

WEEK 11
05.15.16

THE WEAPON OF GOD'S WORD



FOCUS VERSE

Ephesians 6:17

And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

LESSON TEXT

Hebrews 4:12

12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Deuteronomy 11:13-17

13 And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,

14 That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

15 And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.

16 Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;

17 And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.

II Corinthians 7:1

1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Romans 8:1-5

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.



FOCUS THOUGHT

God equips the child of God with a powerful, double-edged sword that both defends against and offensively attacks the enemy. This sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Practice Makes Perfect

When my son was a preteen and the three musketeers were popular, he and I took fencing lessons at the local library. I thought it would be good father-son bonding time. I quickly learned fencing is much harder than it looks. Of course, one must learn how to wield the sword, whether the light foil, the heavier epee, or the sabre for light cutting and thrusting. Being rank beginners, knowing when to attack, feint, or lunge, or to parry, riposte, or counter-attack in defense was confusing. But as the saying goes, practice makes perfect.

I was surprised at how much legwork is involved in the moves. The normal stance is to lead with the foot on which side one holds the epee. The foot is straight ahead. The rear

foot is parallel but behind the other one. To advance, one moves the front leg forward and follows with the back leg. The sequence is reversed to retreat. Skilled fencers make it look so easy. After all, practice makes perfect.

Handling the Word of God can be confusing to new believers. So many verses. So many strange words. However, as new converts diligently study the Word, they become more comfortable with it. The Holy Ghost begins to illuminate the Scriptures. Doctrines become easier to understand. Answers appear to life's questions. Study of the Word does not require any fancy footwork. It just requires holding the Word and prayerfully studying its precepts. And by the way, practice makes perfect.

OUTLINE

I. THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

- A. The Power of the Sword
- B. The Work of the Sword
- C. The Origin of the Sword

II. THE WORD OF GOD

- A. Warring with the Word
- B. Defending with the Word

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Medieval history is a fascinating subject, especially for children. Stories of knights in shining armor doing chivalrous deeds can captivate the childhood mind. The thoughts of knights jousting and warring against their enemies are exciting.

The knight's weapon of choice was a sword. When coupled with a shield, the sword became a fierce offensive weapon—the shield for defense and the sword for offense.



“The sword is an edged weapon with a long blade designed for delivering cutting blows or thrusts, or both. It first appeared in the prehistoric period; once copper

had been mastered, the dagger was fitted with an increasingly longer blade, until it became in effect a short sword. . . .

“Later, bronze was cast to resemble the copper swords. This new metal easily satisfied the requirements for producing longer swords. . . .

“Little by little, the need was felt for swords capable of cutting blows as well, and as a result double-edged swords started to be made with more or less parallel cutting edges and a strong point. . . . the new type of sword . . . was to be used for both cutting and thrusting . . .” (myarmoury.com/feature_swordintro1.html, accessed December 17, 2013).

The writer of Hebrews would have been keenly aware of the swords of the Roman soldiers. These were undoubtedly in his mind as he penned, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). He purposely chose

that metaphor for the sword's ability to pierce and slash the opponent.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

One can never overemphasize the importance of the Word of God. The psalmist said, "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psalm 138:2).

I. THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

A. The Power of the Sword

The Focus Verse, "And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17), specifically identifies the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit. Before proceeding further in our study, we need to note what the sword does. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

In referring to this verse, the *Apostolic Study Bible* states: "Verse 12 does not support the idea that human beings consist of a trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit, with each entity separate and distinct from the other. Rather, the ancient Hebrews viewed a human being as an integrated whole not fragmented into separate parts. This passage was never intended to provide technical insight into the nature of the immaterial person any more than to understand physical anatomy or mental faculties, but to employ these various references to demonstrate the ability of God's Word to assess innermost thoughts and motives completely and accurately."

The message of Hebrews 4:12 is that the Word of God is so powerful it pierces through all of our deceit and hypocrisy and reveals the true motives behind our actions.

The *Asbury Bible Commentary* states: "Just as the priest with deft cuts laid open the sacrifices brought before the Lord, every inward thought and motive is exposed by the Word's penetrating edge. If our acts seem godly but our intentions are not, God sees right through

our folly. Though one day we shall all give account for ourselves, the eyes from which nothing can remain hidden see the genuineness or falsity of our lives today ([Hebrews] 4:13). The Word of God comes to convince us in belief or to convict us in unbelief. As the Gospel meets us, so too does the sifting judgment of God."

B. The Work of the Sword

Besides revealing the true motives behind our actions, the sword also works to lead, sanctify, and keep.

Lead. The psalmist said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). The Word of God can lead us in all aspects of living. Consider the following:

- **Priorities:** "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

- **Parenting:** "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

- **Finances:** "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

- **Health:** "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:14–15).

- **Spirituality:** "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

- **Direction:** "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Psalm 119:133).

Sanctify. The Word of God sanctifies. In John 17:17, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

John Wesley taught that believers could achieve entire sanctification. That is, according to him, believers arrive at a point in their Christian experience where the heart is cleansed from all sin and made holy by a definite work

of divine grace. When this happens, the desire to sin and the ability to willfully sin are completely eradicated. While it would be wonderful to attain to the place where temptation has no pull on the believer, Scripture does not support this stand. II Peter 3:18 admonishes Christians to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

How then can Christians live above sin? Paul’s answer in Romans 8 was to walk in the Spirit. The lesson text cites Romans 8:1–5. In Romans 8:14 Paul wrote, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” The Holy Ghost empowers believers to live pleasing to God.

The secret to victorious Christian living is consistently walking in the Spirit, allowing the Holy Ghost to lead and guide into all truth through the Word of God.

Keep. The psalmist stated, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). Hiding the Word of God in our hearts keeps us from sinning. In this regard, the Word acts as a preserving agent.

Jesus told His disciples, “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). Before the Spirit can bring a pertinent verse of Scripture to our minds, we must have first committed that verse to memory or at least be familiar enough with it that a portion of it will come to mind when needed.

Not only do we need to know the Word of God, but we need to obey it. Knowledge without obedience does not bring about the desired result. The knowledge God gives us must be put into practice if it is to be beneficial to us. It is so important for believers to know—and obey—the Word of God.

C. The Origin of the Sword

The origin of the metal sword can be traced back to the dagger and use of copper and bronze, which allowed the makers to extend the length of the blade. Similarly, the sword of the Spirit can be traced back to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. We can trust the sword of the Spirit because every word was inspired by the Holy Ghost. The phrase “Thus saith the Lord” occurs 413 times in the Old Testament

of the King James Version; “God said” is used 46 times (carm.org/bible-inspired; accessed January 23, 2014).

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:19–21).

In writing to Timothy, Paul stated, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Timothy 3:15–17).

If we take heed to the Word of God, it will show us the way to salvation, teach us proper doctrine, reprove us when we err, and show us how to live righteously and godly in this present world.

II. THE WORD OF GOD

A. Warring with the Word

Just as medieval knights used their metal swords for war, the Old Testament prophets used the Word of God for warring. For example, consider Elijah.

“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. . . . And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land” (I Kings 17:1, 7).

Moses had voiced God’s promises to Israel if they obeyed His law. Moses had also warned Israel of the consequences for not

harkening to the Lord's commands. One of the warnings was that God would withhold rain. "And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you" (Deuteronomy 11:17). Elijah's prophetic word to Ahab was simply a fulfillment of God's promise to Israel before entering the Promised Land. Israel refused to obey and suffered the consequences.

Many other prophets used the Word of God to war against the sin and corruption in both Israel and Judah. An unnamed prophet did this in I Kings 13:1-5:

"And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Beth-el: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Beth-el, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD."

B. Defending with the Word

While the sword is designed as an offensive weapon, a skilled swordsman can use it defensively. For example, a parry is a fencing bladework maneuver intended to deflect or block an incoming attack. Likewise, a stop hit is a counter-offensive action consisting of a straight thrust made while the opponent is attacking or making a preparation.

Similarly, the Word of God can be used defensively to defeat the wiles of Satan. Jesus is the classic example. After Jesus had fasted forty days in the wilderness, Satan came to tempt Him. In every case, Jesus responded to Satan's enticements by quoting Scripture. Notice the conversation in Matthew 4:3-10:

"And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

David said in Psalm 119:11, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Knowing the Word of God was enough for Jesus to parry the devil's thrusts and defeat His enemy.

Knowing the Word, however, is not enough. Moses rehearsed the Law with the children of Israel. They knew what God required. They knew His promises if they would "hearken diligently unto [His] commandments . . . to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 11:13-17). Nevertheless, they chose to follow the example of their Canaanite neighbors and serve their idols.

To follow the analogy of a fencer, knowing the defensive moves is not enough. One must be willing to fight to win.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

What is the importance of this lesson to us? How does it relate to us? How does the sword of the Spirit affect us? The importance of the Bible cannot be overemphasized.

The Christian life is a relationship with God. As earthly relationships are sustained through conversation and other forms of communication, Christians maintain their relationship with Christ through prayer and studying God's Word. Believers will never mature in Christ if they do not become students of the Word.

The psalmist said, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). He also stated, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). The Word will keep us from sin and will direct our lives.

In his online article "The Power of the Word in the Believer's Life, Part 1," John McArthur used several adjectives to show the significance of the Word of God to the believer: infallible, inerrant, complete, authoritative, sufficient, effective, power, and determinative. Believers can put their complete confidence in the Bible because it is flawless, comprehensive, commanding, potent, applicable, instructive, eternal, and decisive.

Harriet Bond stated, "The word of God is the means by which God makes Himself known, declares His will, and brings about His purpose. His word is the primary means by which He is present and working in this

world. He is not Himself part of this world, but He acts in it by means of His word. His word is powerfully creative. (Ezekiel 37:4) 'again He said to me, prophesy upon these bones, and say to them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord Yahweh'. We prophesy by speaking the word of God which He gives to us" (http://www.thy-way.org/Bibles_Studies/Importance_Word_of_God.html), accessed January 4, 2014).

Isaiah 55:11 states, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." The Word of God has a purpose, and that purpose will be fulfilled. Likewise, the psalmist said, "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it" (Psalm 68:11). "I believed, therefore have I spoken" (Psalm 116:10). We publish the Word by preaching and teaching it. We make confession with our mouths by proclaiming the Word. It will not return empty but will accomplish God's intention. His promises are true and everlasting.

Medieval knights highly prized their swords. They kept them polished and honed. They were often buried with their swords. As Christians we must cherish the Word of God. Reading and studying the Bible should be a part of every Christian's daily routine. (See II Timothy 2:15.) We should be consumed by the Word. The Word will keep us from sin. It will reveal God's will for our lives. It will make us ready for the Rapture. ■

REFLECTIONS

- Why did the writer of Hebrews choose to use the metaphor of a sword in Hebrews 4:12?
- What promises are given to children of God if they obey His Word? (See Deuteronomy 11:13–17.)
- What is sanctification? How is it achieved?
- What is "walking in the Spirit"?
- How can we hide the Word of God in our hearts?