

The Sword of the Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn to Ephesians chapter 6.

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Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians chapter 7. Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians chapter 7.

[1 : 5 8] Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians chapter 7. a brilliantly and beautifully written letter because it's a letter that was written to Christians but particularly Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. At the time the Hebrews they were Jewish converts to Christianity and because they were converted from Judaism to Christianity they were being ostracized, they were being made outcasts within their own community and many of these Christians they had their homes burned or their property stolen, they received insults, there was imprisonment and it was all just because they were Christians. But the pressure and even the persecution that was upon them it was so severe in the first century and it was such a strain on many of these Hebrews that they became so weary and so worn out that many of these Christians they started dropping out of church services, they started distancing themselves from other Christians and even dwindling in their faith.

As Christians they stopped growing in grace, many of these Christians they even gave up altogether and so the letter to the Hebrews was written to exhort and to encourage Christians to patiently persevere in their faith and when you read through the letter the message of the letter is Jesus is better. So always think Hebrews, the message of the letter is Jesus is better. The message of the letter is Jesus is better because we're told when you read through the letter we're told that he's better than the prophets, he's better than the angels, he's better than Moses. We read there in chapter 4 that he provides a better Sabbath rest, he's a better high priest than Aaron, he provides a better covenant, he is a better sanctuary for worship and most of all as you know Jesus, he's a better sacrifice than all the other Old Testament blood, the blood of bulls and goats. And so when you read Hebrews the message of the letter is that Jesus is better. But the question which has been discussed and debated for the past number of years is, and maybe you've never even thought about it, but all these theologians they talk about this question. Who wrote the letter to the Hebrews? Who wrote the letter to the Hebrews?

There are lots of suggestions. Some say Barnabas, others say Apollos, some say Priscilla, some say Luke, some even say that it was this anonymous author because we just don't know who wrote the letter to the Hebrews. But for me I'm more convinced than ever of the traditional view and I'm a traditionalist let's say. Because the letter to the Hebrews was written, I believe, by the Apostle Paul. The authorised version will probably tell you in the title that it was written by the Apostle Paul. And the only reason that this letter, in my view, remained anonymous, that Paul didn't say at the beginning that it was from him. The reason it remained anonymous and not attributed to Paul was because, well, I was thinking, if Jews found out that this letter was from the Apostle Paul, who was also a Jewish convert to Christianity, if they found this letter in the possession of Christians, they would persecute them and punish them probably even more severely than they were doing already. But one of the other reasons I believe that the letter to the Hebrews was, had this Pauline authorship, is because of how

Paul describes the Word of God. As we read, he describes the Word of God in both the letter to the Hebrews and here in his letter to the Ephesians. He describes it as a sword. He describes the Word of God as a sword. He wrote there in Hebrews chapter 4, the Word of God is living, it's active, it's

sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And here in Ephesians, Paul is once again, he's calling us to prayerfully pick up and put on, or prayerfully pick up anyway, the whole armour of God. And he writes there in verse 17, take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And so Paul explains that the sword for the Christian soldier, it's a spiritual sword. It's a sharp sword. It's a two-edged sword. It's double-edged.

It's a double-edged sword. And as you know, we often use the phrase, a double-edged sword. I'm sure we've used the phrase before. We often use it when we're describing something both positive and negative. It's a double-edged sword. And I believe that that's what Paul wants to see with this sharp spiritual sword. He wants us to see that it's a two-edged sword. It's a double-edged sword.

[7 : 09] Not that it's on the one hand positive and the other hand negative, but in the sense that it's to be used for both defence and offence. Defence and offence. It's a double-edged sword. It's for defence and offence. It's a sword to protect and it's a sword to pierce. And that's how we should view this sword, the sword of the Spirit. It's a sword to protect and a sword to pierce. And there are two headings this evening. A sword to protect and a sword to pierce. Paul says, take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Now, as you know, we've been ploughing through this letter and we've seen that the letter to the Ephesians, it's full of encouragements, chapters 1 to 3, and then full of exhortations, chapters 4 to 6. And so as Paul comes to the conclusion of his letter, he gives this one final exhortation to us. He says, be strong in the Lord. Be strong in who you are in

Christ and be strong in what you have in Christ. Finally, brothers and sisters, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes or the wiles of the devil. So Paul is saying to us, he's saying to us again tonight, Christian soldier, have you put your armour on today? Did you put it on today? Because the Christian life, we've said it many times before, the Christian life, it's not a playground.

It's a battleground. You're not in a physical warfare, you're in a spiritual warfare. We have an enemy and he's a fierce enemy. He's the enemy of our soul. He is our adversary. He's the devil.

Paul tells us, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, therefore take up the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm. And you know, if you were to underline two words in this section, it would be the words, stand firm. We must stand firm as Christians. That was the problem with the Hebrews. They weren't standing firm. They were falling back. They were disappearing. They were not committed as they should have been. They weren't standing firm. But we can only stand firm, Paul teaches us, if we've begun our day by going into God's armoury and prayerfully picking up and putting on the whole armour of God. The first piece of armour, as you know, the first piece of armour we prayerfully picked up and put on was the belt of truth. It's to be worn at all times, whether we're on or off duty. Because as Christians, we are to be soldiers with integrity, honesty and reliability.

We're to rejoice in the truth, love the truth and speak the truth. Then we prayerfully picked up and put on the breastplate of righteousness. That's verse 14. And we put it on because through Calvary's great transaction, we have received this breastplate of righteousness to protect our heart from the wickedness of sin and the wiles of the devil. Then we put on these gospel shoes of peace, the shalom shoes, because as Christians, we're ambassadors for Christ. We are to be, always to be ready to give an answer for the reason for the hope that is within us. The fourth piece of armour was the shield of faith.

[10 : 57] Because we are to be people of faith. We're to link our shields so that we keep formation, we keep focused and we keep moving forward. We keep moving forward, fighting the good fight of faith and looking to the author and the finisher of our faith. Then last week we prayerfully picked up and put on the fifth piece of armour, which was the helmet, the helmet of salvation. We're to protect our mind.

We're to protect our mind from the ambushes and the attacks and the assaults of Satan. We need to guard our mental and our emotional and even our spiritual well-being from the devil because he will make us doubt. He will make us disengage from even wanting to read the Bible and he will make us despair about our own salvation. And so this evening, our sixth piece of armour, Paul isn't actually asking us to prayerfully put something on. Instead he's asking us to prayerfully pick

something up.

Prayerfully pick it up. Every day, prayerfully pick it up. Because we're to prayerfully pick up the sword of the Spirit. We're to prayerfully pick up the sword of the Spirit, which as Paul says, is the Word of God. Now we've met Roddy the Roman before. He's kitted out. He's got the belt of truth. He's got the breastplate of righteousness. He's got gospel shoes, the shalom shoes. He's got the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation. And as you can see there, sheathed beside him is his sword, the sword of the Spirit. And you know, as a Roman soldier, Roddy the Roman would have always carried his sword with him. He would have carried his gladius. That's what it was called, his gladius. And I'm sure you can guess it's from the Latin word. The Latin word gladius comes from the word, or where we get the word, gladiator. Incidentally, if you follow these things, the new gladiator film came out last Friday. Gladiator 2. I'm sure you're all excited to see it. 24 years since the first gladiator film starring Russell Crowe. If you saw gladiator, then apparently gladiator 2 is said to be just as gory and just as gruesome in the gladiatorial arena. But for a gladiator, or even for a Roman soldier, the gladiator, the gladiator was the weapon of choice. The gladiator was always the weapon of choice. Because it was, as you can see, it was short, it was sharp, and it was a double-edged sword. And it was only two foot in length. So it was lightweight, easy to handle, it was efficient, it was effective for close combat with the enemy. And Paul is showing us, and he's saying to us, we need our gladiator. Pick up your gladiator. Prayerfully pick up your gladiator. We need to pick up our short, sharp, spiritual sword to protect us against the errors of the enemy. Because as you know, there are many errors out there, many voices, many vices out there that the enemy uses to trick us and to trap us. Where he will cause deception. He'll cause distraction.

[14 : 24] He'll bring diversion. He'll cause doubt, disengagement, even despair. There are many errors out there that the enemy uses. Which is why we need, we need our gladiator. We need our short, sharp, spiritual sword to protect us against the errors of the enemy. And Paul emphasizes, and he explains this gladiator. He says to us that this sharp, sharp, spiritual sword, it is none other than the Word of God.

He wants to be absolutely clear, so we don't miss the point. It is the Word of God. Therefore, our short, sharp, spiritual sword is Scripture. And as you know, Scripture is inspired, it's inerrant, it's inerrant, and it's infallible. It's inspired because Paul tells little Timothy that it's breathed out by God. He tells us that it's inerrant, it's without error. It's trustworthy, and it's infallible. It is absolutely faultless. So our short, sharp, spiritual Scripture sword, it's not only readable. We have to read it. It's reliable. Every word of it is reliable. It's trustworthy and true. It is the absolute truth of God's Word. It's the absolute truth. In fact, it's the only absolute in this life. The Word of God. And as our catechism teaches us, the Word of God is the only rule to direct us. The Word of God is the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Which means that this short, sharp, spiritual

Scripture sword, it not only protects us from deception, distraction, diversion, doubt, disengagement, and despair. This sword gives us, also gives us discernment, and it gives us direction. The sword gives discernment and direction. Because the Word of God, and this is what's so important for us to remember, the Word of God enables us to discern the will of God. The Word of God enables us to discern the will of God as our catechism teaches us, as the Bible teaches us, because the catechism is based on the Bible. The Word of God is the only rule to direct us.

Therefore, we can't rely upon our desires.

We can't rely upon our dreams to direct us. We can't even rely upon our feelings, or our emotions, or circumstances, or our situations to show us the way. Because none of these, none of these things, are like the Word. None of these things are like the sword. Because the sword is infallible, it's inerrant, and it's inspired. And you know, I always go back to what Martin Luther said.

Luther, obviously, as a reformer, he emphasized that principle, sola scriptura, Scripture alone. Scripture's the only rule to direct us. And that's why he wrote this poem. And I think it's such a helpful poem because, well, we're often directed by our feelings. And yet, Luther said, feelings come, and feelings go. Feelings are deceiving. My warrant is the Word of God. Not else is worth believing.

[17 : 59] Though all my heart should feel condemned, for want of some sweet token, there is one greater than my heart, whose word cannot be broken. And that's why Luther, he went on to confess, I'll trust in God's unchanging Word, till soul and body sever. For though all things shall pass away, his Word shall stand forever. And you know, my friend, that's actually the testimony of both the Old

and the New Testament. Because in the book of Isaiah, and also in the letter of Peter, you find the same verse, all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of the grass.

The grass withers, the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. That's the only rule to direct us.

So as we said, and as Paul shows us here, this short, sharp, spiritual scripture sword, it's not only a sword to protect us against the errors of the enemy, it's also a sword to pierce the enemy. That's what we see secondly.

So it's a sword to protect, and a sword to pierce. A sword to pierce. Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Now I'm sure you've all heard the phrase, or maybe you've said the phrase yourself before, the best defence is a good offence. The best defence is a good offence.

[19 : 38] In fact, apparently it's known as the strategic principle of war. Ali will probably correct me if I'm wrong. The strategic principle of war, the best defence is a good offence.

Which means that rather than passively waiting for an ambush from the enemy, we should be proactive in our attack of the enemy. Because the best defence, as it says, is a good offence. And that's what Paul is reminding us. That's what he's reassuring us of here. Because the sword which has been supplied to us as Christian soldiers, it's not only a short, sharp, spiritual, scripture sword to protect us against the errors of the enemy.

As we said, this sword is two-edged. It's double-edged. Which means that it's to be used for both defence and offence.

It's a sword to protect and it's a sword to pierce. And when you actually go through the whole armour of God, if you were to go through all the list again, and consider what this armour is, the armour that we have been given, all of it is for our defence against the devil.

[20 : 47] The armour is there to protect. So the belt of truth is to protect us against the lies of the devil. The breastplate of righteousness is to protect our heart against the wiles of the devil.

The shalom shoes are to protect our peace with God from the devil. The shield of faith is to protect against the fiery darts of the devil. The helmet of salvation is to protect our mind against the attacks and the assaults and the ambushes of the devil.

So the whole armour of God, right up until this point, is to protect us. Even the sword, as we said, is to protect. But it's also a sword to pierce. In fact, it's the only offensive weapon that we have in our armoury.

It's the only weapon of warfare that we have been given to fight against the devil. And once again, it's emphasising to us, stressing to us, the importance of Scripture alone.

Sola Scriptura. Scripture alone. But you know what I love about this short, sharp, spiritual Scripture sword is that Paul not only explains to us in the letter to the Hebrews that the sword is living and active and powerful enough to cut deep into our soul and our spirit.

[22 : 04] But Jesus, when you look at his example in the Gospels, he exemplifies to us that this sword, it's living, active, and powerful enough to cut deep into Satan.

And the greatest example of this is when Jesus was in the wilderness and Jesus used the sword of the Spirit to pierce Satan. He used the sword of the Spirit to pierce Satan because when you read the accounts, there's various accounts of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness.

But we're told, Matthew's Gospel, the tempter came to Jesus and said to him, if you, the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. Jesus responds, Jesus retaliates against Satan using the sword of the Spirit saying, it is written, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Then Satan comes to him a second time. He sets Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple and says to him, if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, he will command as angels concerning you and on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone. And you notice that Satan quotes Scripture to Jesus. Satan quoted Scripture to Jesus. Satan tried to use the sword of the Spirit against the Saviour.

[23 : 44] And sometimes Satan tries to do that against the saints too. He uses Scripture too. Confuse us and even bring chaos.

He misuses and manipulates Scripture to cause confusion and chaos. But again, Jesus, he responds, he retaliates against Satan, he uses the sword of the Spirit and again he says, it is written, it is written, you shall not tempt the Lord your God.

Then for a third time, Satan takes Jesus, you remember, to a very high mountain and he shows him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And Satan says to Jesus, all these I will give you if you just bow down and worship me.

I remember what Jesus said, be gone, Satan, be gone, for it is written. Brings out the sword again. It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and only him you shall serve. Then we read that the devil left him. The devil left him.

[24 : 55] So the best offence is a good offence. And Scripture is an offence to Satan. Scripture is an offence to Satan because it's the sword of the Spirit that pierces Satan.

Which is why as Christian soldiers we have been supplied with this short, sharp, spiritual Scripture sword to protect us against the errors of the enemy and to pierce the enemy.

We're to pierce him so that when Satan subtly comes to us to tempt us and to trap us, we are to say like Jesus, be gone, Satan.

It is written, it is written, greater is he who is in me than he who is in the world. Be gone, Satan.

But you know, in order to say even these words to Satan, it is written. In order to use our sword properly, we have to know our sword.

[26 : 02] And in order to be a good soldier, we have to know our sword. We need to know what's written. We need to know Scripture because a good soldier knows their sword.

A good soldier knows their sword. And you know, whenever I think of the sword of the Spirit, I hope this works. Probably not. No, it doesn't want to work.

Oh well, it doesn't work. Well maybe it's not on. Hang on. There we go. There we are. That's better.

So whenever I think of the sword of the Spirit, this is the sword I think of. I don't think of the short, sharp, spiritual scripture sword of the Roman Gladius.

I think of the Scottish sword of William Wallace. Another good film. It's going to get a mention. If you know anything about this sword, you'll know that it's over five feet long.

Five feet, four inches to be precise. You can find it in the Wallace Monument in Stirling. But William Wallace, as you know, he was the Braveheart warrior of the Scottish wars of independence in the 13th century.

[27 : 10] He was a fierce and ferocious fighter. But William Wallace was a good soldier because he knew his sword. He knew his sword.

He knew how to handle a sword of that size. He knew how to defend with that kind of sword. He knew how to attack with that kind of sword. He knew how to protect and he knew how to pierce.

And the same should be true of us as Christian soldiers. We should know our sword. We should know how to handle our sword. We should know how to defend, how to attack, how to protect, how to pierce.

We should know our sword. In fact, if we're going to stand firm as Christian soldiers, we need to know our sword. We need to know our sword. We need to therefore read the Bible.

We need to read our sword. We need to repeat the word, recite the word, rehearse the word, recount the word. We need to memorize the word.

[28 : 14] That's what I love about Psalm 119. The psalmist says there, I think it's verse 11, I have hidden God's word within my heart that I may not sin against you. He knows his sword.

He hides God's word in his heart. That's what we need to do. We need to recite the word, repeat it, and even read it. So if we're going to stand firm as Christian soldiers, we need to know our sword.

We need to know our sword. And even more, we need to sharpen our sword. We need to sharpen our sword. And Solomon wisely tells us in the book of Proverbs, iron sharpens iron.

Iron sharpens iron. And of course, we sharpen our sword through reading other Christian books. We sharpen our sword through Bible study.

We sharpen our sword in fellowship. And through it all, we get to know our sword even better. We become good soldiers who know their sword.

[29 : 19] We need to know our sword. And so as Christian soldiers, we're to prayerfully pick up our short, sharp, spiritual scripture, sword.

Because it's a sword to protect. To protect against the errors of the enemy. And it's a sword to pierce. To pierce the enemy when he comes to tempt us and to trap us. We remind him that it is written.

Be gone, Satan. It is written. You shall not tempt the Lord your God. So my Christian friend, take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and stand firm.

Stand firm, Christian soldier. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Our Father in Heaven, we give thanks to Thee for even the privilege of having a sword to read and a sword to own.

We thank Thee, O Lord, that the Lord, the God who has given it to us and help us to prayerfully pick it up every day. To read it, to meditate on it, to recite it, that we might hide God's Word within our heart, that we may not sin against Him.

[30 : 38] Help us to use this sword not only to protect us against error, but also to pierce the enemy, to pierce him when he comes to tempt us and even to trap us, to remind him that it is written, he shall not tempt us, because greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world.

O Lord, help us, we pray, to stand firm. Help us to fight the good fight of faith. Help us to keep looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

Lord, be gracious to us, we ask. Watch over us, we pray. Remember, as we heard those who are searching for that young boy, we pray that they would find him. Remember the emergency services and all the family involved and all those who are worried and anxious.

Lord, be gracious to them that they would know the angel of the Lord encamping round about them.

O Lord, uphold and support, we pray, because Lord, we realise that without thee we can do nothing, but the promise remains that with thee all things are possible.

Do us good and we pray. Go before us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening.

[31 : 57] We're going to sing the words of Psalm 149. So the second last psalm in the Psalter. Psalm 149, page 450, page 450 in the Blue Psalm book.

We're going to sing from verse 3 down to the verse marked 6. As we said, all of our psalms this evening focus upon the theme of the sword.

It says there in verse 6, Let in their mouth a loft be raised, the high praise of the Lord and let them have in their right hand a sharp two-edged sword.

So that's you described in the psalm there. We're to have in our right hand which is the hand of power and strength, the right hand. So to have in your right hand a sharp two-edged sword.

So Psalm 149, we're singing from verse 3 down to the verse marked 6. And we'll stand to sing if you're able to God's place. Oh, let them under his rename Give praises in the dance Let them with temper and with power In songs his praise advance For God of pleasure take in those That his own people be

[34 : 02] And he with his salvation The meek will beautify And in his glory excellent Let all his saints rejoice Let them to him upon their grace Let them lift up their voice Let in their mouth the law be raised

The high praise of the Lord And let them bow in their right hand A sharp two-edged sword The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all Now and forevermore Amen