

The Sword of the Spirit



Spiritual Warfare (Part 10)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we draw near to the close of another week. Today I am going to continue and conclude the theme that I have been dealing with all week, the defensive armor that God has provided for us in our spiritual warfare against Satan and his kingdom.

In my previous talks this week I have dealt with five of the items of defensive armor listed by Paul in Ephesians 6:13-17: the girdle of truth, the breastplate of salvation, the shoes of the preparation of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation. Today I am going to deal with the sixth and last item: the sword of the Spirit.

There is one thing that distinguishes the sword from the other five items that we have looked at. The sword is the first item that is not purely defensive. Without it, we have no way to drive the devil off. If we put on all the other items of equipment, we may perhaps be able to prevent the devil from actually wounding us, but we cannot drive him from our presence. The only thing that can do that in that list is the sword, which is called "the Word of God."

The Bible compares God's Word to a sword because God's Word pierces and penetrates. For instance, in Hebrews 4:12, the writer says:

> "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (NIV)

The truth there is that God's Word penetrates to every area of human personality. It penetrates to the marrow, the very innermost part of the physical being, and it penetrates and divides between soul and spirit, the innermost area of human personality. It is sharper than any double-edged sword.

In Revelation 1:16, where John had a vision of Jesus in His glory, as the Lord of the church, one of the things that he saw was a sword coming out of the mouth of Jesus. This is what he says:

> "In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword." (NIV)

That sharp double-edged sword is the Word of God coming out of the mouth of Jesus. Since it is indicated in Scripture that Jesus Himself uses the sword of the Word of God, we would do well to study just how Jesus used it in His earthly life. The clearest picture of this is found in Matthew 4:1-11, which describes the temptation of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness. Let me say in advance every time that Jesus encountered Satan personally, He used against him only one weapon—the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Listen while I read this account:

> "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down, for it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him." (NIV)

Some interesting things about that that I would like to point out. One thing that really impresses me is that neither Jesus nor Satan even questioned the authority of Scripture. Isn't that remarkable! Particularly because Jesus quoted each time from the book of Deuteronomy, and if there is one book that has been singled out for attack by modern theologians and critics, it is the book of Deuteronomy. But personally, I believe Jesus and Satan were wiser than the modern theologians. They both knew the authority of those words.

Secondly, you could notice that the basis of every temptation against Jesus was a temptation to doubt. Every time Satan began with the word "if," he called something in doubt.

And then, as I have already indicated, Jesus didn't vary His method of dealing with Satan, He always used the same weapon against him: the Word of God. "It is written... it is written... it is written..." It is significant that the devil can quote Scripture but he misapplies it. He quoted from Psalm 91, but Jesus quoted again from Deuteronomy. The devil tried to use Scripture against the Son of God. If he did it against Jesus, he might do it against you or me. We have to know Scripture thoroughly and we have to know how to apply Scripture if we are going to be able to handle the devil. We have got to be careful of people who misapply Scripture and try to tempt us to do the wrong thing.

But my real main point is this: Jesus did not answer the devil with theology, He didn't answer him with His religious affiliation, He didn't tell which synagogue He attended or which rabbi had taught Him. He always went straight to the Scripture. "It is written... it is written... it is written..." And after the third thrust of that sharp double-edged sword, Satan backed off, he'd had enough. And you and I are given the privilege of using the same weapon.

Return for a moment to Ephesians 6:17, where Paul speaks about the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The word he uses in Greek there for "word" is rhema, and rhema always means primarily a spoken word. I think that is significant. The sword of the Spirit is not the Bible on the bookshelf or on the nightstand. That doesn't scare the devil. But when you take the Scripture in your mouth and quote it direct, then it becomes the sword of the Spirit.

Notice also the significance of that phrase "the sword of the Spirit," the sword of the Holy Spirit. This indicates cooperation between the believer and the Holy Spirit. We have to take the sword, the Holy Spirit doesn't do that for us; but when we take the sword in faith, then the Holy Spirit gives us the power and the wisdom to use it.

In my talks this week I have dealt with the six items of protective armor. Let me just enumerate them once again. The girdle of truth, the breastplate of salvation, the shoes of the preparation of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. If we put on and use this entire protective equipment which God has provided, we are totally protected from the head to the feet—from the crown of our head to the soles of our feet—except for one area. What's that? I told you earlier.

The one area for which there is no protection is our back. Now I believe this is very significant. I believe it has a twofold application. The first is never turn your back on the devil

because if you do, you are giving him an opportunity to wound you in an unprotected area. In other words, never give up. Never turn around and say, “I’ve had enough. I can’t stand this. I can’t take any more.” Because that is turning your unprotected back to the devil and be sure he will avail himself of the opportunity to wound you.

But I think it means more than that because in a certain sense, we are not always able to protect our own back. And I believe the implication is this: in the time of Paul, in the legions of Rome and in the armies of Greece which preceded those of Rome, it was always understood that foot soldiers would fight in close ranks. The Greek word for such a close rank was a phalanx. And they were trained to fight this way and never break rank. Every soldier knew the particular soldier that should be on his right and on his left so that if he was being hard-pressed and couldn’t protect his own back, there was another soldier there that would do it for him.

I believe the same is true with us as Christians. I believe we cannot go out as isolated individuals and take on the devil’s kingdom. We have to come under discipline, we have to find our place in the body (which is the army of Christ), we have to know who stands on our right and who stands on our left. We have to be able to trust our fellow soldiers. And when we are under pressure, we ought to know who will be there to protect our back when we can’t protect it.

In closing, let me say something which I would rather not say, but I believe it is true. You know the real tragedy of so much of our Christian experience is that the very person who protects your back sometimes wounds you. How often we as Christians are wounded in the back by our fellow Christian. That is something that never ought to happen. Let us make up our minds we are going to stand together, protect one another’s back, and not wound one another.

Well, our time is up for today. I’ll be back with you again next week at this same time, Monday through Friday.

Next week I will continue with this theme of “Spiritual Warfare” but I will be explaining how we can move from defense to attack. I will be dealing with weapons of attack.

Radio Program

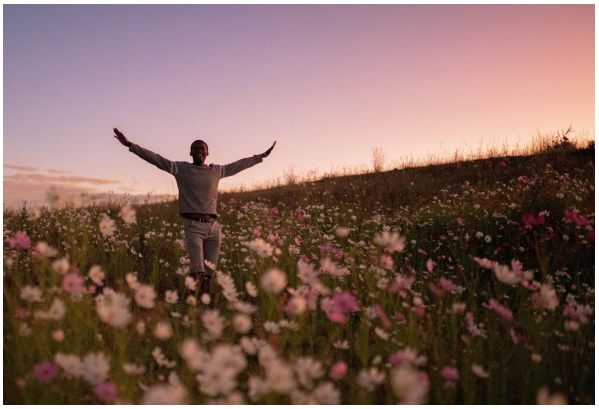
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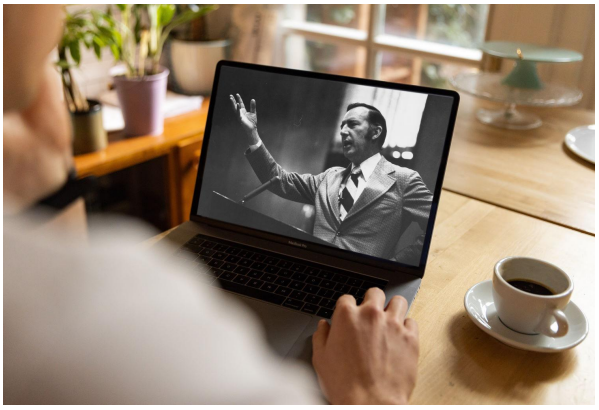
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