

**Ephesians 6: 17b; “The Sword of the Spirit”, Sermon # 12 in the series –
“To be Strong in the Lord”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
December 2nd, 2012, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

As we look down through this passage and examine all the various pieces of armor which Christ has given us, we remember that there are certain pieces which are worn as clothing, which we “put on” in verses 14 and 15, and there are certain pieces which we “take up” found in verses 16-18. There are 3 of each. We find that of those that we take up, only one of them is a weapon and that is our focus this afternoon. The weapon of choice for every Christian is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. I think that it will do us well to remember that prayer is not a weapon but rather the offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to His will. It is communication; a request for help and reinforcements for ourselves and others who are soldiers in the spiritual battle. We are not to “take up” prayer, but to be praying always in the Spirit. We are, however, to take up the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and use it in prayer and in fighting the battles of the Lord. When David was fleeing from Saul in 1 Samuel 21 he came to the city of Nob, and he asked Ahimelech the priest for a sword and he told David that the only sword he had on hand was the sword of Goliath the Philistine. And David said, “There is none like it, give it to me.” And as we come this study we can truly say of our sword – Truly there is none like it. “The Word of God is given to the believer to use as a powerful weapon in spiritual battle. It is a powerful weapon for 2 reasons.

1st – Because it can be used defensively.

Turn with me over to Matthew 4, verse 1. “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” “And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.” “Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’” Our Lord Jesus is just entering on His public ministry. He is led by the Spirit into the battle of being tempted by the Devil. Let it be known that when a man enters into the ministry He must be called and led into it by the Holy Spirit. The ministry is not only a work, but it will be a spiritual fight. We need to understand that the Captain of our salvation had to defend Himself from the fiery darts and temptations of the Devil immediately after His baptism. And no doubt so will every Christian, especially those who are pastors. Christian, the Devil wants to know the truth of your grace; whether you have been feeding upon Christ’s grace and truth in order to become strong, or whether you have not, and are weak morally and spiritually, just like any other man who does not know Christ. He will be confronting you and attacking you with your own pressing needs and his provoking demands.

Notice how he tries, in the verses that I just read to you, to bring doubt upon Jesus' true identity. He says, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones become bread," as though Jesus had to prove something to the Devil by an independent use of His power. But Jesus defends Himself with the Word of God. He says, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God.'" What a wonderful rejoinder. This one verse sums it all up. Satan will try to cast doubts upon your true identity, O Christian. He wants you to try to get you to do things in the flesh, or even fall into sin, by an independent use of all that God has given to you by His grace. This you do not have to do, because God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Your trying to prove something to the Devil may cause you to fall because you may falsely think that your own wisdom is enough to defeat him. You may think that you need to prove something to him about your own ability to care for yourself and whatever problems that you face. But if you succumb to this thinking you may actually be sinning against God because you are declaring your self-sufficiency to the Devil. God knows that you are not self-sufficient, but do you? If you continue in this wrong thinking, it may cast doubt upon the profession of your faith in the eyes of the Devil. Wield the sword against him . Answer him with the sharp blade of the Word of God. Give him the cold steel of God's truth. Tell him that you don't have to do things on your own apart from His Word or Spirit. Tell him that you understand that you do not live by physical food (by bread) alone; it is the Lord God Almighty who upholds all things by the Word of His power. And that you have faith that God will uphold you in all the difficult and trying circumstances that you face.

This quote that Jesus used, was a quote from Deuteronomy 8: 3. Verse 2, just before it, states, "And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these 40 years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not." "So He humbled you, and allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord." The test that came to Jesus is the same test that comes to all Christians in a form suited to them. What God wants to know, is what you will do in adverse circumstances. He sometimes allows you the Christian to have real needs, but He will always provide for your real needs in a way that shows you that you will have to trust in Him to give you what He thinks is best for you. If you are willing to abide in this truth, you will then be able to use this truth to your spiritual advantage against Satan. The true Christian must use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, to defend himself against the insinuations of Satan that God will not provide for their needs.

Next, in this passage in Matthew, Satan tries to kill Jesus with his own evil sword; wrongly dividing and handling the Word of God. He says to Jesus, "If you

are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, '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.' But Jesus again defends Himself with the sword of God's Word, and He parries back – "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" "The true Christian must follow the example and lead of our Lord Jesus. He must know the Scriptures well enough to apply the right Biblical truth to the every situation, and thereby to know how to meet a false and dangerous use of the Word of God. Yes, it is true, the angels watch over and protect Jesus, but He knows that this is no reason to tempt God by throwing Himself down from the temple and thus sin against God in proving the verse to be true. The same is true for you dear Christian. The angels are watching over you, but do not deliberately put yourself into dangerous situations where you are attempting to show others, let alone the Devil, how impervious you are to injury or death because you have faith in God. This is testing God. You are assuming, because of His faithfulness, that He will arbitrarily keep you or protect you from physical harm. But he is wiser than you, and knows all of your reasons for doing things. He may allow you to hurt yourself if your faith is presumptuous; if you are trying to show off to others around you, or attempting to prove something to the Devil. If you are forced into such a situation of danger, that is different. But I am saying, be wise and do not heed the suggestions of Satan to attempt to do dangerous stunts or tricks, as though God must protect you because you assert to yourself and others that it must be so. This is tempting God.

Again, in this passage when Satan tempts our Lord Jesus, we see him offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory if He would fall down and worship him. What Satan cannot get by subtlety he will try to get by bold and brazen impudence. He thinks to himself; Perhaps I can buy His worship of me if I offer a big enough prize. We must always be wary of this kind of temptation from the Devil. He will sometimes try to buy Christians to his service by offering them a worldly job position, with high income, that thereby compromises some aspect of obedience to His Word, such as observing the Lord's Day. Wield the Word of God against like a sword against these offers. This is what the Lord Jesus did. He said, "Away with you Satan!" "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" Satan was attempting to convince our Lord that there was some easy way for Him to become the ruler of the all the kingdoms of the world. He was suggesting that our Lord Jesus did not have to go to the cross. He could worship Satan and he supposedly would give Him all the kingdoms of the world. But our Lord Jesus Christ knew that His kingdom would only be established by His denying himself and by His suffering on behalf of all of God's Elect people. He knew that He would be given all the kingdoms of the world as the reward of His sufferings. And so, He became obedient unto death. He knew that only God could establish His exaltation in righteousness. Satan could only give power and have power for a time, and then God, He knew, would overrule his

sinful plans and depose Him. Do you see things in this holy way, O Christian? You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve. If you see this, then use that truth. Use the sword of the word, O Christian, and know that God gives you the best things, the things that He Himself can, and will, establish in righteousness. The Devil's worship and His dark kingdom of rebellion against God will fall as you are obedient to the Word of God. Christ's kingdom of light and glory will grow. As you trust in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ to atone for all of your sins, so you trust in Him also to overcome the Devil in all of these temptations to worldliness that he brings to you. He says that if you will compromise some aspect of God's Word, that he the Devil, will reward you with popularity or powerful position, or great wealth. Turn and give him the cold steel. Resist him and he will flee from you.

Realize that your example in this battle is very important to the salvation of people around you. Think about what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 2: 8. "Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained." "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." "For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him." "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." "If we deny Him, He also will deny us." "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." Let me ask you dear Christian, if you are enduring sufferings for anything related to the kingdom of Christ's advance, or whether you are becoming more worldly as time goes on? Do you endure all the things that you endure for the sake of God's elect? Do your unsaved loved ones, friends and acquaintances know why you live to be faithful to the Bible? Part of the reason is so that you will be strong and grow in faith and give glory for God as you see Him making changes in your life leading you to greater holiness. And part of it is so that "the elect" may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. See it does make a difference to the advance of Christ's kingdom if you are not worldly. It does make a difference to the advance of Christ's kingdom if you deny yourself those worldly lusts for power or position or personal glory or selfish worldly pleasures, in order that you can promote the things that are right and good and true before the watching world around you. To them your sincere Christian life might seem quite boring, but you know that because Christ is in you, that it is really very exciting and rewarding; a life full of blessing, even though there are sufferings that go along with it. You must choose what you really want; the world or Jesus. You cannot have both. But I trust that you now know how to use the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, to defend yourself and others by wielding it.

2ndly - The Word of God is given to the believer to use as a powerful weapon, offensively, in fighting the spiritual battle with the Lord's enemies and ours.

Turn with me over to Hebrews 4: 11. “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.” “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 joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.” The writer, here, has been speaking to his Jewish readers about entering God’s rest. He’s using this word rest in reference to people who have believed in Jesus Christ, having believed the gospel, having ceased from their own works as a way to justify themselves before God. The writer was very concerned that these Hebrews would not enter this rest; that they would fail to enter this rest of salvation because they would not hold fast their confession of Christ; that they would slip back to Judaism with its ceremonies and priesthood, and not realize that this was disobedience unto eternal death. This rest, of faith in Christ alone for salvation, must be entered into, and stayed in. They had to be diligent, first of all, to enter that rest. And we see why they needed to be diligent to enter that rest. It was because “the word of God” as it is preached and proclaimed and explained, acts as a sword in the hand of God to penetrate the heart of sinful man, the heart of a hesitant man, the heart of a hypocritical man, the heart of an insincere man, to find out the truth and state of that man’s heart. Christ Himself, whose eyes are a flame of fire, is that Word. And the purpose of the preached word in the hand of Christ, is to search not only unbelieving sinners hearts, where he knows there is sin growing, to bring to them conviction of sin. The purpose of Christ in the preached Word is to reveal to the believing heart areas where sin or unbelief may be growing, so that the believer Himself might take the Sword, the word, and with it cut away and mortify the remaining corruptions of his heart. The true state of the heart is revealed by Christ, through His Word, and it comes like a sword penetrating the inmost being of man. But the Spirit’s power hurts nothing of value in the thoughts and the intents of the believing heart. The thoughts of the heart are revealed, the conscience is pricked and awakened, and Christ then pours the balm of His grace into the wounds where sin has had to be cut out. In the preaching of the Word, the unbeliever also realizes in accordance with the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, that his soul is in great danger if it continues on through life without entering in to salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

Some of the Jews whom Paul was writing to in this book of Hebrews were in danger of saying that Christ was a significant prophet and teacher, but they failed to take Him as their Lord and Savior, and follow Him in accordance with His Word; on to spiritual maturity. In some cases they were babyish Christians; in other cases, they had never entered the Narrow gate of salvation at all. In the sword of God’s Word the Bible we find the force of truth. We find that Christ’s kingdom can only be advanced by wielding this sword skillfully and discerningly. It is a spiritual weapon of great power; the greatest power in all the world because

it is the Sword of the Spirit to change men's hearts and thus their eternal destinies. Oh believer! Do you realize what Christ has given you in giving you this weapon? Do we together, here in this church, realize what God has given to us in His Word? Christ can, and He eventually will conquer the nations with His Word, accompanied by the Spirit's power. "Not by might", that is human might; "not by power; (that is by men's human skill and power), "but by My Spirit, says the Lord." Will you have a part in this glorious conquest? All the forces of the Devil, the systems of evil and false doctrine, Satan's strongholds, will all fall when we as Christians learn, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to use this sword. Revelation 19: 11 – "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse and He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war...." Verse 14 – and armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean followed Him on white horses." "Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations." "And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron."

Remember the words of that glorious old Hymn –
"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." "He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored." "He has loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword." "His truth is marching on." "He has sounded forth a trumpet that will never sound retreat; He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat." "O be swift my soul to answer Him!" "Be jubilant my feet!" "Our God is marching on." Let us take up the sword of the Spirit, and His truth will march on!