

## Stand Firm, Using the Sword of the Spirit

by Mark Jarvinen

This is message # 7 in the series entitled "Standing Firm in the Face of the Enemy." We stand firm against Satan's schemes by putting on the full armor of God. The armor is not worn one piece at a time, but functions together to ensure our ability to stand firm in the victory that is ours in Christ. Today's message is derived from **Ephesians 6:17b "Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."**

With this piece of armor we move from defense to offense. Sometimes the best defense is a good offense. We've been speaking for several weeks now about Satan's tactics - the methods and schemes he uses to attack us spiritually. What if we, as Christians, went on the offensive and attacked him? **James 4:7** says, "**Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**" Remember those childhood bullies? The mean spirited boy who used intimidation against those of us who were more compliant? I'll never forget my amazement when my Dad told me to stand up to the bully who was plaguing my life. "What if he hits me?" I queried. Dad said, "Then you'll have a black eye or a bruised body, but at least you'll have your self respect." Then he added, "And you never know, when he sees that you're ready to fight, he just might back down." He was right! And Satan is just like that. He'll bully us until we fight back. Then

he'll turn tail and run, **“because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (I John 4:4b).**

As we seek to understand this powerful offensive weapon that makes the devil turn tail and run, allow me to make a couple of introductory observations.

So far we have had an easy time interpreting what the various pieces of armor are. For example, **“the helmet of salvation” means the helmet which is salvation. “The shield of faith” means the shield which is faith.** In discussing the Sword of the Spirit, however, **we can not say “the sword which is the Holy Spirit.”** The sword isn't the Spirit, but rather the sword is the Word of God. Furthermore, it is not we, first and foremost, in our human knowledge or abilities, who use this sword of the Word; but the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, that uses the sword against the enemy. The Holy Spirit is the swordsman against Satan, but in order for the Spirit of God to have the freedom to use the word of God against Satan powerfully on our behalf **we must be under His filling and control.** Paul writes in **Ephesians 5:18, “Do not get drunk with wine, ... Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”** In other words, a person intoxicated by wine is under the control of that substance. Rather let the Holy Spirit control you, is Paul's argument. Only then will the Holy Spirit have freedom to work through the word on our behalf. Continuing in this analogy, it's we who draw the sword from its sheath, gripping it in our hands so to speak; but it is the Spirit who in effect wields the sword that we have taken up; thrusting, jabbing, and striking the enemy on our behalf. The

word is **“living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword,”** **Hebrews 4:12** says. That is so, because it is ultimately the Holy Spirit, through human agency, who wields it.

Another point worthy of note here is that the Greek word for **"word of God"** in this context is not the usual New Testament word **LOGOS**, but rather the word, **RHEMA**, (from which the word **“rhetoric”** is derived) which means **"a definitive divine utterance, or spoken word."** This is significant because it means that the **SWORD** we are thinking of here is not so much the Scriptures or written word in general, although it includes that, but rather **THE SPECIFIC WORD THAT GOD GIVES US TO SPEAK FORTH OR CLAIM IN SPECIFIC AND PARTICULAR CASES OF NEED.** This is something tremendously practical.

Do you remember what Jesus said to His disciples when He sent them forth on a missionary journey. He prepared them for the possibility of persecution saying in **Matthew 10:19 - 20: "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."** This is a prime example of a situation in which a **“RHEMA word”** would come into play - at a time of crisis, in a moment when Satan might be urging someone to deny his or her faith.

Our Lord's own example in **Matthew 4** is relevant here as He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. First, it's worthy of note that Jesus had just come off of an incredibly powerful experience of God's affirming love. Remember the words that Jesus heard from the Father at His baptism, "**This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?**" Often this is precisely when Satan attacks. When we feel boosted in faith and ready to conquer the world, there is Satan to discourage and thwart. Satan came after Jesus with three specific temptations, and three times Jesus was given a specific word from the book of **Deuteronomy** to counter that temptation. "**It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone.**" "**It is written, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.**" "**It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only will you serve.**" In each case, a **RHEMA** word, spoken by our Lord, and specific to that situation, was given.

A pastor once shared an experience with me about a time in his early 20's when God was beginning to speak to him about a call into ministry. Yet he had this awful fear that ministry was just his own idea and not God's will for his life. As he sat by a beautiful stream one day contemplating his future, his eyes were drawn to his Bible that he had been reading earlier and was still lying open on his lap. He said, the first thing my eyes saw were the words from **John 15:16**, which read, "**You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last.**" He said, "I felt my spirit quicken within me as I recognized God's voice speaking to me in that

word." This is another example of the benefit of a **RHEMA** word which provided guidance and strengthening in the face of fear and doubt.

The point I'm making is that in a warfare situation, God places a "**sword**" in your hand at a strategic moment and gives you a word to speak in coming against the enemy as he works his schemes of doubt and confusion against you. As we read of the armor of God, think in terms of God putting a weapon into your hands at the crucial moment.

Now I hasten to add the corollary to this teaching on a **RHEMA** word. A "**RHEMA** word" is not likely to be there in a specific and strategic moment of need if the "**LOGOS** word," the Scriptures, have not been previously stored up in our hearts. Jesus was ready for Satan in the wilderness because he had studied the Scriptures since his childhood. In Luke's gospel, we read how at the age of 12, Jesus astonished the teachers of the law in the temple with his knowledge of the Scriptures. The importance of laying up God's Word in our hearts is seen in **Psalm 119:11**, which says, "**I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.**" A little earlier in that Psalm it says, "**How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word, O Lord.**" Years ago, **Billy Graham** startled the Christian world when he told a public gathering that he was encouraging his children to memorize large portions of Scripture against a possible time when oppression might be the order of the day for Christians in America. **Martin Luther** committed

much of the Bible to memory during his lifetime, including the Old Testament, which served him well as he endured the attacks of Satan in many forms during his life's work as a reformer and defender of the faith. Childhood is an excellent time to develop a pattern of Bible reading and memorization. But if that wasn't your childhood experience, it's never too late. Sadly, Biblical literacy is down across the board in Christendom today. I'm gratified by the numbers here at CoJ who are enrolled in BSF and other Bible Studies. It's exciting. It's never too late.

We have spoken of going on the offensive in one-on-one, hand-to-hand combat with the enemy, using the spoken Word of God as our weapon. Often Satan attacks us when we're alone. We are called upon to use **the "sword of the Spirit"** in those situations. But what about our use of the Sword of the Spirit in a corporate context? Look at **Peter on the Day of Pentecost**. Peter's sermon, proclaimed to the multitude gathered in Jerusalem that day, as recorded in **Acts 2**, was largely a stringing together of Old Testament prophecies, relating them to the historical moment of the Pentecost event. What happened? The word had the desired effect. God's Word was like a sword that cut to the heart the very men who had been closed to Jesus' teachings and were responsible for His crucifixion. **"Brothers, what shall we do?"** was their heart cry. Peter replied, **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, ...for the forgiveness of your sins..." (Acts 2:37-38).**

The word has the ability to cut through our sin hardened defense mechanisms and convict us of sin. Paul writes in **Romans 7** about his own experience, - "**When the commandment came, sin revived and I died.**" In other words, the word brought the awareness of sin to life as Paul heard the word, and his old nature was slain. He was without excuse before God. Now he was ready to receive the Savior. In similar fashion, we are to turn the sword of the Spirit first on ourselves and let it expose our own sin. As we confess our sin and receive forgiveness, we are ready to proclaim it to others and see it accomplish its work in changing human hearts.

**Lastly**, remember that the Sword of the Spirit, the word of God, is sixth on the list of armor pieces. **It's most effective in concert with the other pieces of armor.** For example, it's not enough to walk around with your Bible under your arm, or to quote Scripture passages to everyone you meet, if you're not also wearing the belt of truth, which is your personal integrity. Suppose someone is trying to reach others by using the Word of God, but that same person is known for his unethical business practices. Will his preaching have power? Is his witness likely to bear fruit? Satan laughs in the face of such inconsistency, and seekers are ultimately turned off. You may be able to defend the Bible, even quote from it, but if your integrity is questionable, your witness is undermined; and furthermore, Christ and the Kingdom cause receives a bad name. Similarly, we can share the Gospel of peace with someone at work, but if we're not at peace with our boss, the message will have little impact on our co-workers. All the pieces of armor must fit together

and be used in concert with each other in order to protect us and lend credibility to our Christian witness. Armor without the sword, and a sword without the armor, is an incomplete package.

In conclusion, let a good offense be part of your defense. Take the battle to Satan, using the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Remind Satan of who you are, a blood-bought child of God. And remember, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **A-men.**