

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

Ephesians 6.17b: The Word of God is a sword wielded by the Spirit of God

Theme: Preach the Word and the Spirit of God will use that Word preached as a sword to cut sinners to the heart.

Today we are going to talk about the *only* piece of “armour” we’ve been given that is offensive in nature.

- (v11-17a) Until now each piece of armour has been principally defensive in design and purpose.
- (v17b) Not so with the sword. Although it can be used in defense, by design its purpose is offensive.
- The sword is designed to advance the cause of one army over that of another.

Therefore, since this is our *only* offensive weapon—our only “tool” to advance the cause of Christ over the cause of the enemy—it is particularly troubling to me when Christians (even pastors) attempt to remove the sword from hands of God's people.

- In some cases they attempt to take it away altogether (like during the Dark Ages).
- In other cases they strive to make us “keep it holstered” (because we are too afraid or intimidated to ever take out because we might use it incorrectly and commit “assault with a deadly weapon”).
- (Jer 48.10) God has some very stern words to say about His saints who would refuse to take out their swords and use them in battle!

So, this morning I would like to speak about the sword of the Spirit...

I. Our Sword is the Word of God

A. (Eph 6.17b) God has given us His Word in Scripture, and that Word of God is as a sword.

1. But, pay close attention to what the verse says about this sword: It is the sword *of the Spirit*.
2. The Person who ultimately wields this sword in the spiritual battles against the enemy is the *Spirit of God*.
 - a) (v18-20) We are called on to preach the Word. And when we preach the Word, the Spirit uses that Word preached as a sword.
 - b) It's a metaphor (picture, illustration) exactly like the sower and seed. We sow the seed by preaching the Word, but the Spirit of God is the one who gives the increase.
 - c) The Word of God is likened unto a sword, but the *sword is wielded (ultimately) by the Spirit*.

B. (Heb 4.12-13) It is the Spirit of God who ultimately wields the sword of the Word of God.

1. The Word of God is quick (living, alive, inspired), powerful (the power of God to save sinners or condemn them eternally), and sharper than any two-edged sword (it has not problem “getting in”).
2. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to pierce, divide asunder, discern the heart of man, and make manifest all things in judgment (expose the dirt and filth sinners have on the inside).
3. That is *nothing* you and I do. We simply preach the Word of God (communicate it with authority). The Spirit of God is the one who uses the Word as a sword to “cut sinners to the heart.”
 - a) (Acts 2.14, 37) Peter preached the gospel on the streets of Jerusalem and those that heard it were “pricked in their heart” by the Spirit of God.
 - b) (Acts 5.29-33) Peter preached the Word to the Jewish council and high priest, and they were “cut to the heart” by the Word of God wielded as a sword by the Spirit of God.
 - c) (Acts 7.54) When Stephen preached Christ to the Jewish leaders, they were “cut to the heart” when they heard the Word preached (cut by the sword in the hand of the Spirit).

4. Warren Weirsbe said: “*A physical sword requires the hand of a soldier, but the sword of the Spirit has its own power, for it is living and powerful... The Spirit wrote the Word, and the Spirit wields the Word as we take it by faith and use it.*”

C. The Word of God is the sword *of the Spirit*.

1. (Rev 1.16) The two-edged sword we have been given is that which proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord: the Word of God.
2. We are charged with preaching that Word (speaking/communicating the Word of God to others).
3. The One who actually wields the Word as a sword to cut sinners to the heart and convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come... is the Spirit of God.
4. The Word of God is the sword *of the Spirit* (**He** wields the Word as a sword).

II. Our Sword Requires Training & Application

A. Even though the Spirit wields the sword, we still need to grow in our skillful use of the Word.

1. (2Tim 2.15) We need to be diligent in the Word, always growing in our knowledge of Scripture.
2. (Heb 5.11-14) We need to continually “use” the Word that we know (apply it to our lives personally and practically) so that we grow in maturity—in Christ-likeness.

B. Just as a soldier would train with his sword, so we should strive to be skillful in the Word.

1. We need to learn it, and learn how to apply it in our own lives.
2. But, training and personal application is not enough...

III. Our Sword is Our Offensive Weapon

A. The sword is purposefully designed to advance the cause of one army over that of another.

1. And this begs the question: ***How is the cause of Christ advanced over that of the enemy?***
2. Is it through living a good life and doing good works (proof text: Mat 4.16)?
3. Is it through sports ministries... youth groups... music services (often wrongly called “worship” services)... children's programs... coffee houses... pot luck dinners...?
4. Is it through prayer? This is obviously important in the battle, but look at what Paul prayed for in the context of our spiritual warfare and the Word as a sword: Ephesians 6.18-20!

B. The cause of Christ is advanced over the cause of the enemy by our preaching of the Word.

1. (Php 1.12) Paul is speaking of our army's advancement: The furtherance of the gospel (the Great Commission).
2. (Php 1.13-17) We advance the cause of Christ by *speaking* the Word—by *preaching* Christ.
3. This is the consistent testimony of the whole of Scripture...
 - a) (Rom 1.16-17) The power to save (to pull souls out of the enemy's darkness and translate them to the kingdom of God) is found in the gospel.
 - (1) (Rom 1.15) And the gospel must be preached!
 - (2) (Rom 10.13-17) Sinners *cannot* be saved without the preaching (communication) of the Gospel—the Word of God.
 - b) (1Cor 1.17-18, 21-23) God saves sinners through the preaching of the cross (the gospel).
 - c) (1Cor 2.1-5) We must speak and preach (v4) the gospel—the Word of God—if we hope to advance the cause of Christ.
 - All the tricks and techniques that men come up with to better “market” the church are nothing more than the wisdom of men who would like to make the cross sound more appealing to rebellious sinners.

4. This is the consistent testimony of the example we see in the Book of Acts...
- a) If you would like to do a complete survey of the Book of Acts, just take a colored pencil and, as you read through the book, mark each verse that mentions believers verbally communicating the Word of God to others.
 - The point: You will see the cause of Christ advanced in the world through the intentional communication of the Word of God to the lost.
 - b) (Acts 4.29-31) The early church in Jerusalem prayed for boldness to *speak* the Word of God.
 - c) (Acts 5.40-42) In spite of opposition from religious leaders, the believers pressed on, teaching and preaching Jesus Christ daily.
 - d) (Acts 8.4 with 11.19-20) When common ordinary followers of Christ were scattered abroad because of persecution, they went everywhere indiscriminately preaching the Word (to anyone and everyone, anywhere and everywhere).
 - e) We see Paul...
 - (1) (Acts 14.1-3) ...preaching the Word to *Jews and proselytes* in the synagogues.
 - (2) (Acts 14.6-15) ...preaching that same Word to *pagan Gentiles*.
 - (3) (Acts 17.17) ...preaching to Jews and Gentiles *daily* when he could.
 - (4) (Acts 20.20-21) ...preaching the same message (the gospel) to both Jews and Gentiles, calling all men everywhere to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Summary & Conclusion: (Php 1.18 cf. 1.12-17) The cause of Christ is advanced through the preaching of the Word...

- a) Why? Because the Word preached is as a sword in the hand of the Spirit of God to cut sinners to the heart.
 - (1) Just like the power is found in the seed and not the sower...
 - (2) So the power of the Word of God is found the Spirit's use of the Word preached.
- b) (Php 1.18) Regardless of the motives of the preacher, when the Word of God is preached, the Christian will rejoice because he knows the Spirit will use it as a sword to further the gospel.
 - (1) **Pretense:** [def] A false or insincere outward show. A “pretense” (Mat 23.14) is “for a shew” (Luke 20.46-47).
 - (2) It's like a recent article I read by a pastor who expressed his disapproval of those who would stand on a street corner “yelling Bible verses at people passing by.”
 - (a) His contention was that these street-hollerers are just obnoxiously blasting away into the faces of their listeners... spewing forth a barrage of Bible verses...
 - (b) And he said they do so because of their own personal insecurities and complexes, because they are incapable of engaging in ordinary conversation.
 - (c) He said these street preachers are “socially challenged folks” who attempt to attract attention to themselves so others see them as tough.
 - (d) He's basically saying that they are preaching Christ in pretense...
 - i) They are preaching the Word of God in contention (not sincerely).
 - ii) They are preaching the Word of God in pretense (for an outward show).
 - (e) His plea to our street-hollering brethren? “Keep it holstered!” (Shut up.)
 - (3) But, what did Paul say? (Php 1.18) When Christ is preached, I will rejoice!
 - (a) A true Christian (a born-again believer who is truly following the Lord Jesus Christ and not the wisdom of men) would *never oppose the preaching of the gospel*.

- (b) In all honesty, there are some “preachers of the gospel” that I don't much care for, at least their methods (I don't know them personally).
 - i) Some seem to be out there just looking to offend people rather than to compel them to turn to Christ for salvation.
 - ii) And, I'd have to admit that I'm not a big fan of the “bullhorn guy” either (it's just not my “preferred style”).
- (c) But, if they are out there preaching Christ (the gospel, the Word of God), Paul says that I should rejoice! Why...?
 - i) Because the power to save and give life is found in the seed, not in the sower (and certainly not in the technique of how you prefer to sow the seed).
 - ii) Because the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit!
 - If we will preach the Word (a specific, authoritative, concerned, passionate, loving communication of the gospel), the Spirit will use that Word preached as a living, sharp, two-edged sword to cut the sinner to the heart and lay him naked before God.
- c) Therefore...
 - (1) (Eccl 11.1-6) Do not stop sowing the seed! Sow anywhere and everywhere and however you want! But sow the seed!
 - (2) (Isa 55.10-11) God wields the sword; we are called to preach it! So... preach the Word!

C. Our sword is our only offensive weapon.

1. If we desire to advance the cause of Christ, we must preach the Word because only then can the Spirit wield the Word as a sword to cut the sinner to the heart and bring him to Christ.
2. And this would bring us to our last point of study for this morning...

IV. Our Sword is the Enemy's Target

- There are two specific attacks I'd like to draw your attention to, one of which we will look at this morning and the other we will look at in more detail next week. If the devil can accomplish either of these, he has effectively shut down the furtherance of the gospel in the world.

A. Firstly, our enemy will attempt to remove your sword from your possession.

1. (1Sam 13.19-22) Illustration: The enemies of Israel had effectively neutralized the threat of God's people by removing the swords from the hands of the common people.
 - Only a select few “important” people actually had swords.
2. In the Dark Ages (AD 500-1500), the Catholic clergy removed the sword of the Spirit from the common man by maintaining the liturgy in Latin (and maintaining the common man illiterate).
 - a) The Reformation broke the hold of Rome and put the Bible back into the hands of the common man.
 - b) William Tyndale (who sparked the Reformation) said: “*I defy the pope and all his laws. If God would spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of Scripture than the pope!*”
 - c) How was that accomplished? By translating the Bible into English so that the plowboy could read it in his own language!
3. Today, the clergy are doing the very same thing, but with the “original languages” (Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic) and the plethora of modern versions.
 - a) I am *not* against the study of Greek and Hebrew. I am *not* against the translation of the Bible in to the modern vernacular (that's how we got our English Bible!). However...

- b) Seminary professors, pastors, and pulpiteers effectively remove the sword from the hand of the common man when they continually refer to the original languages to “correct and clarify” the Bible that people hold in their hands.
 - (1) Why bother trying to learn the Bible in English when it's littered with errors and “unfortunate translations”?
 - (2) And so the laity come to church so the clergy can tell them what the Word of God really says (just like the priests did in the Dark Ages when they knew Latin and others did not).
- c) The multitude of modern versions causes the same confusion and results in the same thing:
 - (1) The common man sets aside his Bible so the clergyman can tell him what the Word of God really says.
 - (2) Because the versions differ, and how are we to know which is right when there are differences? The “clergy” decides and will tell us which one is the “preferred translation.”

4. Don't let the enemy take the sword out of your hand!

- a) Find the Bible of the Reformation in your language, the Bible from the Textus Receptus family of manuscripts.
- b) Have confidence in that Bible! Learn that Bible. Apply that Bible. And preach that Bible!

B. Secondly, the enemy will attempt to shut you up (to make sure you don't draw your sword to use it in battle; “keep it holstered!”).

1. This is a tactic of our enemy that we see throughout Scripture: (1Thes 2.16) If we do not *speak* to sinners, sinners will *not be saved*.
 - a) (Act 4.15-21; 5.28, 40) This was the enemy's tactic in the early church: shut the preachers up!
 - b) (Luke 4.16-30) This what we see in Jesus' ministry: His opponents hated what He said, reacted emotionally to it, and sought to shut Him up (and they eventually succeeded... for three days).
 - c) You see the same thing throughout the careers of the Old Testament prophets:

Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits. [Isa 30.10 cf. 2Tim 4.3-4]

But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not. [Amos 2.12]
 - d) And this same tactic of our enemy exists today! Open your eyes! People today (even those who are called by God's name) say to those preaching the Word: Preach not!
 - (1) For example, a pastor writes this in an article, using the analogy of law enforcement firearms training:

An essential part of training is to drill into the head, heart, spirit, and consciousness of the trainee that his or her weapon is never, ever to come out of the holster and be drawn until and unless there is a good reason to believe that it may be necessary to use its deadly force in the course of duty...

I believe that many professing Christians today are guilty of assault with a deadly weapon. Shooting from the hip, both barrels blazing, they fire off indiscriminately in all directions with no thought for the harm they may be causing.
 - (2) What is the pastor's counsel to these “indiscriminate preachers”? “Keep it holstered!” Shut up! Stop preaching!
 - (3) Now, should we learn *how* to witness biblically? Yes, of course! Should we try to learn about our culture and society so that we might better communicate with the people? Yes!
 - (a) Example: Ray Comfort's new *Genius* movie. He does a fantastic job of breaking the ice with people on the streets and communicating the gospel very effectively with them.
 - (b) Is everyone like that? No. Do I wish I were more like that? Yes! But, I'm not. So...

- (4) Should we shut up? Should we stop preaching? Should we “keep it holstered”? No.
- (a) Because the power is in the seed, not in the sower and not in the method of sowing.
 - (b) Because the Word of God is the sword *of the Spirit*, used by the Spirit of God to cut sinners to the heart over their sin and God's holiness and judgment to come.
 - (c) Because we are *not* law enforcement officers patrolling the streets, occasionally having to draw our weapon. We are soldiers living daily in the midst of a spiritual war!
 - (d) Because the Lord commanded all His followers to go and preach the gospel to every creature everywhere!
 - (e) Because, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached and therein does the Christian rejoice!

2. This tactic to shut you up often comes in the form of *pragmatism*.

- a) Here is another quote from the aforementioned pastor and his article about street preachers:

You're standing on the corner yelling Bible verses at people passing by. One in a thousand prays the “sinner's prayer” and immediately a chorus of halleluiahs confirms the power of the God's Word. How many of those “transformed lives” ever darkens the door of church? ... How may Jehovah's Witnesses have genuinely come to faith because they got hit in a fire fight of Bible verses? How many people are ever argued into Heaven? How many atheists or agnostics finally saw the light because of a Bible grenade that exploded nearby?

- b) People (even those who would call themselves Christians—followers of Christ) will oppose witnessing and the preaching of the gospel by saying things like:

(1) “*It doesn't work... It has the opposite effect that you want... You are turning people away from God...*”

(2) And it's often true (which is why this tactic is so effective)! Think about it...

(a) What is our desire? We desire to see sinners saved. But what is the result (more often than not) of our witnessing efforts? People get upset, angry, and “turned off.”

(b) (Mat 7.13-14) This should not surprise us! And that's not an excuse to be purposefully weird and offensive (a stumbling block to the message).

- c) Scripture testifies to the same:

(1) The testimony of Jesus' ministry:

(a) His desire: (Lk 19.10; 1Tim 2.4; 2Pet 3.9) That all men might be saved.

(b) His ministry's fruit: (John 6.60-66) *Many* people turned away from Him because His preaching was hard. And they ended up killing Him for it.

(2) The testimony of Paul's ministry:

(a) His desire: (1Cor 9.16-18, 22; e.g., Rom 9.1-3) That as many sinners as possible would be saved.

(b) His ministry's fruit: Constant opposition (2Cor 11.16-33) and ultimately no one stood with him but the Lord (2Tim 4.16-17). They killed him, too.

(3) The testimony of others:

(a) Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2Pet 2.5) for 120 years (Gen 6.3) and he was only able to save seven other people (Gen 6.18).

(b) Jeremiah experienced the same thing: He was sent by God to preach a message “*against*” sin, apostasy, and idolatry (Jer 1.18-19). And his preaching did not work, it bore no fruit, and it had the opposite effect he desire (Jer 20.7-8, 18).

Conclusion:

You are not called or expected to be effective; you are called and expected to be faithful.

- (2Cor 4.3-6) The preaching of the gospel is shining the light of God's Word into the darkness of man's sinful heart.
- (John 3.19-21) Most men love their darkness (they enjoy their evil thoughts and deeds).
- (2Cor 2.14-17) When we preach the Word (v14, 17), in every place (!), it will have a sweet savour to a few, but a savour of death to most.

Next week, we'll pick this up where we left off and look more in detail at Satan's attacks on the sword...

- ...his attempts to make us keep the sword of the Spirit in the scabbard, rather than taking it out to advance the cause of Christ through the preaching of the gospel.