

Spiritual Warfare Sermon 13: Ephesians 6:17: The Sword of the Spirit: Part Two

OUTLINE

The sword that dispels darkness
The sword that answers temptation

INTRODUCTION

'The word,' acts 6:4; 'the implanted word,' James 1:21; 'the prophetic word,' 2 Pet. 1:19; 'the word of God,' 'the word of Christ,' Col. 3:16; 'the word of His grace,' Acts 14:3; 'the word of truth,' Ps. 119:43; 'the word of righteousness,' Heb. 5:13; 'fire,' Jer. 23:29; 'hammer,' Jer. 23:29; 'sweeter than honey,' Ps. 19:10; 'lamp,' Ps. 119:103; 'meat,' Heb. 5:14; 'milk,' 1 Pet. 2:2; 'water,' Eph. 5:25; and 'sword' Eph. 6:17. These are just a few descriptions of the word of God, the Sword of the Spirit. The bible is the Swiss army knife of the Christian soldier; it is the universal tool for every situation. It has the measure of every situation from the large to the small. So today we continue looking at the sword of the Spirit we want to continue observing how the sword is used offensively and defensively in large and small skirmishes. Today we will look at the sword as a culture changing force impacting continents and ages, as well as useful in personal self-defence against temptation.

The sword that dispels darkness

The Sword of the Spirit is so powerful it has an effect that affects continents and the fallout lasts for centuries. There are various periods of church history that we could point to in order to illustrate these widespread effects of the word but the Reformation is one of the best examples. It is such a bright light that it drives away centuries of darkness. Europe in the middle ages was bound by the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. The church had bloated to become a bureaucratic dictator that held down the people with its authority and kept Europe from the light of truth by refusing to have the bible translated and conducted the mass in Latin. Luther describes this period as 'The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,' as a title to one of his books. But all of this began to change with the Greek translation of the bible. The Greek Bible was printed for the very first time, and many who could only read it in Latin could now read it in Greek and many mistranslations were corrected and the truth of the word began to take effect. The Latin translation which had been used for 1000 years which with its mistranslation had propped up the sacramental system of salvation in the Catholic Church was removed and light began streaming in.

The Roman Catholic Church taught that Christ's grace was mediated through the Pope who had been appointed to the place of authority by apostolic succession and that the Pope who was the vicar of Christ on earth authorised all the other officers of the church, including the priesthood. These priests by virtue of their ordination were the dispensers of grace through the 7 sacraments of the church. By the 7 sacraments a person was held by the mother of the church from the cradle to the grave. The adherent was baptised, confirmed, married, and buried with last rites, they received the Lord's Supper and confessed their sins along the way, and these were thought to ensure one went to heaven ultimately after death. There would of course be a compulsory time in purgatory for every person apart from the saints. This unbiblical view of salvation through the church fell apart when the truth of God's word came to light. The truth of the word is like a lion. Spurgeon said this, 'There is no need for you to defend a lion when he is being attacked. All you need to do is open the gate and let him out.' And so it was with God's word when released from obscurity it destroyed the lies that had ensnared for 1000 years.

Here are a few examples, the word justification. In the Latin the word literally means 'to make just/righteous.' That might sound fine to you but the emphasis is on make, as in a process. It was Phillip Melanchthon who helped Luther see that the NT Greek word for justification did not mean 'to make righteous' but rather 'to declare righteous.' This brought a whole new light to bear on the issue, no longer was the wording of the bible seen to support the process of becoming better by our own efforts in dependence upon the Spirit for righteousness but it was seen as Paul originally intended it, that we who are sinners are made right in the eyes of God not by a series of acts we do, but God conferring upon us a new legal status. This was good news, no longer was the gospel that we needed to be drip-fed grace through the 7 sacraments so that we had some inner reserves to draw on in order to produce fruit by which we would make ourselves righteous. That is bad news for we cannot produce anything perfect enough to merit heaven even with the aid of the Spirit due to remaining sin. The good news is that God confers upon us a new legal status of righteous not as a reward for your hard work, but as a gift received through faith. Justification was seen to be declared righteous on account of Christ's work not to make ourselves righteous by our own efforts.

Another truth the bible set straight was the concept of faith. Medieval theology essentially taught that faith was a voluntary assent to the dogmas of the church. The church does your believing for you, trust the church, she is the teacher who understands the mysteries, you just do what she tells you. Once again helped by Melanchthon's expertise Luther came to see that faith is more trust than assent. Faith was no longer seen as a submissive acceptance of whatever the church said, but rather based on the account of God's promises and the revelation of His character in His word, faith is a confidence in God's willingness to save through Christ.

These truths and others overturned whole systems of salvation that relied on priests and the sacraments and the gospel was once again free to save sinners apart from these constraints.

The truth of God's word was set free by the translating work of William Tyndale. He was a great scholar who translated the word of God into English and produced the first printed bible in English. This was not welcome by the church in England and the Archbishop Thomas More. In fact there was so much resistance to God's word that the church burnt the bibles in English and some of Tyndale's friends were martyred. 'John Tewkesbury. He was converted by reading Tyndale's *Parable of the Wicked Mammon* which defended justification by faith alone. He was whipped in Thomas More's garden and had his brow squeezed with small ropes till blood came out of his eyes. Then he was sent to the Tower where he was racked till he was lame. Then at last they burned him alive. Thomas More "rejoiced that his victim was now in hell, where Tyndale 'is like to find him when they come together.'"¹

It is reckoned that all this resistance was because of 5 words, 'Thomas More's criticism of Tyndale boils down mainly to the way Tyndale translated five words. He translated *presbuteros* as elder instead of priest. (This overturns the Roman Catholic system of government and its dependence upon priests) He translated *ekklesia* as congregation instead of church (this meant that the authority for the church was local not in the organization of Rome). He translated *metanoeo* as repent instead of do penance (this took away the Catholic Church's sacrament of penance and its dependence upon a priest). He translated *exomologeio* as acknowledge or admit instead of confess (this did away with the

1 <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/always-singing-one-note-a-vernacular-bible>

need of the confessional). And he translated *agape* as love rather than charity.² The truth of the bible and what it actually meant was so dangerous people were killed to silence them. But the truth is a lion and it can defend itself, the seeds were now sown and it was just a matter of time before they bore fruit.

In 100 years the Reformation has spread to every country in Europe, and lie after lie was overturned. The teaching of the supreme authority of the Pope, the system of salvation through the 7 sacraments, the superstitious practice of pilgrimages and praying to angels and saints, the concept of the priesthood and the celibacy of the clergy, the doctrine of purgatory, the selling of indulgences, these and many other errors were exposed and people were set free. An age of light that had not been known for hundreds of years was experienced. There was widespread revival. All because the bible is the sword of the Spirit and it has the power to change the course of history never mind our individual lives.

Do not underestimate the power of the Spirit in using the bible, place your confidence in it and stand upon it. If we will but be faithful to declare this word and not teach the traditions of men, philosophy, psychology, and any other form of wisdom. Let us be faithful to God's word and perhaps He will have mercy upon us in NZ and we will see another Reformation. I cannot do better than recommend to you Luther's practice when he was being challenged at the Diet of Worms to give up his teachings, listen to his famous response:

'Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of Scripture or by clear reason—since I believe neither the popes nor the councils by themselves, for it is clear that they have often erred and contradicted themselves—I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not withdraw anything, since it is neither safe nor right to do anything against one's conscience. Here I stand. God help me. Amen.'³

The sword that answers temptation

The word of God is powerful enough to overturn centuries of error, but let us bring this home to ourselves; the word of God is also strong enough to help us fight our daily temptations. The bible, when used of the Spirit, not only sheds light and banishes systems of lies, it also helps you and I in our minor regular skirmishes and helps us to overcome. There are applications that relate to the continental power of God's word. Because of these truths you should make sure that I preach God's word and not man's ideas. You are now equipped to know what I should be saying to you and what will benefit you. You should learn to become fussy eaters when it comes to God's word. Do not accept garbage, be it in the form of highbrow philosophy or sentimental humanism, if it is not God's word then spit it out and go somewhere where you will get the Shepherd's provisions for the flock. But I want to move from the profound to the everyday. One of the necessary and everyday uses of the word of God is using the word to address temptation. This use of the sword is not a man-made innovation but a pattern that was established by our Lord when He faced temptation after His baptism in the gospels. You will remember that Jesus was tempted at least three times, and in every instance He responds with 'it is written.' This is not something intended to be unique to Jesus as the God-man but the method taught in the OT intended for every believer.

2 Ibid.

3 Needham, p98.

Ps. 119:9-16, 'How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you, let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.'

Let's look at Christ as He is being tempted. Firstly, I would like you to notice the extreme conditions of the temptation in v2, 'And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.' He was not in our present cushy conditions of first world comfort but in extreme circumstances. I point this out to highlight that the word is helpful in all situations including the extremes like when you are on a death bed, or about to be killed for your faith.

The first temptation is a temptation for Christ is an attack on the veracity of His Sonship to prove that He is the one sent of God, v3, 'And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' The key to understanding this answer is to try and answer this question: in what way would Jesus be sinning by proving his Sonship at the devil's provocation? Making bread is not the sin for He will feed 5000 in His ministry. Eating when He was supposed to be fasting is part of it. The Spirit led Him into the wilderness to do this fast. Jesus as the Israel of God was being tested as God's former sons, Adam and Israel had been tested. But notice how the devil wants to get Jesus to illegitimately break His fast. He wants Jesus to be unsure of His Sonship or to feel the need to prove it and goad Him into action by calling His Sonship into question. But Jesus answers with a verse from Deut. 8:3, v4, 'But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" There are several important things to notice about this text.

Firstly, it comes in the context of Moses looking back over the time God was testing Israel in the desert for 40 years. The point of the 40 years was a test to see if they would be obedient it was an exercise in teaching them to listen to God and follow no matter what the requests were. God's love towards His son Israel was in this form of chastening and instruction and was proof of His love not wrath. Deut. 8:2-3, 'And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.'

Secondly, think about the way in which the devil sought to goad Christ, by making Him feel the need to prove that He was the Son of God. The clue is in His answer, 'every word that comes from the mouth of God.' Let me ask you, 'where in the context have we had words come from God's mouth?' Matt. 3:17, 'and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'" God had spoken that Jesus was the Son, He did not feel the need to prove to the devil that He was the Son, if God said it that settles it, and He can rest in what God says. Jesus answer not only reminds Him that He is allowed to be hungry and must obey God only, but that He is the Son and need not feel the need to prove otherwise because God has said it is so.

There are many aspects to Christ's temptations that are not relevant for us, for example, you I will never be led by God into a 40 day fast as a test of obedience, nor will we be faced with having to resist the temptation to use miracles to prove our identities. But Christ in His humanity gives us much instruction about how we are to resist temptation by using the

word of God. We must appreciate that Jesus was fully human and in dependence upon the Spirit He used the word to aid Him in His resistance against temptation.

Jesus knew the bible and had parts of it memorised. He had followed the instruction of Psalm 119 and had stored up the word in His heart. When a temptation came and it used confusion, and a provocation to do a good thing in a bad way, Jesus clarified the path of obedience by shedding the light of the word on the situation. He reminded Himself of the reality of the situation from the context of Deut. 8 that He had been led by God into the wilderness for the purpose of being tested in His obedience not to prove His Sonship by miracles. He reminded Himself of His responsibility to obey. He reminded Himself that obedience and death is better than food and life. And He diffused the need to prove His Sonship by remembering that God had declared Him His Son and that is enough.

This lays upon us the importance of memorising scripture and having it ready for the Spirit to bring back into our remembrance at the needed time. It will be no good to you if you want to sharpen your sword after the battle is begun you need to be ready for battle by having the word already stored away in your heart. Dawson Trotman the founder of the Navigators was converted in 1926 and begun memorising scripture. He put himself to learning one verse every day. During the first three years of his Christian life he memorised 1000 verses. He was a truck driver and would use the times driving to go over the verse. Donald Whitney suggests that when you memorise Scripture that you:

Have a plan, that is have a pre-planned list of verses you want to learn. These can be promises; they can be verses relating to preaching the gospel; they can be verses related to a present difficulty or sin. Lay them out beforehand.

Write out the verse in full on a piece of paper or index cards.

Draw pictures on the cards to help you remember them better.

Memorise them in a good translation word perfectly, including the chapter and verse. Don't lower the standard because it will continue to slide.

Find a method of accountability.

Review your memorised verses daily.

And meditate on your verses.

1 Thess. 4:3-5

Jesus faced the temptation of doubting God's word about His Sonship. In the first two temptations this is the devil's angle, 'if you are the Son of God throw yourself down.' It was not enough that He knew the right verses, but that He also believed them. When we are tempted, it will often be the case that we not only need to know the truth about what we are to do, but trust that God's word is good and the best way in that situation. Think back to Adam's temptation. He too was tempted by being tempted to doubt God's word, 'Did God really say,' and the implication that He would not be a good God for restricting the first humans by His laws, and that His ways were not the best ways for them to live. You will have to trust God and not doubt, trust that He is indeed good and commands you for your good. I think it was Ed. Clowney who points out the connection between this temptation and the words of Christ in Matt. 7:9, 'Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?' These words are spoken in a context where Jesus is speaking of God as a loving Father who gives to those who asks. He paints the picture of a generous and willing God, that prayer is not so much changing God's unwillingness but drawing on His willingness. This would have been His confidence as He was being tested for so long, and could wait for God's timing and provision.

But to know the word is not enough, there must be a willingness to obey the word. If you are double minded, if you are not sure you want to walk in holiness then knowing it is not enough. But once again the cure for unwillingness is to meditate upon the word, look again at Ps. 119:14-16, 'In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.' Notice that sandwiched in between two mentions of delight is the practice of meditation. David is convinced that the word of God and its laws is a delight, to have the word he says is like having all the money in the world. He knows that in having God's word He has the best way to live his life and will experience blessing. For this reason he says he will not forget it. Let me use a familiar example here. The world has gone crazy over sex, it is a God given gift to be opened as a wedding present but the world has turned it into an industry and something not objective but that must be arranged around my almighty will and desire. But remember that we are made by God to do His laws. The best way of being human is by being holy and living our lives according to His laws. Personal happiness, marital and family happiness, blessings from God, and a well-run society were all intended to be found in the instruction of God's word. Like a lion living in a game reserve, in its natural habitat it is free and can flourish, in the bounds of God's law we are free and can flourish. But to get outside the fence we break ourselves, our marriages, our families and our society and we provoke the judgement not the blessing of God. Think of all the abortions, the unwanted babies, the sexually transmitted diseases, the divorcees, the pornography, the prostitutes, the sex trade, sexual abuse of children, homosexuality, the present fight for people trying to remove the incest laws and bestiality laws. All of the pain and hurt and judgement that is found in not keeping God's law. Can we not help but marvel at God's wisdom, at the goodness of His ways, at the generosity of His laws and how good life is when done God's ways. If you want to be equipped to fight temptation with the sword of the Spirit you will need to have this agreement, this delighting, this understanding of its goodness based on meditation. Let the Spirit reveal its treasures to you that you come to delight in it and see its value, as if you had all the money in the world.

Are you equipped, do you have this universal tool, and is it sharp?