

Series: *Take Up the Sword*

Title: "What Is the Sword of the Spirit?" (Ephesians 6:17)

Speaker: Rev. Adam Eshleman

Original Air Date: Week of 1/26/2019

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Why is the Bible called the Sword of the Spirit in Ephesians chapter 6? Why do so few Christians in our time know what the Sword of the Spirit is, and why every Christian must march toward Heaven with the Sword in hand? Why are we told to "take up" the Sword? Why is it vital for you – Christian man, woman, or young person – to understand why the Bible is called the Sword of the Spirit, and how you are called to use it, in many ways, every day of your life? Today we present the first of two messages on these important questions. Our speaker is Rev. Adam Eshleman, associate pastor of Reformation Bible Church in Darlington, Maryland. We are grateful for the opportunity to present these messages, and it is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use them to revolutionize your thinking about the Word of God in your daily life, and ground you more deeply in it. – Dr. Paul Elliott

Ephesians chapter 6, beginning our reading in verse number 10. I remind you most solemnly that this is the Word of the living God:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of righteousness and your feet shod with the preparation of

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the Gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel for which I am an ambassador in bonds that therein, I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.

The grass withers and the flower thereof fadeth away, but the Word of our God shall stand forever.

Warfare is one of many of the New Testament's metaphors for living the Christian life and living it well. The New Testament has many metaphors for this. It talks about the Christian life as a way, as a path to be walked. It talks about the Christian life as membership in a family and the relationships from in that family. It speaks of the Christian life with an analogy from human growth and development or from analogies of agriculture.

Each biblical metaphor presents us a unique contribution that helps our understanding of our calling as Christians. Warfare is calculated to remind us that there is an enemy who seeks to oppose every advance that we make. He is determined to cause us to fail. He's determined to bring us down, and the stakes are as high as they possibly can be. It's war, it's life or death. If we, in our own strength,

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confide our striving would be losing. This enemy, this mortal enemy of our souls, is as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He said in this passage, "To have wiles and to have fiery darts aimed at God's people."

We are called to stand in the strength of our Captain, to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Our wise and omnipotent captain has given us everything we need to successfully stand in this evil day and to resist the temptations of the devil. He's given us truth, truth which must be at the very core and strength of our being. He's given us the righteousness of Christ that we are to apply to, for defense from all of Satan's accusations against our consciences. He's given us the Gospel of peace, which gives us a firm footing to stand in the evil day and to advance into enemy territory.

He's given us faith, and we are to take faith in God's promises if we are to defend ourselves against any of Satan's deceitful temptations. We are to take hope and a final salvation if we are to resist Satan's attacks on our minds that are calculated to weaken us through discouragement in our present circumstances. We are to take the Word of God as our only weapon in this fight. This morning, our theme is the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit. I'll divide our exposition of the second half of Ephesians 6:17 into three different parts.

Let's think, first of all, of this metaphor of the Scripture as a sword. What does that communicate to us? Second, why is it called the Sword of the Spirit? Why does he include that in his description? Third, and most importantly, what does it mean? How

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shall we take the Sword of the Spirit, take the helmet of salvation, and take the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God? First, let's consider the scriptures as a sword. What does that mean? There are so many different metaphors for the Word of God in Scripture. Think of all of the biblical illustrations that we have of the Word of God.

The Word of God is compared to light. It penetrates into the night. It dispels darkness out of darkened and blind minds. It removes natural blindness; it grants sight, "The entrance of Thy Word giveth light. Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." The Word is compared to food, it gives life, it nourishes, it satisfies the soul, it builds up the believer unto maturity. Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby." The Word of God is compared to a seed in Scripture. It's planted in the hearts of men, and it yields a harvest at some latter date.

The parable that Jesus says, tells about the soils. He says, "The sower soweth the Word." Peter tells us that we're born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. It's light, it's food, it's a seed. The Word of God is a mirror, a mirror, "For if any be a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he's likened to a man beholding his natural face in the glass." A mirror enables you to see yourself as you truly are. It tells the truth, it's a revelation of yourself. The Word of God is not just a revelation of our outside, it's a revelation of what we truly are on the inside.

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We never truly know ourselves until we know the Word of God. It's a mirror for God's people. The Word of God is a fire that consumes and a hammer that breaks in pieces rocks. Jeremiah says, quoting the Lord, "Is not my Word like as a fire and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" There's so many different metaphors for the Word of God. Here, the metaphor is that the Word of God is a sword, it's a sword. There were two types of swords in the Roman soldier's arsenal. There was the long broadsword, the type that you would wield with two hands to hack against the enemy. Then there was a short, almost dagger-like, sword.

The Word here signifies that that latter sword, the short sword, the sword that's used to thrust and to cut, it's the sword used by Peter when he wielded it that night to cut off the ear of Malchus. It was a sword about 18, 30 inches in length. It was double-edged, and it had a blade about two inches wide. Of course, a sword like this was used for hand-to-hand combat. That should teach us something about our use of the Word in our warfare in the Christian life.

Roman soldiers would often use many more weapons than their swords. They had darts, they had arrows, they had javelins to throw at the enemy. They even had machinery to launch things against cities, but none of those kinds of weapons are given to the Christian soldier. He's given just one weapon, and it's a weapon used for close hand-to-hand combat. It implies something about our warfare. God does not give us the option as Christians just to launch impersonal bombardments against the enemy. We're not sitting in a command center and pushing buttons and launching missiles against an enemy, unknown and unseen.

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He calls us to be on the front lines of battle and to endure trial and to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. We're to fight our battles head-on. If we were able to fight our battles from a distance, we would never experience any actual trial, but that wouldn't be real Christianity. It'd be fake. The Bible tells us that the Bible is like a sword and reminds us that the battle is always up-close and it's always personal and it is necessarily going to involve suffering. We should expect nothing less. Paul told all of his churches that they were to, through much tribulation, enter the kingdom of God.

The Bible is compared to a sword, not an arrow, not a javelin, but a sword because using it is going to often bring trial and bring suffering on the front lines of battle. Another thing about swords is that swords are just as defensive as they are offensive. We think of swords, usually, as offensive. We think the only offensive weapon in the armor of the Christian is the sword. Actually, if you stop and think about it, you would use your sword more to block the enemy than you would to actually thrust it into any enemies. It's probably a 10:1 ratio, maybe even greater, of blocks to cuts.

A sword is just as defensive as it is offensive. A soldier is given this sword as an essential part of his defense. Think of a soldier's vulnerability if he doesn't have a sword like this, even if he has a breastplate. Even if he has a shield in front of him, the kind of shields we talked about that are as big as this pulpit almost, still, he's not called to cower behind that shield. He's a sitting duck if it doesn't have a sword to block the blows of the enemy in this up-close and personal combat. We're to use the

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sword, not just on offensively but defensively as well. Actually, if you stop and think about it, the two are one and the same.

This is how the Lord used the Sword of the Spirit when He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. We spent a while on this back when we talked about the wiles of the devil in the second sermon and going through this passage. We spent time in Matthew chapter four, the temptation of Christ. We saw that the way that the Lord modeled for us resisting the devil is by using the sword defensively, by quoting scripture, by quoting Deuteronomy, in fact, against every blow of Satan. What was the result of that defensive use of the Word of God? The result was that Satan fled from Him.

This has got to be what James is getting at when he tells us, "Resist the devil," which is certainly a defensive strategy, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." When you use the Word of God defensively like our Lord used it in Matthew chapter four, we are actually putting on an offense against the devil and he flees from that kind of defense. The Scripture is a sword used for up-close combat, cutting and thrusting. It's a sword used both defensively and offensively. It's a sword. The scripture here is called more than just a sword, it's called the Sword of the Spirit. What does that mean? Why would he say that? Why doesn't he just say, "And take the sword, which is the Word of God"? Why the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God?

Well, there are several grammatical possibilities, but the most likely one is that the sword is called the Sword of the Spirit because it's the sword that comes from the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the source of this sword. He's the one who forged the

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sword. Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His Word was in my tongue." By the miracle of inspiration, God inspires the words of Scripture through these holy men as instruments, as means. He is the source of the Sword of the Scriptures.

Further, it's the Spirit Himself who gives a sharp edge to this sword. This sword would have no edge at all if it were not for His presence in the Word. Our hearts are so dull and so hard toward truth that if it were not for the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, giving it sharpness, that it would not ever penetrate the heart and get to where it really needs to be. It's the Spirit who puts the sharp edge on the sword. As William Cowper wrote in that hymn, "The Spirit breathes upon the Word and brings its truth to light." The hand that gave it still supplies the gracious heat and light. In fact, the work of the Holy Spirit is always in tandem with the Word of God.

The two cannot be separated. It's the only weapon that the Holy Spirit uses. The Holy Spirit I know uses sermons, but only in proportion to the Word of God in those sermons and the truth expressed in them. The Spirit of God uses religious books to convert sinners and to edify His people, but only in proportion to the Word of God and the truth that is in them. The Spirit uses the Word of God. It's His only weapon. The Spirit has abundant ability to speak for Himself apart from the written Word. He could do that, but He doesn't do that because He esteems this book so powerful a weapon that He will give over all other weapons and commit Himself to the use of this one weapon, the Sword of the Spirit.

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He does not work apart from the Word of God. This is why we must take up the Word of God, why we must take up the Sword of the Spirit. If you, or I, are going to make any difference, if we're going to make any difference in the lives of anyone else, we are desperate for the working of God's Spirit. He does not work contrary to, without, in the absence of, the Word of God. It's the Sword of the Spirit. He only works through the Word. That's why it's called the Sword of the Spirit. It comes from Him.

He gives it power, and it's the only way that He gives power. It's through the Word of the Gospel. I am not here merely to talk to you about the sword. We're not here to have a discussion and to brainstorm about the sword. That's not what this text is here for. It is not here to inform us. This text, Ephesians 6:17, is a command. If I spend all of our time just explaining to you what the sword is, I have not been faithful to the text. I am under obligation not only to explain it to you but to exhort you to take the Sword of the Spirit. It's what the Word of God tells us to do in this passage, "Take the Sword of the Spirit."

It is clear from our text that our defense against the devil and our conquests against our foes will be obtained by fighting. Compromise will end in our disgrace. Neutrality is not an option in this warfare. We are not merely to hide behind our breastplate and our shield. No such orders are given in this passage. We are to grasp our weapon, and we are to go forth and to fight with it. We are to take the Sword of the Spirit. We cannot dream that winning the battle is going to come to us by accident. No man was ever made holy by accident. No man ever entered the

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Kingdom of God by being careless. If he lets things go as they please, he is bearing himself down to Hell.

As Spurgeon said, "We have no orders to be quiet. We have no orders to take matters easily. The one note that rings out from this text is, 'Take the Sword of the Spirit.' The Captain's voice is as clear as a trumpet, 'Take the sword.' No Christian man here will have been obedient to our text unless, with clear, sharp, and decisive firmness, courage, and resolve, he takes the sword. We must go to heaven, Sword in hand, all the way. Take the Sword of the Spirit."

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