

**“Our Weapon: The Sword Of The Spirit
Ephesians 6:10-20**

April 22, 2018

SI: Paul says context of Christian life is spiritual warfare against supernatural evil.

But God has not left us defenseless.

He has given us his armor—Jesus Christ and all his benefits.

Each piece of armor is a different facet of the Gospel.

Today we’re looking at the last piece of armor.

Let’s read the whole passage one last time.

But Paul says one more thing after this, so next Sunday we’ll finish up.

INTRO: There’s a stained glass window in the sanctuary of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. In that stained glass are two Latin words, Spiritus Gladius—The Sword of the Spirit. Which Paul says, is the Word of God.

I’ve always thought what an inspiration that must be for the preacher at St. Paul’s before he steps into the pulpit to see the sunlight shining through those words—Spiritus Gladius, and to think, Yes, I’m using, the Sword of the Spirit.

The Sword of the Spirit is the last piece of armor.

When a Christian takes up the Word of God, then he is fully equipped, he is ready to stand his ground in the evil day and resist the Devil.

Let me take you back to the first piece of armor. Do you remember what it was? It was also the Word of God.

Girding up your loins with the truth, the belt of truth buckled around your waist.

But Paul is not repeating himself. Not just saying read the Bible, read the Bible.

The belt and the sword are two different and complimentary ways believers are to use God’s Word.

The belt was foundational for the soldier.

The belt held everything in readiness.

All the loose garments were tucked into the belt.

The belt of truth signifies the whole truth of the word of God,

The point of the belt is that you have to make God’s word your foundation.

You start by believing and submitting yourself to the whole of God’s word.

You don’t pick and choose. I believe this. I don’t believe that.

Everything God says, you believe. You tuck all the loose ends,

even the ones you don’t like or don’t fully understand into the belt of truth.

The belt of truth is deciding you are going to base your life and decisions not on

your impulses and feelings, on the appearance of things, the opinions of crowd. You're going to base them on the truth of God's word. It's a statement of faith.

The sword of the Spirit is a different use of God's word.

Paul says about the final three pieces of armor—shield, helmet, sword—in addition, take up, take up. These are for use in particular situations.

So the sword of the Spirit is knowing and using God's word in a pointed way—pun intended—a pointed way to defend yourself and attack the Devil.

The sword is both defensive and offensive. You can use it both to protect your mind and heart and even drive the Devil away so he quits attacking you.

So let's look at this under three headings.

1. Sword stories
2. The power of the sword
3. Swordsmanship

Let's start with some sword stories . . .

MP#1 Sword stories

I read an article this week about a man from the Czech Republic, Petr Jasek. In December 2015 he went to Sudan for four weeks to document the persecution of Christians. He was arrested and imprisoned for 14 months.

He was put in a tiny cell with six other prisoners.

They were all Islamic extremists, ISIS fighters.

Because Petr was a Christian they tortured and beat him daily and ordered him to be their slave, to wash their clothes, clean the toilet.

The article says:

Jasek didn't have access to a Bible during his captivity, so he meditated on Scriptures he memorized as a young person. "I was literally asking the Lord that He will keep my mind sound and that I wouldn't lose my mind through the situation . . . The Holy Spirit kept reminding me of some of the verses that I had memorized. This was just enough for me, to give me enough strength everyday to pray." One passage that came to mind was Jesus' teaching about loving your enemies. He was startled when he heard his abusers weeping late at night when they could not sleep. "They were crying. They were also missing their family members . . . That allowed me to easily continue to pray for them. I was praying for those fellow prisoners, the interrogators, for the guards, for the prosecutors and for the judge, that the Lord would reveal Himself as the Lord, Savior and God."

He tells how God's word was so powerful to him that he lost all fear.

Even when he was being beaten he would start praising Jesus—

even though that made them mad and they started beating him harder.

Eventually moved to large cell full of Eritrean refugees and two Sudanese pastors.

They got hold of a Bible. Petr and the pastors led 40 refugees to Christ.

God's word defended Petr Jasek's mind and spirits, the Devil was forced to flee.

Let's move a little bit closer to home.

A few years ago a church member asked me to visit her neighbor—

an elderly women who was dying of cancer.

I didn't know this women, didn't know what to expect.

As I sat in her driveway, I got out my Bible and wondered what to read.

I decided to read Psalm 121. Turned to it and marked with ribbon bookmark.

A relative let me in and took me to her bedroom.

She was piled under a bunch of blankets, her face was gaunt, she obviously didn't have long to live. But she perked up when I came in.

After we had only talked a short time I realized she was a devout Christian so I asked her: What do you want me to read to you?

And you can probably guess what she said. Please read Psalm 121.

I laughed and showed her to bookmark and read it to her.
She was perfectly at peace. No bitterness. No fear in death.
Her little bedroom was filled with light.
The sword of the Spirit defended her and drove away the enemy.

Once I was in the home of a church member who had lost her husband.
It was Elizabeth Wood, who some of you remember from years ago.

Her husband Woody had passed away. Yes, that was his name. Woody Wood.
So I asked Elizabeth: Is there anything in particular you want me to read?

She said: Please read Psalm 91. That's the Psalm that starts:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
She said, But before you read it let me tell you my history with this Psalm.

She related a time in her life when she was a single mom, desperately poor.

Time and again she would read Psalm 91 to herself and children.

The sword of the Spirit would drive away desperation and self-pity and fear—
and their morale would be lifted. Here she was turning to it again.

I know a Christian man who was slandered.

He turned again and again to the story of Joseph, who was betrayed by his brothers
and falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, but finally vindicated by God.

That old Bible story became such a powerful spiritual weapon that it removed
all his anger, eliminated his desire to justify himself, and gave him patience for
years until he too was vindicated.

All the ways the Devil wanted to twist and use that situation failed.

One more. I heard a pastor tell how the son of church members arrested.

The parents called and asked him to please come over.

When he got there, mom and dad were falling into a pit of blame, regret, worry.
That morning for devotions pastor had read a verse in John 13 where Jesus says:
"You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Christian parents latched on to that. Yes, that is true! Jesus is doing something.

We don't understand but he understands. They were calmed, Devil had to flee.

Bible verses memorized long ago, a favorite Psalm, a Bible story, a verse never
noticed that jumped off the page—defend against fear, hatred, bitterness, despair,
self-pity, anger, regret, and blame. Why? Why does the Bible work this way?
Let's consider . . .

MP#2 The power of the sword

The Scripture has the power to do these amazing things like erase fear and bitterness is because it is the sword “of the Spirit.”

“Of the Spirit” means originating from the Holy Spirit, given by the Holy Spirit, supplied by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and the word of God always go together.

There are three aspects of this.

The first is inspiration. The Holy Spirit inspired the word of God.

2 Peter 1: No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Peter says the prophecies of the prophets were not their own interpretations.

In other words, the books of the Bible are not the private reflections of the writers on what they thought about God and religion.

Instead, the writers of Scripture were carried along by the Holy Spirit, so that the words they wrote were the very words of God.

The Holy Spirit breathed into these men, and they wrote the inspired word of God without error. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3 all Scripture is God-breathed.

There is a lot more that can be said about the inspiration of Scripture.

We also affirm the humanity of the Bible. They were not human typewriters.

They wrote in such a way that expressed their own individual styles and abilities.

But what sets the Bible apart from all other human writings is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is not words of human wisdom, but words from God with truth and power

The second aspect of the Holy Spirit's connection to the word is illumination.

The Holy Spirit inspired God's Word and he illuminates God's word.

Illumination is giving readers a true understanding of it.

Without illumination it is possible for someone to read Bible not grasp truth.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

A person could be a genius and a great scholar and could know lots about the Bible, but without the illumination of the Holy Spirit it will never have sword-like power in his life to overcome his fears and chase away the Devil.

The third aspect of the Holy Spirit's connection to the Word is application.

The Holy Spirit inspires, he illuminates, and he applies.
Application simply means that when you are faced with a specific situation, when the Devil is attacking you in a particular way, the Holy Spirit brings the word to your mind.

It might be a specific passage, it might be truth of Scripture.

But you have the sense that the Holy Spirit has spoken to you and given you just what you need.

Jesus says in John 4:

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

So it's always the Spirit and the Word.

The Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, the Scripture, Bible.
In the history of the Christian church, there has always been a tendency to separate the two, or to put the emphasis exclusively on one or the other. There are some who say all you need is the Spirit, you don't need Word, Bible.

A famous example is George Fox and the Quakers.

They were English Christians reacting against the opposite extreme.

The Church of England in their day basically denied there was any experiential communication between believers and the Holy Spirit.

It all came through the formal liturgy and sacrament of the ordained clergy.

Fox started to preach conversion and Holy Spirit's illumination—right.

But then he and the Quaker movement went overboard and that was what it all became about. The Holy Spirit speaking directly without the Bible at all.

The Inner Light, they called it.

The problem with that is you end up with your own thoughts, not God's Word.

Your own thoughts can't defend you against the Devil.

And I've already mentioned the opposite extreme which has also cropped up in the church over and over—intellectual or formalistic interaction with the Scripture with no appeal and longing for the Holy Spirit's illumination.

This approach to the Bible isn't the sword of the Spirit either.

The Bible becomes a dead letter. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

It always has to be for us the Spirit and the Word, the Word and the Spirit.

Open my eyes, Lord, that I might see wonderful things in your law.

That's where we always begin.

Asking the Holy Spirit to illumine and apply the word to our situation.

This is really the first part of the last thing we need to consider . . .

MP#2 Swordsmanship

There was a boy on my hall in college who had been on a fencing team in HS. Someone asked him about it so got two fencing swords out his room and we went out in the commons and he started showing us some basic moves. He was standing there and some guy who didn't know anything about fencing picked one up and took a swing at him without any warning. Quick as a wink up came his sword, he blocked it and then lunged and poked the guy in the chest. All that training, all that muscle memory came back. How do you learn to use the sword of the Spirit so you're ready for evil day? Let me just share a few thoughts in no particular order.

1. Submit yourself to the weekly preaching of the Word.

Preaching is a God-ordained method for strengthening his people.

Sermons are like meals. There are very few meals in your life you remember.

Most meals we eat and enjoy at the time and then forget them.

You can't remember what you had for lunch on Thursday three weeks ago.

But all those ordinary meals nourished you.

That's what regular preaching does, it nourishes you so ready for the fight.

Here's how someone else put it.

Preaching is that holy half hour each week when the assembly of the redeemed closes her collective mouth, opens her ear and heart, and listens to the uninterrupted voice of her Husband, through his appointed mouthpiece, fallible though the messenger be . . . When we put ourselves under the preaching of God's word, it is one of the precious few moments in modern life when we button the lip, resist the temptation to respond right away, and focus our energy and attention on hearing with faith.

If you submit to the word Sabbath after Sabbath, then when the evil day comes, your ear will be more sensitized to the Holy Spirit.

2.. Have one or two favorite verses or passages of Scripture that you actually memorize and carry with you for years and years.

I'm thinking about those two women I mentioned:

dying woman who had Ps 121, and Elizabeth Wood who had Ps. 91.

They carried those passages with them for decades, took up like swords.

James 1 is one of my favorites that I've carried for years:

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

That passage has encourage me, convicted me, and defended me many times against the attacks of the Devil.

3. If you're in a crisis, if terrible things are happening to you, the Holy Spirit may lead you to a passage of Scripture that becomes not just a help to you in the crisis, but a standing stone that marks his faithfulness. When the Israelites experienced great acts of deliverance from God, they would sometimes set up a standing stone, a monument, to mark it. When he parted the water of the Jordan and they marched into Promised Land— set up standing stones. Did the same thing at Shechem. And there's always a comment like this— So in the future, when your children ask, what's the meaning of this stone, you can say: This is what the Lord did.

The Holy Spirit often gives Christians in crisis a verse, a Psalm, a Bible story that becomes a standing stone.

Years later, when the crisis is long past, and when God has made the rough places smooth, this portion of God's word always figures in the telling of the story. If you've participated in church life long enough, you know exactly what I mean. You've heard people tell the story that way.

Ask for this if you're in a crisis. Ask for this if you're under attack.

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a word that not only helps you now— but one that becomes a standing stone in your life for decades to come. One that becomes a new favorite sword for you to take up on future occasions.

Do you believe that the Bible really is the word of God, the sword of the Spirit? Have you ever experienced the sword of the Spirit?

Have you ever had the exhilarating experience of putting the Devil to flight?

Have you witnessed a spiritual victories because you used the sword of the Spirit? I hope so. That's what God wants for you.

Through Jesus Christ he has given you all you need for fight of the Christian life.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

“Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.”