

Battleground: Sword of the Spirit

Ephesians 6:10-18; Hebrews 4:12-13; Proverbs 12:18; Matthew 4:1-11; Psalm 64

Recap: The book of Ephesians set the standard of what the Kingdom and the New Humanity should look like and how it should function in equality, unity, and love. It is a totally new way of living. Jesus made it possible for us to stop living by our flesh when he surrendered His flesh for us on the cross. It is not part of our natural instincts and we need help.

In Ephesians 6:10-12, Paul gives us a powerful metaphor of preparing for battle. We are essentially fighting an invisible war for an invisible Kingdom that has very real eternal consequences. Our unity is at stake. Everything that Paul wrote about in the letter so far is emphasizing the importance of unity in the Body of Christ. If we are divided against one another, the battle is already lost. We have to stay prepared, alert, and ready to defend.

In week 2, the meaning of the “belts, boots, and bulletproof vests” was broken down and summarized in this one sentence: *The Good Tidings of Victory, that announce the enactment of God's plan to unify his people and reconcile them to himself, drive us to cling to the truth of God's reliability and love for us to such an extent that we protect our character by displaying our identity in Christ-inspired righteous action that prevents onlookers from doubting our good intent and love.*

In week 3, we were challenged to use our faith in unity to protect each other. If you are working to unify God to people, and trying to protect those who are weak, you are putting yourself in the middle of the battle and on the front lines. You will see more attacks than those who are sitting on the sidelines doing nothing to protect others. If you are constantly getting arrows fired at you...you must be doing something right. If the battle is quiet you should ask yourself, what am I not doing? Have I not taken up arms?

In week 4, we talked about how the Helmet of Salvation protects your reasoning, choices, and the direction of your destiny. The influence of the Creator that spans from the garden tale to the direct and present teaching of Jesus has initiated a change in our way of thinking whereby we are able to choose to surrender to the Creator's further influence by accepting the love and dedication demonstrated by the creator through Jesus Christ. This acceptance takes the form of seeking His teachings, adopting His attitudes towards people & circumstances, and accepting the aid of the ‘helper’...The Holy Spirit. Salvation is all in acceptance. It is not in actions, magic prayers, educational prerequisites, or doctrinal gate-keeping. Simply accepting that God loves you, accepting His help, and accepting the example of Jesus in how He refused to repay our evil with justice and gave us mercy instead.

The Sword of the Spirit: Up until now, all the pieces of armor have been about our protection and preservation. But the Sword is our weapon and is the only offense we have.

Weapons training is an essential part of basic combat training for any soldier. They have to become intimately familiar with the weapon they are issued. They have to know how to take it apart, put it together, load it, fire it with accuracy, and clean it after use. Weapons training doesn't stop after basic training. It is a skill that must be constantly practiced throughout their entire career. The weapon becomes so familiar to the soldier that it becomes an extension of who they are

In the same way, we should become intimately familiar with the weapon we are armed with. Unlike the other parts of the armor that Paul just gives us the names for, he tells us what the

Sword of the Spirit is. It is the Word of God. What is the word of God? The written testimony of the story of God (Bible).

How can a book be a sword?: First of all, it's not just a book. Read Hebrews 4:12-13. The Word of God as a sword is a powerful metaphor for the transformative and protective nature of scripture, emphasizing its ability to cut through deception, reveal truth, and empower believers in their faith. It is the *living* word of God. Now that doesn't mean that God's Word is constantly changing. It means that as you grow in your familiarity and understanding of it, your relationship with God is strengthened, and more of His character of faithfulness is revealed to you.

Words have power. We try to deny it by saying things like *"I'm rubber, you're glue. It bounces off me and sticks to you."* or *"Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me"*. Read Proverbs 12:18.

The power of spoken words isn't appreciated the same way today as it was in the first century when Paul wrote Ephesians. It was primarily an oral culture. Information was transmitted and preserved through speaking and listening. Stories, history, teachings, and beliefs were passed down this way.

The apostles and disciples relied on verbal communication to spread the teachings of Jesus. They traveled and preached sharing the Gospel orally. Written texts were not widely available, and not everyone could read. Even the letters (like Ephesians) would have been read aloud to the church rather than read by each member.

This gave a significant weight and authority to the spoken word. Important texts, like the Torah, were memorized and recited repeatedly. They didn't have an app with them all the time to refer to and read scriptures. The word of God became part of who they were as they memorized and shared it verbally.

How is the Word of God as a weapon used in battle?: In Matthew 4, we read about when Jesus was tested in the wilderness. Read Matthew 4:1-11.

When tempted by Satan, Jesus replied each time with the phrase "It is written..." This phrase establishes the Bible as an authoritative voice that serves as the foundation of all faith and belief. He used it to establish that His faith and trust is in God alone.

Jesus faced physical, mental, and spiritual temptation. These were a parallel to the temptations of Adam and Eve from the Serpent: Good to eat, Did God really say?, and You can be 'like God'.

It is important to note: The Tempter also quoted scripture. He also knew what was written and attempted to use it to create confusion and doubt. Just because someone knows the Word of God does not mean that they aren't using it as a fiery arrow to attack you with. That's where the shield of faith comes in to block the attack and the helmet of salvation (your knowledge and relationship with God) protects you from being deceived. Your faith and salvation work together to provide you with the wisdom to discern what is good and what is evil. But it is not a one and done kind of thing. It takes a lifetime of learning and connecting with the Word of God to strengthen your faith and salvation.

Because Jesus was intimately familiar with the Word of God and therefore knew God's character, He was able to recognize the misuse of the written word. He knew when it was being taken out of context just like a good soldier would know if they were handed the wrong ammunition for the weapon they were trained to use.

So words are our weapon. However, it's not *our* words, but the *Word* of God. The battle is God's, not ours. God's Word strengthens us, protects us, prepares us, assures us, and defends us. If we try to use our own words to fight, we will lose.

So what is our role?: Stand firm. Read Ephesians 6:13. Being still and letting God fight our battles is the most powerful way that we can show Him that we trust Him. It is so hard to let go of the illusion of control, but we are simply not able to fight these battles ourselves. So we have to be still, stand firm, and trust in God.

However, our words do have value. Through our prayers and our praise, we show God that we trust Him. Read Ephesians 6:18. God wants us to come to him and share our hearts with Him. Of course He already knows what is in our hearts but sharing it with Him shows him that we trust Him.

He also wants us to pray for one another. When we raise each other up with prayers, it unifies us. It's how we are able to lock together our shields of faith to deflect the fiery arrows of intolerance that the enemy fires at us.

Yielding to God in prayer is how we fight our battles. The full Armor of God is where we take refuge:

- With God's **TRUTH** at our core
- His **RIGHTEOUSNESS** over our heart
- Standing in His **PEACE**
- Protected by our **FAITH** in Him
- Covered by our **SALVATION** through Him
- And assured by His **SPIRIT**

In this way, we can stand firm, no matter what the enemy, the world, or others throw at us

King David was someone who understood both physical and spiritual battles. But, just as he said before facing Goliath, "the battle's not mine, but God's". He fought his battles through prayer and praise.

Read Psalm 64.

Discussion Questions:

- How important is it for us to know God's Word well?
 - How do we use God's Word in spiritual battles?
 - Can motive/intent affect the results?
- After learning about the different pieces of armor more in detail, which piece (or pieces) do you struggle with 'wearing'?