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## THE WEAPON

Ephesians 6:17b

By

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Ephesians Lesson 61

## The Weapon Ephesians 6:17b

Can you imagine a soldier carefully putting on each piece of armor to protect himself and then going into battle without a weapon? That would be suicidal! While David could go up against Goliath without wearing Saul's armor, he *had* to take his weapon! While the other pieces of armor that we have considered were necessary to protect the soldier from the enemy's attacks, they could not kill the enemy. Only the sword could do that. The soldier without a sword wouldn't last a minute if the enemy got close enough for hand to hand combat. The sword shows us that Satan doesn't just shoot at us from a distance. He also moves in close to kill. To survive and conquer, we must take and be able to use the sword:

To stand firm against the enemy, take the sword of the Spirit,  
which is the Word of God.

There were two types of swords. One was a large broadsword, swung with both hands to hack at the enemy. The other (mentioned here) was a shorter, two-edged sword used to cut and thrust. Peter used this type of sword to swing at Malchus, who probably ducked to the side so that the blow did not split his head open, but rather cut off his ear (Matt. 26:51).

Paul identifies this sword as coming from the Holy Spirit and then adds that it is the Word of God. This reminds us of Hebrews 4:12, "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."

In that verse, the author uses the Greek word *logos*, which is used mostly to refer to the written Word. In our text, Paul uses *rhema*, which usually has the nuance of the spoken word. But the spoken word is the written Word used verbally and precisely to apply to a specific situation. In other words, the written Word is the basis for the specific sword thrusts of the spoken word. Paul's

point is that the church must be armed with and use Scripture to defeat the enemy.

1. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.

This teaches us two things:

- A. The Holy Spirit is the source of the Word.

By “the sword of the Spirit,” Paul means that the sword *comes from* the Spirit. He originated the sword, which Paul further identifies as the Word of God. Paul tells us the same thing in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” The word *inspired* is literally, *God-breathed*. God’s Spirit breathed out the Word through human authors, using their unique styles and personalities. But the final result is that the written Word came to us from God.

Peter put it this way (2 Pet. 1:20-21), “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” The word *moved* pictures the wind moving a sailing vessel. Charles Hodge explained, “Inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of His mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God that what they said God said” (*Systematic Theology* [abridged edition, Baker], p. 77).

John Wesley said regarding the divine authorship of Scripture: “The Bible must have been written by God or good men or bad men or good angels or bad angels. But bad men and bad angels would not write it because it condemns bad men and bad angels. And good men and good angels would not deceive by lying about its authority and claiming that God wrote it. And so the Bible must have been written as it claims to have been written—by God who by His Holy Spirit inspired men to record His words using the human instrument to communicate His truth.” (Cited without reference by John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians* [Moody Press], pp. 368-369.)

Because the Bible comes to us from the Holy Spirit, it is as reliable as God is. It is inconceivable that the God of truth would inspire errors and contradictions. By the way, when Paul equates the sword of *the Spirit* with the *Word of God*, he is assuming that the Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity. Contrary to what the cults teach, God is triune. The Father is God; the Son is God; and the Spirit is God. Yet they are not three gods, but one God. (To read more on this, I recommend Bruce Ware's book, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit* [Crossway Books]).

Before we leave this point, I should also point out that the Holy Spirit always works in conjunction with the Word (see Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier* [Baker], pp. 328-329). If people claim that impressions they have are from the Spirit, but those impressions contradict Scripture, they are deceived. The Spirit never contradicts the Word. Also, when we come to the Word, we need the Spirit to give us insight and understanding. To study the Word academically, even in the original languages, but without reliance on the Holy Spirit, may yield information, but not the power that we need to overcome Satan's schemes. Since the Spirit is the source of the Word, we must rely on Him when we come to the Word.

B. Since the Word comes from the Spirit, it is powerful, being the very Word of God.

God's spoken word is powerful. As Hebrews 11:3 states, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word [*rhema*] of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible." God spoke and the entire universe came into existence out of nothing!

The picture of the Word as a sword also implies its power. The sword wasn't used in battle to tap your enemy on the shoulder or to hold up to threaten him. It was used to kill him! While we cannot kill Satan, God's Word is powerful to defeat him and to put to death the temptations that he puts in front of us. To understand how the Word is powerful, consider four things:

(1) God uses His Word to accomplish His sovereign purpose.

Every time I preach I rely on God's promise in Isaiah 55:10-11, "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; 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 may wonder, "What about those who hear and reject God's Word? How does that accomplish God's purpose?" The answer is, sometimes God uses His Word to pour out His grace, but at other times He uses it to harden and blind the wicked, who rightly deserve His judgment (see Matt. 13:14-15). Our job is to give out the Word in reliance on God, who promises to use it to accomplish His purpose.

(2) God uses the Word to save sinners.

God uses His Word to impart new life to dead sinners. James 1:18 states, "In the exercise of His will [not *our* will] He brought us forth by the word of truth ..." 1 Peter 1:23 says, "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." This means that when we share the gospel, the power to save does not lie with our ability to persuade or our using the right method. Rather, the power is with God through His Word. When you witness, use God's Word, relying on the Holy Spirit to convict of sin and to impart new life to those who are dead in their sins.

(3) God uses the Word to expose our sin and restore our souls.

We all tend to compare ourselves with others and conclude that we're doing pretty well: "Sure, I get angry, but not like that guy! Yes, I struggle with lust, but I'm not a sex-addict!" Then we read the Word, which shows us God's holy standard. It's like when I'm working out in the yard and I know that I have some dirt on my face, but I don't know how bad it is. Then I look in the mirror and it shows me how dirty I really am! God's Word holds the mirror of His holy standard to our dirty lives. It shows me where I need to clean up.

But, thankfully, it doesn't just leave us there. God uses His Word to renew and revive us. David wrote, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul" (Ps. 19:7). The entire 176 verses of Psalm 119 extol the benefits of God's Word. Repeatedly the

psalmist cries out, "My soul cleaves to the dust; revive me according to Your word" (119:25). "This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me" (119:50; see also, 93, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159). If you're spiritually dry, ask God to restore and revive you through His Word.

(4) God uses the Word to equip us for every good deed.

We saw this in 2 Timothy 3:17. When Paul says that the Word is adequate to equip us for every good deed, he is not thinking primarily of giving us the methods that we need for ministry. Rather, he means that the Word will impart to us the wisdom and godly character that we need to serve God effectively. God powerfully uses plain, ordinary people whose lives are in conformity with His Word. Ministry is not primarily about getting the right techniques or methods. Rather, it is about being a godly person through God's Word and God's using His Word through you to others.

Thus the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. The Spirit is the source of the Word and therefore the Word is powerful.

2. Use the sword of the Spirit both defensively and offensively.

The sword is the only offensive weapon mentioned, but it was also used for defense, when the enemy came in close for combat. Paul is especially referring to God's Word as spoken or proclaimed specifically to a particular situation. This is not mysticism or subjectivism, where you feel that a certain word is from the Lord. Rather, Paul is talking about the skillful, careful application of God's written Word to a particular situation. We are not to fight the enemy with our own ideas or strength, but with God's inspired Word, properly understood and applied.

A. Defensively, use the Word to ward off the temptations and attacks of the enemy.

Our primary example here is Jesus Himself, who used God's Word defensively against the devil when he tempted Him. Jesus was hungry from fasting, so the devil said (Matt. 4:3), "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." Jesus answered (Matt. 4:4), "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" He was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

Next, Satan took Jesus up to the pinnacle of the temple and suggested that He throw Himself down. This time (Matt. 4:6), Satan himself quoted from Psalm 91:11-12, "'He will command His angels concerning You,' and 'on their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" The devil left out a phrase, "to guard you in all your ways," but the sobering point is, Satan knows Scripture and can use it wrongly against you to tempt you. Be on guard! Jesus rebutted the devil with Deuteronomy 6:16 (Matt. 4:7), "On the other hand it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Satan wasn't through. He took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Then he said (Matt. 4:9), "All these things I will give to You, if You fall down and worship me." Jesus again came back quoting Scripture (Matt. 4:10, citing Deut. 6:13), "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"

The instructive thing for us is that each time, Jesus responded with a specific, appropriate Scripture, which He knew verbatim from memory (from Deuteronomy, no less!). Jesus didn't say, "I know that there's a verse somewhere about that. Just a minute while I get my concordance!" He knew the Word and used it to ward off Satan's temptations. We should do the same.

B. Offensively, use the Word in preaching, in counseling, and in evangelism.

(1) In terms of preaching, God's Word must have the primary place in the life of the church.

Satan repeatedly attacks the church by trying to get it to diminish the preaching of the Word. Paul warned Timothy about this danger. After commanding him to preach the Word, he explained (2 Tim. 4:3-4), "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."

Every great revival in church history has been sustained by a return to the expository preaching of God's Word. If there is evangelism only, without solid teaching, converts will not endure. The

seed of the gospel will be choked out by the weeds of the world. During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church had replaced the preaching of the Word with the ritual of the mass. They kept the Bible from the people. When the Reformation began through a return to God's Word, the Reformers sustained it through faithful expository preaching of the Word and by translating the Word into the common languages. The Reformers all were committed to solid expository preaching.

Later, the Puritans sparked renewal in large part through their commitment to preaching as the pastor's primary task (see Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints* [Academie/Zondervan], p. 93). J. I. Packer (*A Quest for Godliness* [Crossway Books], p. 283) states, "to the Puritan, faithful preaching was the basic ingredient in faithful pastoring." He then cites from John Owen, who wrote, "The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the Word.... This feeding is of the essence of the office of a pastor."

I share this because this emphasis is not only lacking in our day, but also is under direct attack. The seeker church movement has deliberately downplayed the expository preaching of the Word and replaced it with shorter topical sermons along the lines of using God and the Bible to help you succeed. These churches draw large crowds by putting on slick, entertaining programs, but they're "lite" on the Word. If you ever need to look for a new church, put expository preaching of the Word at the top of your criteria.

- (2) In counseling, God's Word is sufficient to help people with life's problems.

The Bible claims to be adequate to equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and to give us everything that we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-4). The fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in us through the Word describes an emotionally whole person (Gal. 5:22-23). The entire Bible was written to help us develop loving relationships with God and with one another (Matt. 22:37-39). We don't need the "insights" or techniques of worldly psychology to help hurting people. If a person has a medically diagnosed brain disorder, then they may need medication. But if the medication masks the symptoms of underlying sin problems, it will not help in the long run. Our basic problems can all be traced back

to sin. Only God's Word tells us how to deal with our sins in a godly manner. Use it to give godly counsel.

- (3) In terms of evangelism, God's Word is powerful in the conversion of sinners.

I already touched on this, but here I want to say that if you want to see sinners converted, get them into God's Word. One of the most effective gospel "tracts" that you can give to anyone is the Gospel of John. After all, John (20:31) plainly stated his purpose in writing his gospel: "these [signs] have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." If the Holy Spirit inspired John to write his gospel so that people would believe in Jesus Christ unto eternal life, then use it for that purpose. And, memorize enough verses so that you can lead someone to faith in Christ when you don't have a New Testament with you.

So, the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. Use the sword both defensively and offensively against the enemy. Finally,

3. To use the sword of the Spirit effectively, saturate yourself with the Word by every possible means.

- A. To use the Word effectively, you must know it well.

The Word is not a magic charm to put on your coffee table or to carry a pocket version for good luck. You must know how to wield it in battle. John MacArthur (*ibid.*, p. 370) writes, "Unlike the shield, however, which gives broad and general protection, the sword can deflect an attack only if it is handled precisely and skillfully. It must parry the enemy weapon exactly where the thrust is made." As we've seen, Satan knows how to use the Word wrongly for his own evil purposes. So we must know how to use it rightly in each situation.

- B. To know the Word well, read it repeatedly, study it carefully, and memorize it persistently.

- (1) To know the Word well, read it repeatedly.

Read through the Bible consecutively. My habit is to read from Psalms or Proverbs, plus a chapter or two from the Old Testament and a chapter or two from the New Testament. Four

chapters per day will get you through the entire Bible in about a year. You can get Bible reading guides online.

(2) To know the Word well, study it carefully.

In addition to just reading the Word, you should meditate on it, thinking about what it means and how it applies to your life. Pray for understanding and insight as you study. Pay attention to the context. Compare Scripture with Scripture, especially noting how various authors use certain words and concepts. Try to determine what the text meant to the original readers. Interpret obscure passages in light of the clear ones. Buy and use basic Bible study tools or get them off the Internet (we have a basic bibliography and some helpful web links on the church web site). Read the sermons of godly Bible expositors.

(3) To know the Word well, memorize it persistently.

Psalm 119:11 affirms, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You." As I said, memorize enough verses so that you can lead someone to faith in Christ. Memorize key verses that relate to areas where you are easily tempted. The Word will only change your life if you know it well enough to apply it at the moment of temptation, as Jesus did. Memorizing it requires persistence.

### Conclusion

Charles Hodge (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans], p. 389) wrote, "All [the church's] triumphs over sin and error have been effected by the word of God. So long as she uses this and relies on it alone, she goes on conquering; but when any thing else, be it reason, science, tradition, or the commandments of men, is allowed to take its place or to share its office, then the church, or the Christian, is at the mercy of the adversary."

The Puritans, who used the sword of the Spirit mightily, wrote in the preface to the Geneva Bible: the Bible is "the light to our paths, the key of the kingdom of heaven, our comfort in affliction, our shield and sword against Satan, the school of all wisdom, the glass wherein we behold God's face, the testimony of his favor, and the only food and nourishment of our souls" (cited by Ryken, *ibid.*, p. 154). Amen! You've got a sword. Use it against the enemy!

## Application Questions

1. Some people (in fact, whole cultures) are not readers. Must they become readers to grow in Christ through the Word?
2. If you were talking with a professing Christian who was not motivated to get into the Word, how would you motivate him?
3. If a believer told you that he reads the Word but doesn't get anything out of it, how would you counsel him?
4. Someone says, "We use doctors for physical problems. Why not use psychologists for emotional problems?" Your answer?

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