

Our Spiritual Warfare (8) - The Sword of the Spirit

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] We're looking at the second part of verse 17. As you know, we've been going through this passage dealing with the armor that God provides for his people. And we have made it a purpose to look at each part of the armor in itself, but also noticing the ways in which the different parts of this armor are also related together.

And last time we looked at the first half of verse 17, the helmet of salvation. And then the second part of the verse tonight, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

It's really the final piece of the armor mentioned in the list of parts, because we then go on in the final study. We believe it will be the final study to look at how the whole armor really, as well as the sword, not just the sword of the spirit, but in verse 18, praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication.

In other words, the method of using the armor is primarily that of prayer, or prayer certainly is central to it. And as we look at this one here, the sword of the spirit, we are told specifically what that is, what that represents, what this sword is about.

It is the word of God. So we don't have to ask, well, what does he mean by the sword of the spirit? It is, in fact, the word of God. And just as we've seen different ways in which the parts relate together, if you go back to the first part there, the belt of truth, well, the word of God obviously relates to the belt of truth.

[1 : 34] If we take it that, as we saw the belt of truth that was around the soldier's waist, that held many of the other parts together and held them so that they were made secure by the tightness of that large, large belt or skirt.

And you can see how the belt of truth relates to the word of God, which we'll see is the written word and the proclaimed word. And how, as you find the central truths of salvation to be represented by the belt, the core issues of our salvation, Jesus himself, his cross, his death on the cross, his resurrection and so on.

You can say that the sword as the word of God is the means by which these central truths are brought to us. And that's how they relate together.

It is one of the ways in which the sword of the spirit and the belt of truth relate together. The truth of God comes to us through the word of God. And as we read the word of God and expound the word of God and the word of God is declared in the preaching of the gospel, so the truth of God is presented to us.

He himself does that. This is not just simply the business primarily of the preacher. He's the agent. He's the means. He's the instrument. But God himself is the active presenter of his truth.

[2 : 59] And his truth is presented through the sword of the spirit, the word of God. So let's look, first of all, at a very, very obvious fact that the sword is a weapon.

And, of course, all the time in your mind, as you're looking at the Roman soldier and thinking about the Roman soldier as described, and then putting that into spiritual terms, you have this image of the soldier with a sword ready to face the enemy.

And it's obvious that that sword is a weapon. But although it's obvious, but although it's obvious, do note that this is the only part of the armor that has to do with attack.

The other parts of the armor are shielding you from the attacks made upon you. By and large, although we saw that the Roman shield could also be used as a blunt weapon.

But it's really the sword that is the primary weapon against the enemy. The rest are there to shield, whereas the sword is there to attack. It's an offensive weapon rather than a defensive part of the armor, as most of the other pieces are.

[4 : 11] So as the other pieces are for your protection defensively, so this weapon or the sword of the spirit is for your use offensively against all that stands against you and against the gospel itself.

In other words, we need to use our Bible, the word of God, the written word of God, and what we learn from the word of God as it's expounded, as we read certain commentaries or certain books that explain it to us, we need to use that Bible for attack just as much as for our defense.

There's plenty there for our defense when the enemy comes to attack you. You can use that sword certainly as a defensive weapon, but it's primarily offensive.

That's why it's so important to really get to know and appreciate the word of God in its detail and extensively. Because the more familiar we are with the word and with its teaching, the more prepared we are then with this sword in our hand to meet the assaults of unbelief, the assaults either from outside or within ourselves or from Satan especially.

As we've seen again and again, that's what he really has in mind. You recall how James mentions in his epistle in chapter 4 and verse 7 where he mentions the devil as well.

[5 : 35] He gives more grace, he says in verse 6. Therefore it says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Then submit yourselves therefore to God.

And of course submitting to God will always be through the use of his word where he is revealed to us. And when you find the word of God and God revealing himself through his word, then a believing, loving response to that is in submitting ourselves to his authority as that's shown to us through his word.

And what he says there is, as you do that, what he says immediately after that is that submit yourselves therefore to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God. He will draw near to you. And it's significant there that as you place yourself submissively under God and under his word, so it's conjoined immediately to the devil fleeing from you.

How do you put the devil to flight? Well, you don't try and meet him on his own terms. You simply come, although it's something we feel as we heard in prayer very often to do or sometimes to do.

[6 : 52] We resort to the word of God. We use the sword of the spirit in response to the way in which the devil seeks to attack.

Now, that's one reason why, and this is always important for us to bear in mind again and again and again in our goings as believers in the world.

The one thing we will always need to bear in mind is that the devil will seek to undermine your confidence in the Bible. It's no accident at all that most, if not all, of the deviations throughout history from proper theological understanding of God and of his ways and of his redemption, all of them have included, to some extent or other, a deviation from your view of the word of God, from confidence in the word of God.

And that's why he will seek to undermine confidence in the Bible. Some way or other, he will actually present to you that this Bible is, in one way or other, not sufficient, not as relevant for today's world as it has been.

And you just cast your mind back over the span of your own life since you became a Christian. Or even less than that, over the last 20 years, let's say.

[8 : 13] And think about the number of ways in which you've heard or witnessed or experienced even, departures from the word of God that have involved a loss of confidence in what this word is and what this word can do.

Because that's one of the primary ways in which the devil will seek to undermine the authority of the church, to actually seek to overthrow people's confidence in the word of God.

The one thing you must never do, of course, your relationship with Jesus personally is, in many ways, all important. But the one thing you must never do along with that is actually lose your confidence in the word of God.

Not just in the gospel itself, but in the word of God particularly as well. Because this is where God still speaks to us. This is what God still uses to bring people to know him.

He reveals himself through his word to people in order to have them come to know him as their savior. So the sword is a weapon. It's a weapon that gives you the great privilege of offensively, attackingly, respond to any of the ways in which these spiritual forces of evil, sin in your own heart as well and mine, you respond to that with the word of God as a word in which you have complete confidence because it is God's word.

[9 : 46] Now, that doesn't mean we have confidence always in the way we set about using it. That doesn't mean we have confidence in our own ability as an understanding of it.

It doesn't mean we have confidence in actually presenting the truth in a cogent and meaningful way. I'm not talking about that at all. That will actually vary from one person to the other and even in an individual's life from time to time.

But what we must never lose is confidence in the word itself. And when you have the confidence of your life grounded in the word of God, when you have that word of God as the sword of the spirit and you're convinced that that's what it is, well, then you're very much aware of the way in which you can stand against the wiles of the devil.

So the sword is a weapon. But more fully, it is the sword of the spirit. And of course, he means here the Holy Spirit because the sword was fashioned by the spirit.

Every sword that a soldier took to war was a weapon that he needed to have confidence in, that it had been well produced, that it wasn't just carelessly put together in some sweatshop or other.

[10 : 58] He had to be sure that this weapon would stand the test, that it would do its job. And of course, when you come to what the word of God itself says about itself, basically, you have the likes there of 2 Peter 1, verses 19 to 20.

You know the verses yourself, I'm sure. 2 Peter telling us about the word of God and how this word, this prophecy of scripture, as it calls it, actually came about.

It did not come from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In other words, the authors of these parts of scripture have this in common, that they were carried along. They were under the influence of the spirit of God to influence what they wrote.

That did not leave their own personalities out of it altogether. As you look at the various books of the Bible, you can very often see the personality of the different writers coming through. Peter doesn't write the same things in the same way as John, and so on.

[12 : 12] And the personalities and the characteristics of the individuals themselves are not just beaten out of them, as it were, as they come under that influence of the spirit of God to write the documents that became our Bible.

But it does mean that everything they wrote was not, they weren't writing of their own imagination, of their own unaided understanding. It was produced as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. And isn't it significant? The chapter division, again, maybe just something that perhaps stands in the way of just looking at the flow of the words there in 2 Peter.

Because once he said this, No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. But false prophets also arose among the people. He's moving straight on to talking about false prophets after he has called their minds to confidence in the word of God that was produced under the influence of the Holy Spirit by holy men of God.

[13 : 20] And then he's straight into saying, but false prophets were there then also. And that he's saying to them, be sure when you meet with false prophets, when you meet with heresy, when you meet with the truth of God attacked by ways that would undermine the authority of the word or the nature of the word of God, think about how that's always been the case.

But you must always counteract by confidence in the word of God itself. In other words, you have the same as you have in 2 Timothy 3.16.

It's a spirit produced God produced word. 2 Timothy 3.16, the well-known words, All scripture is, in the old translation, is given by inspiration of God, but it's actually by expiration of God.

The words there, as you know, I'm sure, actually mean God-breathed. All scripture is God-breathed. As you find in the winter, like today on a frosty morning or evening, your breath is seen as it leaves your body.

You can say, that's my breath condensing in the cold air. What do you say of this word? This is God's breath. This is God's breath in words. This is God's breathing out his truth.

[14 : 42] It's God's word. And the enemy frequently will attack that. He will frequently attack in different forms the fact, again, that this Bible is what it makes itself out to be.

In other words, you could say, if a Roman soldier was to one day say, well, you know, I'm quite influenced by the idea that I don't need to take the sword.

I usually use, I think I'd just leave that one today. And I'll take this other one. It's lighter. It's made of wood or whatever, but it'll do for me today. And anyway, the opinions that I meet with is that this is

perfectly adequate and suited to the situation that now prevails.

You cannot imagine a Roman soldier actually setting out to attack his enemy or defend himself with anything other than the Roman sword, the well-produced and steady sword that he would use. And that's why you fight back with the same sword whenever that is called into question. In other words, what I'm saying is this.

[15 : 49] When the Bible is attacked, you actually respond with the Bible. You respond with its own arguments in favor of itself. And one of the things that we learned way back in the distant past when we were trading in college and so on, seems a long time back now, but one of the things that was emphasized is that this word is a self-authenticating word.

In other words, this word argues for itself. Yes, of course, we have to stand and try as plainly and cogently as possible to argue in favor of this Bible being God's written word.

And of course, nobody's going to really understand that if their own minds have yet to be opened by the light of God's word and by the truth of the spirit. But you have to have confidence in the word that as people read it and as it's proclaimed and as it's testified to by God's people, and then people read it for themselves, it authenticates itself.

It proves itself to be the word of God. And in many ways, confession of faith is such a brilliant document. And not all Reformed confessions begin with a chapter on scripture.

But the Westminster Confession does. And those who drafted and drew up the confession of the Westminster Divines, when they met in that wonderful assembly to draw up the documents such as the confession and the catechisms, they had this in mind that the first chapter should be on scripture as the word of God, because everything else follows on from that.

[17 : 28] How do you know about Jesus and the person of Jesus and the truth about Jesus and the atonement and justification? Because they're all from the word of God. You're depending on the word of God for that.

That's where God has placed them. And so you begin with the word of God. Confession says something like this. Well, not something like this. This is actually what it says in chapter one, verse and paragraph five.

Good to read it in its entirety. It's not terribly long, but it's a brilliant summary. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. We all know that that's very much the case. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God, the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God.

See what it's saying? It doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God. Yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the word is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.

[19 : 06] In other words, that's exactly taken out of what this description here is in this short description, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Not only Spirit produced, but also as the Spirit takes it and uses it in our experience, so the Spirit convinces us that this word is the word of God.

And our full persuasion, it says, of the infallible truth of it and God's authority in it is only by the Spirit of God persuading us to that effect.

See how wonderfully the two things combine, the Spirit of God and the written word of God. So it was fashioned by the Spirit, and therefore you use this word itself in order to present itself in its self-authenticating truth to those that would actually seek to attack it and undermine it.

And secondly, we use it by the Spirit of God. It's not only the sword of the Spirit in the sense of having been fashioned or brought about by the Spirit, but when we use it, we depend upon the Spirit.

[20 : 21] It'd be totally useless for Kenny or myself or Scott or any others, either in the ministry or training for the ministry, to think that you could actually turn up. You've done your studies. You've checked the commentaries.

You've put a sermon together. You've taken a lot of time over it, and you hope it's going to fit together properly, and you're going to hope it's actually in terms in which people will actually follow and be in accordance with their spiritual needs at the time.

But if we stand there and then say, well, that's enough, what good is that going to be? It might do some good, but unless we are depending on the Spirit of God, not on our own skills, whatever they may be or otherwise, it is the Spirit of God that we depend upon in our use of the Word privately as well as publicly.

If this Word of God is to be blessed to yourself, you know this very well, but this is what it's reminding us of, and this is what the devil will undermine, that you don't need really frequently to pray over the Word before you read it and after you read it or even when you're reading it. But it's the sword of the Spirit, not only Spirit produced, but Spirit dependent on the Spirit as we use it. And as you use that word as the sword of the Spirit, you think, first of all, of our understanding. [21 : 46] Our understanding of the Word and the meaning of the Word actually comes from the Spirit, as the Spirit takes the Word and uses it for our understanding of it.

You think of 1 Corinthians, for example, a passage where Paul deals with this at some length, 1 Corinthians chapter 2, and really all the way from verse 6 through to verse 14 there.

Yet among the mature we do not impart wisdom as though it is not a wisdom of this age or the rulership of this age. So on, he goes through various aspects of that.

These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. So no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

And all the way through, the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. And he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

[22 : 45] The spiritual person, the person that has the Spirit, that means. The person that has the Spirit judges all things. But he himself is not judged by no one.

For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. We have the mind of Christ because we have the Spirit who imparts to us the meaning of Scripture, the mind of Christ through his Word.

And understanding of the Word is itself so important. That's why we work at Bible study. Why we work at helping each other understand the meaning of the Word or how this Word has related to our experiences in our own lives personally as well.

But using the Word, it's not just our own personal understanding of it. We understand it not just so as to progress our own lives spiritually, but also to be used by God as instruments of his gospel and of his power.

Not just preaching the gospel, you yourselves as well, who actually witness to Christ in your community, your homes, your place of work. Same principle applies. You know the Word of God for yourself and you need to know how to use it in terms of presenting this truth to other people.

[24 : 05] Now I don't mean by that that you need to be a very skilled apologist or theologian or church historian. All of these things, of course, are in themselves.

Good. What you need is the Word of God and the Spirit of God in a right use of them together. What do I mean by that?

What I mean by that is that there's an important balance between the Word of God on the one hand, the written Word of God or the declared Word of God in preaching, and the Spirit of God on the other hand.

And we need to actually navigate between two extremes so that we're always navigating safely and successfully between these two extremes or two crops of rock, if you like, as we navigate our way spiritually in using the Word of God.

What are these two extremes? Well, the first extreme is that you can make the Word secondary in importance and just emphasize the Spirit over and above that.

[25 : 12] You can make the Word secondary in ways in which, for example, I'm sure you heard of Edward Irvin, a Scottish minister of contemporary with Thomas Chalmers, who sadly went astray in what you would call nowadays more charismatic type of ministry.

And the same principle, you find the same idea in what you know as the prosperity gospel, where you find celebrity preachers, especially of the prosperity gospel, will actually claim that they have the Spirit and that they've been spoken to by God and not necessarily with reference to His Word, but they've been spoken to by God.

This is what God has said to them. This is what they actually must do. This is what people, therefore, must comply because as so-called apostles of God, they are actually there to be used by God and fed information that's then fed to people for their compliance.

That is emphasizing the Spirit of God, but lessening the emphasis on the Word of God. There are different ways in which that can actually come about.

That's the one extreme you've got to avoid. The other extreme is the opposite one where you can make the Spirit secondary and just rely almost exclusively on having the written Word, having the Bible in your hand or your home or in your use of it.

[26 : 41] And that's really pretty much the same as being orthodox in your understanding and approach to the Word of God and to salvation but be dead spiritually.

And of course, that's perfectly possible. That we can have the kind of mind that would want to argue the Bible and its truth in a reformed fashion and yet ourselves not rely on the Spirit of God or at least if maybe for part of it or a very minimal amount.

We need to have both in equal measure. Dependence on the Spirit of God, the author of the Word, fabricator of the sword, and on the other hand, as much use as possible of the Word of God, the written Word, along with dependence on the Spirit.

that's the channel, that's the navigation channel, that's where you actually set out to progress. Not leaving one or other undealt with, not leaving one or other in a secondary way as it were, but both together.

After all, what we read there from the confession is important in the way that it put together. Notice again, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Word is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit.

[28 : 08] That's not all it says. From the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts. You see, that's so important.

When the Spirit bears witness in our hearts to the divine authority of this Word, it doesn't leave the Word out of it. It doesn't just come with His own voice, as it were, and say to you, without any reference to this Bible, I'm just telling you this is the Word of God.

He persuades you of that through your use of the Word of God, testifying to that in your heart, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts. And of course, in conclusion, we could widen out a lot of these points and you'd be able to do that yourselves quite successfully.

But I want to finish just by thinking of Christ as our chief example even in this. And it goes back again to His temptation, as you find it recorded in Matthew and in Luke especially, Luke chapter 4, verses 1 to 13.

And as Jesus met the temptations, the specific temptations of the devil, He didn't actually then produce a word Himself that had never actually been produced before.

[29 : 28] He didn't speak as God, as it were, bringing into being an additional to the written word that was already there. He went to the book of Deuteronomy, the word that God had actually given to His people in Old Testament times.

And he quoted back at the devil the written word of God that he himself well knew was His word. And yet in that chapter you find as well that there's such an emphasis on the Spirit of God in the life of Jesus.

And I'm not saying we can understand everything to do with that. There's enough mystery in that. But it's important that it emphasizes when Jesus was full of the Spirit that He actually answered the devil in that way.

He'd been led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The Spirit was very much the agent that led them into the desert. Having tempted Him there for these 40 days or at least being hungry for 40 days the devil then came with the temptation command these stones to be made bread.

What He's trying to do is to get Him away from dependence upon the Father and obedience especially to the Father's will which Jesus found in the written word.

[30 : 52] and where Jesus in following what was in the written word of God could answer the devil back it is written. It is written again.

It is written again. And it's so important that we realize that as Jesus is our chief example even in that He has set that pattern for us.

and that's why the sword of the Spirit as this attacking part of the armor is emphasized here as the sword of the Spirit. And as you use it and as we'll see God willing next time use it along with the other parts prayerfully but you use it in a very right balance.

You depend on the Spirit you're convinced of the word itself as to what it is. And as you set out like that so you're in position to be offensive for God offensive in the sense of attacking as well as defensive.

And in our day as it has been in every day we need to be both. We need to be both defended and we need to be able to and willing to attack all the untruth that's out there in the world.

[32 : 14] and we do it by the sword of the Spirit. Let's pray. Almighty God we thank you tonight for the sword of the Spirit.

You have given us your word. You have done over the course of many generations moved holy men of God so as to produce for us what we now have in this written word.

And we thank you for the care in your providence that you have provided to ensure that this word reached us. And we thank you too Lord for the way that you have gifted individuals down through the year to translate this word so that we have it in our own language.

Lord we are thankful that you have remembered us in this way. We pray that we may take the sword of the Spirit and with due dependence upon your Spirit and not in ourselves that we may hold forth in the fight against evil and against the sin in our own hearts.

Teach us Lord more of your word and teach us to use your word further and help us each day Lord to have confidence in it as your word. Receive our thanks hear our prayers pardon our sin for Jesus' sake.

[33 : 34] Amen.