

## **The Gospel Armor, Part 6 – The Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17b)**

*Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on January 6, 2013*

[www.goldcountrybaptist.org](http://www.goldcountrybaptist.org)

We are incredibly blessed to hold a copy of God's Word in our hand in our language. Do you understand how unusual and unfathomable this blessing would be to believers from a few centuries ago if they could see us sitting here, with the entire Word of God in our hand in our language and so many of us have many copies of Scripture in our house and for every believer in our family? These blessings we take for granted were not shared by believers for thousands of years till 17th-18th century AD. We begin this year expressing New Years blessings to each other, and I pray God will impress on our heart today this blessing in our hands

We live in an incredibly privileged time in human history. Go back to OT times and most of the godliest people we read about there had limited access to the first 5 books of the Bible, the Torah. The Levites kept copies and there were teachers in Israel, and children would gather to learn the Torah, and later some psalms or prophets were read, but for the most part, typical Israelites didn't have their own personal copy of even those books. They had to memorize it and they would gather under rabbis to be taught it, to discuss it. As synagogues developed, the scrolls were kept there, and on Sabbath days people heard them read, and some might come at other times, but many in later Bible times couldn't read Hebrew even if they had access to the scrolls.

None of the OT saints we read about had personal copies of all the OT, and the NT saints or apostles didn't have all of the NT books, as it took the letters like Ephesians some time to circulate. All of the other apostles were dead before John wrote his final books at the end of the first century, and it took another century for the NT collections to become more common, another century till a canon of all 66 was in common use. Then the next century they were all translated into Latin so more could read. For many more centuries, expensive copies of Scriptural scrolls or parchments were not the common possession of common people, even if they could read in Latin, and almost everyone in the world had little to no access to the Scriptures and were in the dark for what we call the dark ages. The Roman Catholic Church kept people in the dark to keep power.

'For centuries the Bible existed only in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and those rare copies were sequestered by priests who operated deep within the recesses of a fortified church. There was no such thing as a personal copy of the scriptures, or personal Bible study, or "My time in the Word."

But all that began to change when John Wycliffe, the brilliant linguist of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, began to translate scripture into English ... handwritten copies of Wycliffe's Bible were considered a blasphemous affront to the church and were quickly confiscated. And, in 1408, the archbishop ... led a crusade against translating any part of scripture into English. Failure to comply was a crime punishable by death.

Even as late as 1519, seven Lollards ... were burned at the stake for teaching their children the Lord's Prayer in English. It was in this world and under these conditions that William Tyndale went to work. Tyndale, a linguistic expert, proficient in eight languages, lived a self-imposed exile in France, a fugitive from British justice for translating scripture into English. During the last twelve years of his life, before he was captured and killed, he gave his countrymen the entire New Testament and half the Old Testament. Six thousand copies of the illegal Bibles, hot off the mechanical [newly invented printing] presses, were smuggled inside cotton bails back to England. Each cost three shillings two pence—a week's wages for a skilled laborer. And yet, even with the hefty price tag, demand quickly outstripped supply ... livid at this biblical invasion [the archbishop] devised a plan to counter Tyndale's efforts.

He purchased all remaining copies of Tyndale's New Testaments and had them quickly destroyed. However, the infusion of new money enabled Tyndale to produce a much needed revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition ... By doing so, the archbishop unwittingly financed a project [to] advance God's words [and eventually from there to U.S. soil]...This Book, and the journey it took to get to us, is worth being first in our lives and foremost in our teaching.<sup>1</sup>

The grass withers, persecutors fail, but God's Word abides forever. The Scripture comes to us through history stained with the blood of martyrs who literally gave their lives to get this Book into our hands. I've heard John MacArthur tell of one old Bible he has seen from Reformation times and its pages were stained red with literal blood, as they had dipped the martyr's Bible in his blood after he was executed for it. I remember MacArthur (whose not known for being overly emotional) he said as he held that Bible he began to weep, thinking how highly people have sacrificed to get Scripture to us and how lightly so many of us treat the Holy Word of God. It is stained with blood, and in our text, Eph 6:17, it's called a sword.

v. 17: "*And take up the helmet of salvation, and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***"

Verse 17 completes the picture that began in v. 14 where Paul says we put on "*the belt of truth*" - the sword was worn on the belt by soldiers in Paul's day. The truth of God holds the scabbard for the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. As we begin this new year, 2013, we need a renewed grasp of this sword of the Lord.

Paul calls it "the sword of the Spirit." As His gospel is preached in Acts 2, God uses this "sword of the Spirit" as Peter preaches it, and it says that by it many Jews *'were pierced to the heart, and said, "... what shall we do?'"* (Acts 2:37). Peter tells them there to repent, to turn from their sins to Christ. In Rev. 2:16 Christ says "*repent, or else I coming to you ... with the sword of My mouth.*" His sword will pierce one way or another. If our heart is hard, we need it to be pierced by Christ's gospel sword, before He comes on a white horse with 2-edged sword and an army.

In Hebrews 4, right after one of the greatest gospel appeals in the NT (repeating 3x "*today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts,*" 3:7-8, 15, 4:6-7) is one of the greatest descriptions of the Word of God as "*living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword*" (4:12), piercing the inner man, cutting us both ways. This series is "the gospel armor" but this sword really is more a *weapon* to be armed with, arms for soldiers to take up to battle temptation. Not just the words of Christ in the *gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*, all Scripture is Christ's Word and weapon for all of us. All Scripture points to Christ and His gospel work for us (Luke 24).

In Genesis 3, after the first battle between mankind and Satan that Adam and Eve lost to the serpent in the garden, the Lord cast them out and put an angel with a flaming sword or sabre (1st light sabre) turning every direction so man couldn't return to paradise. Hotter than any laser is this fiery sword of the Lord that again is seen in Revelation by the One who is like fire (Rev 1:16), "*One who has the sharp two-edged sword,*" (2:12), the One that is promised back in Genesis 3:15 to fatally wound the devil's head (called 1<sup>st</sup> gospel)

A hymn says: I have read **a fiery Gospel** writ in burnished rows of steel;  
 "As ye deal with My contemners, so with you My grace shall deal";  
 Let **the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent ...**

[The first stanza says] Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
 He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
 He hath loosed the fateful lightning of **His terrible swift sword;**  
**His truth is marching on.** Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! ...<sup>2</sup>

From Genesis to Revelation, the "sword" is a theme of the gospel. At first the sword of the Lord blocked man's path to paradise, but the gospel promised One to come to make another path back, and to re-create a world one day where all man's swords will be beat to plowshares, peace to be restored by a Prince of Peace (Isa 2:4, 9:6).

Isaiah 49 said Messiah would do this with the sword of His word and Isa 53 said to do it *He would have to be pierced for our sins*. Right before Jesus dies and is pierced through His heart, one next to Him on the cross has his heart pierced by the Spirit's sword to trust Jesus and Jesus replies: *'today you'll be with me in Paradise.'*

A way to Paradise is restored for all pierced by the Spirit's Sword as that man was or as Peter's listeners in Acts 2 were cut, convicted repentant. But the unrepentant will face God's sword of judgment, and only the repentant find the sword of the Lord their sure defense.

Isaiah 49:2 said Messiah's words or mouth would be *"like a sharp sword,"* and Psalm 45 presents Him as a mighty warrior girding on His sword, riding victoriously (including salvation) for His bride, and then taking His throne as king forever (Heb 1 applies to Christ)

Jesus is the Word of God, and when He speaks the Word of God, it is a sharp sword that strikes down His enemies. That epic battle of history will culminate when King Jesus comes, but until then, His Word is also the weapon we need for our everyday battles with sin. That same almighty invincible weapon is given to us in this sword.

In England, legendary King Arthur is given "Excalibur," a special sword. In Narnia, Peter Pevensie receives a sword named Rhindon for an epic battle that Aslan the King (picturing Christ) would win. In J.R.R. Tolkien's middle-earth, "Narsil," sword of Elendil, was broken, re-forged and re-named "Anduril," a king's sword given to Aragorn. In the Arab world, there are legends associated with Zulfiqar, the sword of Ali. In the Orient, Nitta Yoshisada is a famous Samurai sword that has been passed down through the ages. In Spain, the personal sword of their historical hero El Cid, his sword "Tizona" is one of their national treasures. In Scotland, the Wallace Sword is a long Claymore they say was used by the Scottish patriot warrior hero William Wallace in the 13th century against England's army.

But the true and greatest sword of all is given to all followers of Christ in v. 17, *'the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.'*

#### Outline:

1. How a Soldier Used This Sword
2. How the Savior Used His Sword
3. How His Servants Must Use His Sword

### How a Soldier Used This Sword

In NT language, to “bear the sword” meant deadly force (Rom 13, Acts 12:2). The double-edged blade stabbed and cut both ways. In the context of the full armor Paul has described in v. 14-17, this is the first and only piece that is not only defensive armor but is also offensive arms, and would be the last piece taken up before battle.

Unlike the shield that provided broad and general protection on the one side, the sword had to be handled precisely exactly where the enemy attacked. This Greek word is for a dagger or a short sword, adapted from the Spanish sword, also called the *gladius*, used by the gladiators and Roman soldiers. It was always at hand on the right side of the belt and if handled skillfully it was used to block the attacks of an enemy and thrusting back in sword-fighting duels.

When v. 17 says “take up...the sword,” Paul is calling on soldiers to unsheathe their weapons and stand up to fight the enemy attacks like a Roman soldier or a gladiator in the arena fighting for his life. We’re called to be as brave as Braveheart, and fight like Pilgrim’s Progress characters “Great-heart” or “Mr. Valiant for Truth,” as we wield the razor sharp 2-edged samurai saber of the Spirit, the Word.

### Which takes us to #2: How the Savior Used His Sword

Turn to Luke 4, and like each piece of the soldier’s arsenal, we see this one in a Christ-centered light, rather than centered on man and his efforts. It’s the Lord’s armor we put on and this is the sword of the Lord we take up, the sword that He first took up for us and was victorious with against the devil, as an example and to empower us

Luke 4:1 *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit* [notice that, because we're about to see how the Spirit and the Word go together, that's why Paul calls the Word of God, "the sword of the Spirit" in Eph 6:17, and in Eph 5:18 Paul says we must all be "filled with the Spirit"], *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness* [some translations "desert"]<sup>2</sup> *for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.*<sup>3</sup> *And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread”* [he's tempting Him by the lust of the flesh, to use His powers for self-gratification instead of the Father's will]

This is the original "desert storm conflict." The devil is going to try to storm up against Jesus in the desert wilderness with "all the fiery missiles of the evil one." But just like in a later desert storm war, as Saddam Hussein fired Scud missiles, our army's superior weaponry in Patriot missiles literally blew one Iraqi scud after another out of the sky, while it was still in the air, before it could land and do its damage. Sophisticated defensive radar tracked the trajectory of all flaming missiles, and the superior weaponry of the Patriot missile shot down enemy scuds by causing them to self-destruct in mid-air

In v. 4 Jesus does the same with a greater weapon: *Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.’”* His radar was up to Satan's fiery projectiles. His superior weapon He used for counterattack was the Word of God that cut down the incoming flaming darts like a light saber blocking shots fired. The next round of Satan's firepower goes after the desires of the eyes.

<sup>5</sup> *And he led Him up and **showed Him** all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.* <sup>6</sup> *And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.* <sup>7</sup> *"Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours."* [i.e., the crown without the cross]

This temptation would come again in the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus, in agonizing bloody sweat, would cry "Abba, Father, is there any other way?" Jesus was fully human and fully tempted in every way, Hebrews 2 and 4 says, yet without sin? How? Jesus relied on God's Word through the Spirit: <sup>8</sup> *Jesus answered him, "**It is written**, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'* " [again the sword, the Word cuts temptation down mid-air]

<sup>9</sup> *And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here;* <sup>10</sup> *for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,'* <sup>11</sup> *and, 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE'"* [#3 is pride, do a sky-dive with no parachute to test God's power and show off to all those people like a super man]

<sup>12</sup> *And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.' "* <sup>13</sup> *When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.* <sup>14</sup> *And Jesus returned to Galilee **in the power of the Spirit** ...*

Notice it is the Spirit's power that was with Him to use "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Satan tried to break Him but Jesus said in John 10:35 "Scripture cannot be broken." This is the unbreakable sword of the Lord used in the power of the Spirit. 3x Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6 and 8, 3x "it is written." The Scripture-quoting Scripture-twisting serpent had to slither away.

Theologian Shai Linne writes "a true Anomaly...who can ponder the Servant fighting the serpent in the desert with verses from Deuteronomy, Satan threw every obstacle at Him, but couldn't fathom The brilliant stratagems of the eschatological Adam ..."<sup>3</sup>

Did you get all that? "Eschatological Adam" means "final Adam," and that reference to the serpent reminds us of the serpent in Eden. The last verse of Luke 3 actually makes that connection, at the end of Luke 3:38: '*...the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.*' Then 3 verses later, Satan says in 4:3 "*If you are **the son of God**...*"

The first Adam was a "son of God" in a unique sense, having no earthly father, but the serpent tempted his wife Eve and he failed as head and man's representative. And so another Adam and man was needed to represent a redeemed humanity, you can study that out in Romans 5. So God sends Jesus, "*The Son of God*," His unique One and Only Son with a capital "S." "God the Son" becomes fully man to prevail against Satan's temptations where Adam and Eve failed.

1 John 2:16 categories all sin as "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of eyes and the pride of life.*" Gen 3:6 says Eve "*saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food* [there's the lust of the flesh Satan first tempted Jesus with, food for the flesh, and saw it was] *pleasant to the eye* [lust of the eye] *and desirable to make wise* [pride of life]

- Satan tries the same approach to tempt Jesus in the same 3 areas in the same order in Luke 4: lusts of the flesh (food), lusts of the eye (showing him the kingdoms and a shortcut), and the pride of life. But this time Jesus uses God's Word as a sword against the twisting serpent who twists God's Word
- Jesus the Last Adam (as 1 Cor 15:45 calls Him) meets and defeats the last enemy, death swallowed up in victory (v.54)
- Contrast Adam and Eve with all they needed in the garden, while Jesus was in want, hungry after forty days of fasting.  
1st temptation was in a beautiful Garden, 2nd Adam meets him in a dry wilderness (best vs. worst of circumstance)
- Adam lost the battle and plunged humanity into sin and death. But Jesus won the battle and went on to defeat Satan and He delivers redeemed humanity from sin to life forever
- And He gives adopted sons of God the same weapon sword

### **Which takes us from #2. How the Savior Used His Sword, to ... #3. How His Servants Must Use His Sword**

Psalm 149:6 says of God's servants: "*Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, And a two-edged sword in their hand ...*"

Revelation says our Lord Jesus when He speaks His words, it's like a two-edged sword, and that same power is available to those who speak His Word as He did in temptation, by saying "It is written." Scripture was written for our example and spiritual swordsmanship so Christ's adopted siblings can fight like Christ our Elder Brother.

Hebrews 2:11, at the end, and in v. 12, Jesus calls us His "brothers."

*<sup>14</sup> Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, **He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil...<sup>17</sup> Therefore, **He had to be made like His brethren in all things...**<sup>18</sup> For since **He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*****

**4:15** *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but **One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.***<sup>16</sup> *Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need [v. 12]... 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.***

So how are we the church to use this sword? Steve Lawson said:

'No book is more relevant, up to date, fresh, or contemporary than this book. Some pastors are wanting to have a contemporary service. Great: be an expositor of the Word of God! If you preach trends and current events, you are old news before the words come out of your mouth. But when you preach this book, you're more up-to-date than tomorrow's newspaper. [He says someone once asked] "How are you going to make Ezekiel relevant?" I've waited 20 years for that question! "I do not have to *make* the Bible relevant, it *is* relevant. My responsibility is to explain its relevance ... I often enter into the pulpit empty or tired, but this book never is!

It's alive ... [he also said in that message] I've read other books, this is the only book that has ever read me! ... As a two-edged sword, it cuts both ways. It comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable ... [he said to preachers] You can be both the most loved man in town and the most hated at the same time. You can walk into a room and either duck or pucker ... [some may name their children after you and later will curse their dogs after you] ... when you minister the Word rightly, it cuts, it penetrates, it pierces. So often [in church] people set up barriers against God and remain aloof from the truth. There's a "do not disturb" sign around their neck ... But the Word penetrates the outer facade and cuts down all the way in: not to harm but to heal ... critics want to sit in judgment on the Bible. But the Bible is not on trial — we are. It's the Word of God that is able to judge...<sup>4</sup>

He closed his message to 3,000 pastors at Shepherds Conference: 'O preacher man, unsheathe the sword! No battle was ever won when the sword remained in its scabbard. Take this book: open it, read it, study it, preach it, proclaim it! Never enter the pulpit unarmed. Put down all other blades, they are all dull and blunt. Too many ministers are attempting open heart surgery with a butter knife. They have taken up inferior weapons of pop psychology, of self-image improvement, of church growth strategies, or corporate leadership principles. *Put down all those plastic utensils and pick up the sharp 2-edged sword of the Word of God!* Wield the sword confidently...thrust with it, let it cut, let it pierce, let it penetrate, let it cut both ways...for we have nothing to say apart from the Word<sup>5</sup>

I can't improve on those words and can never improve on God's to all of us (not just teachers) that we're to study to show ourselves approved to God, as unashamed workers, who rightly divide or cut straight, who properly handle the Word of God (1 Timothy 2:15).

### **New Years Resolutions to increase your handle on God's Word:**

#### **1. Resolve to hear it preached more in 2013**

Since those things are true of the Word, and it is the Sword that the Spirit uses, we need to be exposed to its blade as much as possible.

*"faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ ...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching."* (Romans 10:17, 1 Timothy 4:13 ESV)

- Be in church to hear preaching Sunday mornings more
- Be in church to hear preaching Sunday nights more – don't be content with one meal a week from the Word, come for dinner
- Don't wait till next Sunday for your next meal (audio sermon CDs and series are available free by request on back counter or online, MP3s, even iPhone and Android apps, GTY, Piper, etc.)

#### **2. Resolve to read it more in 2013**

1 Timothy 4:7 *"...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."*

- Handout in bulletin for one read-thru-Bible-in-a-year program
- Back of MacArthur Study Bible has plan (daily 1 NT, 3 OT)

### 3. Resolve to study it and apply it more in 2013

Ezra 7:10 ‘*Ezra set his heart to study the Law...and to practice it*’

- Men’s study Saturdays (Elders really desire all fathers there, John showed yesterday how the gospel is to be applied in the home, future study applications on leading family devotions)
- Sunday school classes (why not join one today or next week?)
- Small group studies (new week-night studies starting January)

### 4. Resolve to memorize it more in 2013

Psalm 119:11 ‘*I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*’ [Jesus quoted Scripture to resist temptation]

- Note the bookmark in your bulletin, dads in particular, this you can use to memorize a verse a week together as family

### 5. Resolve to pray more for the Spirit’s help in 2013

Eph 6:17 “*and take the ... sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*<sup>18</sup> *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer ...*”

We’ll study that more next week, how the Spirit is essential in both the Word of God and in prayer and how He they must be joined

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Walters, April 2012 “Pastor’s Letter” from KFIA (Sacramento Salem Radio station)

<sup>2</sup> “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

<sup>3</sup> Shai Linne, “Mic Check, 1, 2,” The Solus Christus Project, 2005 album.

<sup>4</sup> <http://dinghome.net/2008/03/07/general-session-6-steve-lawson/>

<sup>5</sup> Steve Lawson, “The Preacher’s Invincible Weapon,” March 7, 2008  
<http://www.shepherdsconference.org/media/details/?mediaID=584>