

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Sword of the Spirit

Ephesians 6:17b

Intro: We've been discussing the armor that God has provided for every believer to use when engaged in spiritual warfare. And, as we have seen, each piece of this armor is something that every believer already possesses but they might not know it or they might just not know the importance of it or how to use it effectively on the battlefield. Paul's list is very straightforward and there is very little discrepancy between scholars and theologians concerning this list. Each piece clearly serves a different function and those functions are as obvious as they are necessary. But, while there may be a general consensus on the armor and its purposes, it's still interesting to see the various applications that have been made concerning their focus.

One scholar has pointed out how each piece of the armor is directed to one way in which Satan attacks Christians.

The belt of truth is the foundation of our defense against the wiles of the devil; both knowing it and living it. Our breastplate of righteousness arms us against Satan as accuser. We've seen from the example of Joshua the high priest, recorded in [Zech 3](#), how Satan is Johnny-on-the-spot, ready to point an accusing finger at the believer and gloat over his multitude of sins. "Look at that sin," he sneers. "No one that wicked can serve God." We saw that the righteousness that protects us against these accusations is of 2 types. First, there's the righteousness of Christ imputed to us in justification. Then there are also those practical deeds of righteousness that are the result of the presence of Christ in our lives. We should always remember that it's not just that God can use broken vessels; it's that He only uses broken vessels. While we don't glory in our brokenness, we also don't use it as an excuse. We learn to move beyond our brokenness by the power of the Holy Spirit, walk in righteousness and live in victory.

The next piece of the soldier's equipment is his footwear. They think of these as protection against Satan as a serpent ([Rev 12:9](#)). A serpent strikes out at the feet or legs of his victims. The shield of faith arms us against Satan as tempter. He tells us that we cannot trust God, particularly to deliver us from evil and enable us to live a pure life. Faith in God overcomes these temptations. The helmet protects us against Satan as deceiver. He would

confuse us, if he could. Satan would crush our heads, if it were possible. Actually, it is Satan who is to have his head crushed by Jesus, though Satan was given power to strike His heel, as he did at the cross.

This brings us to the Christian's final piece of armor, the only offensive part: our sword. These other pieces of armor have been defensive. This one is clearly offensive. It's our means of resisting Satan as liar. Jesus said that Satan is a liar and the father of lies and there is no truth in him (Jn 8:44). What is sufficient and effective against Satan's untruths? There's only one weapon, and that's the truths of God embodied in the Bible, which is God's Word.

17b – As far as the parallel to Roman armor, the sword Paul's referring to here was the short sword Roman soldiers used in hand-to-hand fighting. The Roman soldier would use such a sword when the enemy was immediately before him in the thick of battle. This was when the battle became up-close and personal. This implies that there are certain elements of spiritual warfare that hit real close to home and seem to be very personal, unlike the long-range fiery arrow attacks of v16 that seem to hit indiscriminately. Sometimes, the attack of the enemy is so personal, it may seem like you're the only one in the fight. Although we always have brothers and sisters to lean on and the Holy Spirit to come alongside of us with strength, our best defense against these personal attacks is a good offense!

Paul isn't ambiguous as to the identity of this sword; he says it is the word of God. Associating of the sword of the Spirit with the Word of God infers 2 ideas. 1st, it implies that the word of God is the offensive weapon that is wielded by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit and the word are intertwined and this concept is affirmed by scripture itself (Jn 16:12-13; I Pt 1:10-11; II Pt 1:20-21). Too many Christians today try to separate the working of the Spirit and the word of God, mostly because of confusion arising from denominational or doctrinal differences; more specifically – the differences between pentecostalism and evangelicalism. But our text, along with others, doesn't allow for this division. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit – His powerful offensive weapon against the forces of darkness.

2nd, as we have seen, this imagery implies that wielding this offensive weapon is close-quarter combat. Preachers, evangelists, teachers and anyone who proclaims the word of God are involved in frontline fighting in

this slugfest of spiritual warfare. The enemy is always up close and personal to any believer who is brave enough and disciplined enough to wield this weapon faithfully and thus, he is always an imminent threat. Those who teach the word or share the word or simply live the word before the world are at an immediate risk in this battle a must, therefore, be properly prepared by taking up the full armor of God.

Of course, while there are some close parallels between a material sword and the word of God, there are also some important differences. [Heb 4:12](#) compares the Word of God to a sword because it is sharp and able to pierce the inner man just as a material sword pierces flesh and bone. As lost, rebellious sinners, we were cut to the heart when the word convicted us of our sins. Peter even tried to use a sword to defend Jesus when He was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane but he later learned at Pentecost that the sword of the Spirit does a much better job. Moses also attempted to advance God's kingdom with a physical sword only to discover that God's Word alone was more than powerful enough to defeat the Egyptian empire.

A material sword pierces the body but the Word of God pierces the heart. The more you use a physical sword the duller it becomes but, constant use of God's Word only makes it sharper in our lives. A physical sword requires the hand of a soldier but the sword of the Spirit has its own power because it is living and powerful ([Heb 4:12](#)). The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Word and He wields the Word as we take it by faith and use it. A physical sword wounds to hurt and kill while the sword of the Spirit wounds to heal and give life. But, when we use the Word against the forces of evil, we seek to deal them a blow that will cripple them and prevent them from hindering God's work. We must remember that our weapon is the sword of the Spirit in the sense that it belongs to Him and we must depend on Him to help us to use it. Not only did the Spirit give us the Scriptures but He also makes them come alive to us (or us alive to them) and He equips and enables us to use it the right way at the right time.

To better understand Paul's teaching here, we need to see that the word used for word in the phrase the word of God is not logos, which is the most common term used in such a phrase, but the word rhema, which is quite different. Logos is an exalted word. It was a great word in secular Greek long before it was taken over and used in a special way by the NT writers. Centuries before the time of Christ there was a Greek philosopher named

Heraclitus who wrestled with the question of how there could be order in a universe in which everything seemed to be changing. He was the philosopher who said, You can't step into the same river twice, meaning that the water of the river is always moving, so when you step into the river the 2nd time it's no longer the same river. It has changed. To Heraclitus all life was like that. Nothing was stable. All things were changing. But if that is so, he asked, how is it that all things remain the same? Why is the experience of one generation the same as that of those who have gone before? He concluded that the Word of God (the logos) stood behind the physical universe and governed it. God's logos was the ordering principle of the world.

This is the word the apostle John picked up and used with such effect in the opening chapter of his gospel, saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" ([John 1:1,14](#)). In John's prologue logos refers to nothing less than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God's full and final word to mankind. The Scriptures, which are the Word of God in a parallel sense, tell us about Him. Rhema, on the other hand, isn't like that. While logos embraces nearly everything, rhema has a more narrow scope. It really means *a saying*, in this case, a particular, specific portion of God's written revelation. [John 3:16](#) is a rhema as is [Rom 3:23](#) and so on for all the other specific portions of the written Word of God. It's important to see this, because according to Paul's teaching we're to overcome Satan by the particular words or portions of Scripture.

What Paul has in mind is illustrated by the victory of Jesus over Satan in the wilderness. Satan approached Jesus after a 40 day fast and said, If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread ([Mt 4:3](#)). The idea behind this temptation was not that it was wrong for Jesus to use His supernatural power to make food—His very first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana just a few days after this, and later, on at least 2 occasions, He produced an abundance of bread and fish in Galilee ([Mt 14:13-21](#); [15:29-39](#)). Rather the problem is that it was wrong for Him to use His power to test the Word of God.

Notice that the emphasis of Satan's query was on the word if: If you are the Son of God... Immediately before this ([Mt 3:17](#)) the Father had stated at the baptism of Jesus, This is My beloved Son. This was a direct and

unambiguous statement. But now, immediately after, Satan comes to Jesus with the subtle query, If you are the Son of God. It was a temptation to doubt God's veracity, hidden under a false concern for Jesus' physical hunger.

Yet Jesus had no trouble answering Satan. He replied with a quote (rhema) from Deuteronomy. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4; cf. Dt 8:3). Jesus was simply saying, "It does not really matter much if I have physical bread to eat. God will preserve My life for as long as He wants, to do with it what He wants. What really matters is whether I believe God or not. If I doubt His word, all is lost."

At this point Satan decided to use his own knowledge of scripture, saying, Well, Ps 91:11-12 says, 'He shall give His angels charge over you' and 'in their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone' [Mt 4:6].

"What about that? Don't You believe it? I believe it. In fact, I believe it so much that I'm willing to go up to the highest point of the temple with You and watch You jump off. God will 'bear you up,' and the people who see the miracle will follow you immediately. It'll get your ministry off to a rip-roaring start." Jesus quoted from Deut a 2nd time: It is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God' (Mt 4:7; cf. Dt 6:16). Here Jesus used Scripture to interpret Scripture and said, in effect, "Satan, you want Me to put God to the test. But you have to understand that it isn't God who is to be tested. I'm the One being tested. My responsibility is not to test God but to trust Him."

In the 3rd temptation Satan cast off all subtlety and asked for Christ's worship. He showed Him the kingdoms of the world and their glory and promised, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me" (Mt 4:9).

Jesus replied, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written: 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve'" (Mt 4:10; cf. Dt 6:13); another direct quote from Deuteronomy. In all Scripture there is no better example of the power of specific sayings of the Word of God to turn Satan aside and preserve the one tempted. Here's Jesus Christ—the holy Son of the almighty God, the one in whom neither Satan nor man could find any wrong or gain even the tiniest foothold. Jesus, whose eyes were always on the glory of God the Father and who always lived in the closest possible communion with Him. If this Jesus, our Lord and Savior, had to know

Scripture in order to resist Satan and win a victory over him, how much more do we need it to win a similar victory!

You may say, I have a general idea what the Bible's about. I believe its God's Word. That's a good place to start. But it's not enough. Our text teaches that you need to know the *specific sayings* of Scripture; you must have them memorized, if you're to resist and overcome Satan successfully. I don't mean be able to quote them verbatim with chapter and verse but, know them well enough to know what they mean. The reason is clear, because in the heat of temptation, when all other external supports are MIA, having been removed by Satan's devices, only those specific sayings of God's which are firmly fixed in our hearts and minds will remain and emerge to help us. The Holy Spirit can't call to mind specific saying that aren't already hidden in our hearts. Effectively using the sword takes practice.

Think of a soldier or gladiator in training, practicing sword thrusts and moves and positions. Of course, he must practice them ahead of time and do it enough to nail down the muscle memory. This way, even if he's not a superior fighter or doesn't have a great fighting instinct, in the heat and confusion of combat he will be able to instantly recall which thrust, defensive move or fighting stance suits the precise moment. He would never be able to instinctively use the thrust in the midst of the fight if he hadn't first practiced it over and over again beforehand. In the same way, Satan won't flee from us just because we tell him to. He'll only retreat from before the power of God as God Himself speaks His words by His Holy Spirit into the midst of our temptation – our personal, spiritual hand-to-hand combat.

There's nothing in all of this life more powerful than the specific words of God. You may think that's an exaggeration because we know a lot of things that are powerful. What about nuclear weapons? Yes, they are powerful. They can kill you and, if you're not saved, send your soul to hell. But the words of God can impart eternal life and take you to heaven. What about gossip and lies? They do great damage. Yes, but the truths of God are more powerful than lies, and what's more, they can transform the liar. In times of revival the words of God have transformed whole societies and cultures. Nothing in all of life is more powerful than the words of God.

The words of God are compelling. They have a way of getting a hold of us and moving us as no other words do. They give hope to the hopeless, faith

to the faithless and, most important of all; they give life to the lifeless.

The words of God are convicting. I can't tell you how many times I've heard how a message has spoken to someone in ways that I never considered or even thought of. Many who have faithfully tried to preach or teach the Word of God has had the experience that after the sermon or lesson is over a person will come up and say, "What you were talking about is exactly what I've been dealing with. You've been reading my mail!" No, it's just that the words of God, carried home by the power of the God who spoke them, have burned into the heart.

The words of God are converting. They change lives as no other power on earth can. How many skeptics have been convinced, how many reprobates have been repaired, how many darkened hearts and minds have been brought into the warm light of God's glory simply by reading (and believing) the Word of God?

Finally, the words of God are consoling. We often go through difficult times in life; times that involve disappointments, sickness or the loss of a job, friends, or a close family member. The world has its way of handling such situations. It says, "Keep a stiff upper lip," "Every cloud has a silver lining," "Things will get better"—profound words like that. But they're just empty platitudes. Where does a person who's suffering sickness, disappointment, loss, persecution or misery find comfort? There's no comfort like that of reading or hearing the very words of God. To hear such words is to hear God Himself, and it is God Himself who ministers to the suffering soul through them.

If we're going to resist Satan successfully and properly employ the convicting, converting, and consoling words of God that we need to live and triumph as Christians, we must take the words of God into our minds and hearts. We must pick up the sword of the Spirit and wield it forcefully and we can only do this if we see and accept God's Word for what it is – the truth! It's not a lucky charm or a book of pithy sayings; it's God's truth that changes lives, converts souls and defeats evil. We must allow it to change us before we can ever hope to wield it to change other's lives.

There are plenty of swords out in the world. Every pawn shop in America most likely has an over-abundance of samurai swords; every military

museum has a multitude of swords from different wars and eras on all on display. There are beautiful swords, important swords, swords that have been owned and used by kings and warriors of many earlier ages. I've seen a few in my time but none of those swords have ever done me one bit of good, nor will they. They're not mine. I can't hold them. They are locked away in those great museums and there they will stay. For a sword to do me any good, I must take it up and use it. It's the same with the words of God. They're wonderful words, but to be useful to you they must become yours. You must learn them. This is what David was talking about when he said, Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You ([Ps 119:11](#)). Only the words that we know will be useful to us.

Finally, the concept of the Word of God as an offensive weapon isn't just a parallel to a Roman soldier's armor; it is actually imagery that is seen in the OT. The sword of the Spirit as the word of God alludes directly to [Isa 11:4](#) which states that the Messiah will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Clearly, the Messiah's mouth is regarded as an offensive weapon – a rod. Also, the command, or literally, the breath of His lips will dispatch the wicked. This breath in Greek is the same word as spirit which further deepens the connection between [Isa 11:4](#) and our text in [Eph 6:17b](#). In this we see that the sword of the Spirit is the offensive weapon that is deployed by the Messiah Himself against the enemies of God. As believers wield the sword of the Spirit, they deploy the Messiah's own weapon as an expression of their union with Him. This is another way that we can obey the command in v10 to be strong in the Lord.

Paul has taken us through the complete (or whole) armor of God, it is His armor and He encourages us to use it in our own spiritual battles. But, there is also the sense that the whole armor of God is a picture of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Truth ([Jn 14:6](#)), He is our righteousness ([II Cor 5:21](#)) and our peace ([Eph 2:14](#)). His faithfulness makes possible our faith ([Gal 2:20](#)); He is our salvation ([Lk 2:30](#)) and He is the Word of God ([Jn 1:1, 14](#)). This means that when we trusted Christ, we received the armor.

Paul told the believers in Rome what to do with the armor ([Rom 13:11-14](#)), that is: wake up ([11](#)), cast off sin, and put on the armor of light ([12](#)). We do this by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ ([14](#)). By faith, put on the armor and trust God for the victory. Once and for all, we have received the armor at the

moment of salvation but there must be a daily appropriation of it. When King David took off his armor and returned to his palace, he was in greater danger than when he was on the battlefield (**II Sam 11**). We are never out of reach of Satan's devices, so we must never be without the whole armor of God. 😊