker, I immediately identify with His metaphor.

But again, may we remember that such is not so for the mind of an unbeliever. Just as an unbelieving person is not able to “put on” this armor of God, and just as Jesus only intended for His disciples to understand His parables and not the unbelieving onlookers who might be listening, neither is the unbelieving mind able to comprehend the precious truths visualized in these words about the power within God’s word.

These words, instructing us to “take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”, these words are only for committed, seeking believers in Christ. Jesus said, “Let those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, see and listen! And so it is with us. Thanks be to God, as believers, our eyes and our ears are open to see and to hear God and His intention within these words.

A curious thing . . . this expression “the sword of the Spirit” is used only once in these scriptures and that is right here in this passage; and because of that, may we recognize that God has a specially intended purpose for saying it this way.

Note first that the words, “sword of the Spirit”, clearly tell us that the “sword” belongs to the Holy Spirit. In other messages regarding the Holy Spirit, we have learned that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to men, “Spiritual gifts” to each of us, as we receive Christ as our Savior, gifts such as prophecy, and preaching and teaching and serving and helping, and on and on, gifts intended to be used by us for God’s purposes. And according to the words of Romans 11:29, those gifts are irrevocable.

But “Spiritual gifts” are not to be confused with “Spiritual fruits”. The “fruits” belong to the Holy Spirit and are forever His; and they are never actually “given” to you and me. For us to have and to enjoy the “Fruits of the Spirit”, we must have Him, the Holy Spirit, personally abiding “within us”; and He must have free reign within us, not “grieved” and not “quenched”; then and only then will His fruits of love, and joy, and peace, and patience, and kindness, and on and on be displayed within us.

And so it is also with this “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”. This is the sword of the Holy Spirit, His sword, not ours. It is never ours to possess for our own, but is part of who the Holy Spirit is. And like the fruits, to have His sword, we must have Him personally abiding within us. Otherwise, the words within this bible are not much better than an “academic exercise” providing a little knowledge, but not much more. That is why as we listen to the highly learned “Academics” spouting their “wisdom of the wise”, though they may be able to fluently speak the words of these scriptures; their words are meaningless to them. They are nothing more than brilliant fools!

But praise be to God, though you and I may be far less learned, because we have God’s Holy Spirit abiding within us, we can know and understand things far beyond anything we could ever hope or imagine, and we can have wisdom that surpasses all understanding.

And as His “beloved sons and daughters”, we have the special privilege of carrying His sword everywhere we go throughout our day. But here also, may we be cautioned, with privilege comes responsibility? Yes, wielding His “sword of the Spirit” in battle each day truly is a great privilege, saying words that we ourselves would never have dreamed of saying, but the use of His sword also carries with it great responsibility. It is God’s “word”, God’s “sword”! And as a “Christian Soldier” we must learn and know how to use His blessed “sword”, ever so carefully and accurately.

And yes, along with the “imputing” of His righteousness into our souls, the Spirit of Christ will also give us all the help we will need in our learning about all the many things within this “word of God”. But as these words clearly tell us, we must also be diligent to do our part. We must, each day, carefully and intentionally “take up” “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17 (NASB) and we must carefully and intentionally write it upon the pages of our hearts and receive it into our minds, as “food for our souls”. By these “words” of God, we are “sanctified”, set apart for His purposes. And by these words we take part in the sanctifying of others. In Jesus’ prayer for us in John 17, He asked of the Father,

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. (John 17:17 (KJV)

This is the preparation that God both desires and requires of you and me, first for ourselves to be “equipped”, then for us to step on out onto that battlefield each day, covered with His armor and wielding the “sword of the Spirit”.

The equipping, as well as the use of His “sword” is ever and always by His power, but may I say again that it also requires real work from you and me. We are to diligently study and learn these precious words of scripture, daily opening the pages of this

“Book”, allowing the words to flow into our minds, our hearts, our souls and our spirits. If we will surrender ourselves to doing that, then we will be amazed at what will flow forth from our mouths when we are called to be a witness for Christ. In Matthew 10, we are told

16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 "But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18 and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19 "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. 20 "For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.
(Matthew 10:16-20 (NASB))

Some have been confused and thought that these words were saying that they did not need to spend much time in the scriptures, that God would provide them with the words to say, but not so. We are to be diligent to show ourselves approved, rightly dividing out the words of truth.

Just as Jesus was tempted by satan, with satan twisting the words of scripture to suit his purposes, so also will the demons of this world try to confuse and beguile you and me by twisting the scriptures. And if we have not been faithful and diligent to study and learn God’s word rightly, then we might never realize that we are being beguiled. But if we are diligent in our study of these scripture, God will be faithful to guide our thoughts and efforts as we engage in the “sword fights” of our day.

Folks, may I encourage us to know that these words of truth are trustworthy and they are applicable for every circumstance of our daily life exactly as they are given to us within these scriptures. But many among us do not agree, some even who claim to be devout believers in Christ. Many of them with their “progressive” thinking do with these scriptures, much as they do with our constitution and with our nation’s laws. They insist that some of these biblical truths are no longer “relevant” to our modern circumstance, demanding that we change these truths so that they “better fit” with the culture. But may that never be! In 2 Timothy 3 we read,

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV))

God’s words are His breath, unchangeable truths that do not and cannot vary in their meaning or effect. In their given condition and meaning, they have power beyond our imagination. So, we must leave them just as they are.

And folks, God used this metaphor of a “sword” for a very important reason and we must be willing to be guided by it. Just as a soldier is diligently trained so that in the “heat of battle” he will know how to correctly use his sword, so also must we be just as diligent in our training regarding these words of truth.

And again, as we mentioned a moment ago, this word of God is able to accomplish God’s desires and purposes not only as a weapon of offence against the enemy, but is first able to change our own hearts. In Hebrews 4, we read one of my most favorite promises from God.

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13 (ESV))

Note these last words first, verse 13 . . .

13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:13 (ESV))

If you and I are willing to truly open ourselves up to the power of these words of truth, an amazing, but difficult result will take place. God will expose us not only to Himself, but also to our self! By that I mean, we will find out more about our self than we have ever known before, and sometimes that is hard to deal with. For myself, I immediately found out that I am a wretch, a total wretch. Sometimes when people find that out about themselves, they get afflicted and go into fits of depression. But that is not God’s intended purpose. He simply wants you and me to see ourselves as we really are, and then for us to “repent”. And “repentance” is the best remedy for any and all manner of sin. So be prepared for God’s Spirit to do some “painful” work within your soul.

And then in verse 12 of Hebrews 4, we read

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 (ESV))

Again, this is a work that first begins within our own hearts, and it will be the source of power for all sorts of changes within us. But so also, when used in the way God intends, it is a powerful weapon to pierce and make changes within the hearts of the other people that we will engage with each day.

Now, this may sound somewhat strange since the context of this message is Christian warfare against the spiritual forces of evil. But folks, your Christian family members, your Christians friends, your Christian co-workers are often under attack and being over-run by the demonic world, being influenced and provoked to take part in wrong behaviors. And this precious sword of the Spirit is the best weapon for their defense and their help.

As for the unbelievers that we will encounter each day, the “words of truth” that fill this precious “Book”, are the perfect weapon to pierce the resistance put over people’s hearts by the world, the flesh and the devil. Imagine, as you engage in conversation with even the staunchest of unbelievers, this “sword” is able to “pierce” down deep within their defenses, “piercing between bone and marrow, soul and spirit”. And please understand, they may walk away from you still disbelieving, but they will surely have been changed by the conversation. God’s word is that powerful and that effectual.

And then, as the perfect weapon of defense for your own soul, just as Jesus did when being tempted by satan, you will have the perfect answer to every tempting provocation that comes to you from out of that “present darkness”. This sword of the Spirit will be able to deflect every “flaming arrow” from the evil ones.

One final thought, a reminder of what has been said here today . . . first, yes your and my words may be quite clever, but they will never be clever enough to accomplish the purposes of God. Only His “word” filled with His “Spirit” can change the hearts of men and women and cause them to turn to Christ for salvation. Because of that, you and I need to be diligent in our study of God’s word. We are to write it carefully upon the pages of our hearts, and from there, simply be willing to be a useful vessel of God’s Spirit. If we are willing to do that, then we will be trustworthy soldiers as God sends us out onto the “battlefield” each day.

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 (ESV))

Praise the Lord!