

ARMOR OF GOD

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS WITH PASTOR JACK

Knowing our Adversary and the Armor of God Week 9: (Ephesians 6:17b) The Sword of the Spirit November 18th, 2015

Introduction

- A. Tonight we come to our last piece of armor: the sword of the Spirit (Eph.6:17b); and next week, we will conclude by looking at the importance of prayer in covering us in the battles we face wearing our armor (Eph.6:18-24).
- B. The sword found here is not the same sword we spoke about last time when we studied the shield of faith. That sword, which the shield protects us from, is a broadsword (rhomphaia in Greek); whereas this sword (machaira in Greek) is a 6-18" long weapon carried in a scabbard or sheath and used only in hand-to-hand combat.
- C. A precise weapon requiring training and practice to use well, Peter the fisherman showed us how bad things could go for the untrained. In our list of armor, it is the only piece designed for offensive use other than prayer. All of the other pieces are strictly for defensive purposes only.
- D. It is vital then, that we learn to use it well. Paul encouraged his disciple Timothy of its importance (2Ti.2:15). Yet if the truth be known, many saints are poor swordsmen. Why is that?
 - 1. Are we complacent because we have so much good Bible teaching available to us? Do we fail to learn the Bible because of the quick access we can have to "looking it up" if we need it? Have we replaced learning with simply reading?
 - 2. Paul was convinced of the value of knowing God's Word (2Ti.3:15-17) and so was Job (Job 23:12); and so must we be, for by it we can defend ourselves and also go on the offensive reclaiming the places Satan seeks to keep from us.
 - 3. Why do we give our all to earthly pursuits yet give a casual nod to learning to use this sword of the Spirit? We must conclude that it is not fully appreciated in terms of power and importance or else we would all seek to become more proficient in its use.

The B-I-B-L-E

- A. Infallible: Without error or flaw in its totality. God did not have a second thought or a regret about something taught or declared. His Word is like the Author Himself: unchanging and constant (Jam.1:17)(Ps.19:7).
 - 1. As such, we need not challenge, question, or doubt Him, but simply allow Him to fill us with the treasures of His Word revealed to our hearts.
- B. Inerrant: Having no flaw in its individual parts. The questionable nature of some verses not found in any manuscript until the 14th century as well as certain scribal errors have no impact upon any doctrine of God's Word. God who created the world will watch over the integrity of His Word.
- C. Complete: His warnings to those who would seek to edit, change, add to, or subtract from His Word are sobering and serious (Pro.30:5-6)(Rev.22:18-19). Many cults are distinguished by what they add to the revealed Word of God.
- D. Authoritative: When God speaks, all men should listen. His authority and judgment are final and there is not an appeals process (Ps.19:9). His Word will indeed be the final word for each of us. The people of Jesus' day recognized that He spoke with authority and not as the Scribes and Pharisees (Mk.1:22).
- E. Sufficient: Though the Bible does not address every issue of life -- medicine, environment, etc., it does provide all the answers we need to live godly lives filled with His blessings (2Pe.1:3).

- F. Effective: When God speaks, things happen; just check Genesis 1! No wonder Isaiah recorded the Lord as declaring that very truth (Isa.55:11). We must follow the manufacturer's handbook guidelines if we truly desire to see His work in us.
- G. Divine: It is God's book and not man's work. He used some 40 authors from all walks of life over a 1500 year period writing in three languages and led by the Holy Spirit to record it all (2Pe.2:20-21). It is God breathed and God inspired and God backed!
- H. Determinative: What a person believes and does with the Bible both reveals his relationship with God and determines his eternal destiny (Jn.8:47).

Using the Sword of the Spirit

- A. A sword carried without training is of little use. Our training consists of knowing God's Word well!
- B. A soldier wounded in battle can't blame the sword he was poorly equipped to use. Some saints carry beautiful covered Bibles but have no idea what is in it. We need our minds renewed by it (Rom.12:1-2).
- C. The benefits and protection the sword provides are all found in the pages of this book. We must know it well, cover to cover.
- D. Jesus in the wilderness showed us the value of knowing God's Word as He answered each of Satan's temptations with the Word of God properly applied in context. Even Satan's attempt to misquote and misapply the scripture was corrected by Jesus who knew the Word.
- E. So we must know it and follow it. To simply know it but ignore it or find reasons to set it aside will provide no protection for us but actually assure our defeat.
- F. The sword is defensive in that it keeps us from sin by casting light upon the darkness. It is offensive in that it allows us to take land we lost in sin -- restoring rest, peace, joy, etc.
- G. Heeding His Word will make us wise and victorious. Know it well (2Ti.4:2)(1Pe.3:15). Learn it by book, by chapter, by verse. What is the topic of 1 Corinthians 13, John 17, Genesis 1, Matthew 5-7; Revelation 2-3?

Final Thoughts

- A. How do you approach God's Word?
 1. Like a butterfly: lighting on each flower for a moment before moving on.
 2. Like a botanist: looking with a magnifying glass and a number 2 pencil with a notepad, yet only coming for observation and analysis without it touching your heart.
 3. Like a bee: arriving empty and leaving full, for it has reached deep for all the nectar it can find.
- B. Next week we will look at the power of prayer in our battles with the enemy.

All right. Let's open our Bibles this evening to Ephesians 6:17. It's a good word, huh? God can do anything with you. Just look around here, and you'll be amazed.

Introduction

We've been studying our adversary and the armor of God for quite a few weeks now. In fact, next week, God be willing, we will finish this series - looking specifically at prayer, verse 18, which is going to kind of tie everything together. After we looked for a couple or three weeks at the devil and who he was and where he came from and his limitations and his plots and plans against the church and against the world, we turned to what Paul had to say last in Ephesians 6, as he was chained to a Roman soldier, to say, "Look, I watch this guy every day. But he wears a lot of equipment, and it's kind of like us." And he took the armor of a traditional Roman soldier, and he converted them into spiritual armor for God's people. And he taught us them one at a time, and we've been going through: three of them that you always wore (they are introduced with the word "having," beginning there in verse 13) and then the last three have the word "taking." These are the last three pieces of armor that you don't wear all the time but you pick up and you wear them as need be in the battle that you're facing. And it all has to do with our battle with the devil, his will to destroy and keep us from God's best, and our protection. Everything that we've looked at so far has been protection, it's been defensive.

A. The sword of the Spirit

Tonight, the sword of the Spirit is the only one that has both functions. It both protects, and it also takes ground that you've lost. It's an offensive (not an offense) tool that God has given you to use. So that's our goal tonight is to see in verse 17, there at the end, "take the helmet of salvation," (and the word "take" modifies the next phrase as well) "and" (take) "the sword of the Spirit," (and we are told exactly what Paul means) "which is the word of God."

B. This sword is not the same sword we spoke about last time

Now you might remember, if you were with us last Wednesday, that we talked about this shield of faith, and we said this was this really big kind of shield that was designed to protect you when someone came at you with what the Greeks called a "*rhomphaia*," a huge, big sword that was swung like a baseball bat. One blow to your head, and you're dead. It was this big, heavy sword. Well that's not the word for "sword" here. In fact, the word for "sword" here speaks of a dagger - sometimes 6" long, sometimes as far as 18" long - always carried in a sheath or a scabbard; typical Roman soldier equipment. But it was used specifically for hand-to-hand and face-to-face combat. I guess, the Word of God - if you had a little Bible, it could be a switchblade, a dagger.

C. This sword requires training and practice and is the only piece of armor used offensively

But it was a precise weapon that required, at least in fighting, tremendous skill to use well. And you might remember that Peter tried very hard (his knack with it) and wasn't very good at using it, though you could almost use the longer ones like in fencing. But you had to have some skill to use it, or really you were not going to be very long for this world. And so, like I said, Peter showed a tremendous lack of the knack. But it was certainly one of the most important single pieces of armor that a soldier in battle would have. So in our list of armor, like I said, it's the only purely offensive weapon in the sense that everything else required you to be protective.

Prayer, next week, covers everything. But it isn't really listed as a part of the armor. It is just kind of as an encouragement, "Hey, now that you've got all that on, pray." You still need God to work. So we didn't want to leave that out of our study for next week.

D. It is vital we use the sword of the Spirit well

Because it is an offensive weapon, we do need to learn to use it well. We don't want to just hold ground; we want to gain ground. As a Christian, even as Melanie was sharing (testimony given before this message), there's something about moving forward. We're almost at the end of another year. I can't believe how quickly this year has gone by. I thought we just had Easter, and now we're planning - we're doing Easter flyers this week. Can you imagine that? For this coming April's Easter. So things go by pretty fast. But you really want to be able to measure some growth, right? Do you feel like you made progress this year, spiritually? Or have you just kind of barely been getting by?

Well, I think this will help because rightfully dividing the Scriptures, and better applying the Scriptures to our own life, and applying it correctly in context, has a lot to do with growing up spiritually. Paul's last letter to Timothy (at 40 years old, first pastor in Ephesus) - he said to him in chapter 2, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). That really is, I think, the direction for us. God's Word is powerful. God blesses it, He honors it, He stands behind every word. And when you get to, "above all these things, take this sword of the Spirit, take this word of God to battle with you."

Now, I'm always amazed, and maybe you've thought about it, but if that is true - that God backs this up 100% and that you can count on every word, this isn't man's word, this is God's Word - why do you think so many people take this book so lightly? Or they seem to be moved by it so slightly. They're not well established in it. They can't accurately quote much from it. They have a hard time answering basic Bible questions. They're not sure what to believe or what it says. They have a tremendously difficult time sharing it. And then they say, "Gosh, I don't know why I'm so weak!" And you go, "Well, you don't have a sword, and you're a swordsman. You're missing the one instrument that you need to move forward. You're missing the sword!"

1. So even Christians, I think, can take this weapon for granted or not fully see its power. Now I don't know if it's because we live in a place where there's an abundance of Bible study

teaching available to us. There are parts of the country where you can hardly find three churches teaching the Bible. But we have hundreds of places we can go. So maybe we're complacent because we just have it too easy, or maybe we're just not convinced how important this sword of the Spirit is to our life.

I talked to somebody a while back who told me they'd been reading their Bible. I said, "Well that's good," and he said, "Yeah. I actually have read ten chapters a day for three months now." I said, "Wow, that's a lot of chapters." He goes, "Nine hundred." And I go, "What have you learned?" And he said this, "Oh, I didn't know there was going to be a test." And I thought, "Well, what good have your nine hundred chapters done you? You're ripping through most of the Old Testamentlook at you go. What have you learned?" "I didn't know there was going to be a test." And then he even said this to me, "Most folks have never read the Bible as much as I have." And I went, "Wow, great. But what have you learned?"

2. Paul referenced Timothy's knowledge of the Scriptures in that same 2 Timothy letter when he said, "I know that since you were a little kid," I think the words are "from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). And he mentioned that Timothy was a young man who grew up with the Scriptures, and then he said to Timothy, "You know, Timothy, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable' (or beneficial) 'for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God' " (or the woman of God) 'may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work' " (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul saw Timothy's background in the Scriptures being one of the causes of him coming, early on, to know the Lord. And he said, "You've known Him for years, and you've possessed that knowledge in your heart."

When Job wrote (in chapter 23:12), he said to the Lord, "I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." In other words, Job said that God's Word to him was more important than eating. How many Christians do you suppose you're going to find saying that and meaning it? "I would rather have God's Word than a burger; God's Word than a sundae; God's Word than a snack; God's Word than a milk shake. I would rather have God's Word than breakfast." I think most of us would go, "Yeah, we could have both....." But Job was locked in, wasn't he? I mean, he saw it. It guided his steps. It possessed his heart.

3. And I think one of the things that, maybe, we're getting beat up with the enemy so often is that we don't necessarily develop a real nurture for God's Word, and so then we don't have much victory. I remember when we were in 1 Peter a couple of months ago, early on in chapter 2 where Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (verse 2). In other words, like a baby wants to eat, you should want to hunger for God's Word. And for those of you that are here every Wednesday, faithfully show up early, Bible in hand, I'm probably singing to the choir. But you know we have three services on Sunday morning, and we have one service on Wednesday night. Why do you suppose that is? Is everyone that busy, or is there just a hunger that's lacking sometimes? Because that can happen, right? And it can hurt us. And it's like putting your sword down when a guy's coming at

you with a sword. You go, "Yeah, I'll just put this down," and I'm a sitting duck, I'm done for. It does amaze me that people will line up for a day and a half, early, to go to the Rose Parade. I did that once with my parents. I swore if they ever did it again, I was leaving home. It was endless, just sitting out there. People stood in line for five days to get the new iPhone. But in Bible studies, there's usually room. Why is that?

To get someone to go to Bible study regularly is like pulling teeth because I think that we can only conclude that this part of the armor is not fully appreciated by God's people. We don't fully appreciate what God has to say. If we did, I think there'd be standing room only every time the church doors would open. I think we'd have a movement where people were beginning to show up early, and I pray that would one day be our experience. But what I, instead, find so often is when it comes to battle, everybody wants to win the battle. "Let's fight to win the battle! Let's serve the Lord!" And they put down the sword. There's some lethargy, the take-it-or-leave-it attitude found in many lives, and I think it suggests, at least to me, that we don't understand the value of the sword very much. But Paul says, "Take it, man. Take up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, because when it comes to the enemy, you need this to stand."

The B-I-B-L-E

The B-I-B-L-E. It's the book for me. I remember singing that when I was a kid. What is your view of the book on your lap? How do you feel about what the Bible stands for? Because there are certainly some absolutes that you should be convinced of if you're going to be a swordsman for the Lord. But what do you think about it?

A. The Bible is infallible

You know, the Bible is infallible, isn't it? The word "infallible" means, when it's applied to the Bible, without error in its total presentation of what it has to say; that it is flawless or that it is flawless; that God never had a second thought. He didn't write this down and go, "Ah, who's got the eraser? I'm going to tear this page out and start again. It's not exactly what I wanted to say." It never happened! He didn't make a mistake. God didn't change His mind. He never once regretted having said something in it and now wishing He could take it back. Teaching methods tend to change. Approaches to passing along God's Word can change. But the Word doesn't change. Right? It's constant, and it's unchanging - just as the Author is constant and unchanging. James wrote, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). "The testimony of the LORD is sure" (Psalm 19:7). It's sure. It'll make simple people wise. It's infallible. You don't need to read the Bible and then question God. You don't need to bother reading the Bible and challenge Him. You don't have to read the Bible and doubt Him. He's right. You're wrong. He knows. You don't. You only have to just get in line with Him. Right? Because it's infallible. That's what it is. If there was a doubt, then, man, it'd be hard to start putting the Bible to work for us. But if you can learn to rightfully divide it and be wise and fill yourselves with the treasures of His knowledge, then you'll be pretty good in your sword skills, and the enemy won't get much room to take you out. Because he throws something at you, and you go, "Yeah, that's not what the Bible says. That's not what God has to say." And you're

not easily moved. You're able to stand. Infallible. Isn't that what it is? Is that, to you, an infallible book on your lap?

B. The Bible is inerrant

It's also inerrant. The word "inerrant," by definition, means that it has no flaw in its individual parts; that every part of the Bible, standing on its own, is dependable. Now, there are some verses in your Bible, in your manuscript (in the King James, the New King James), that we don't have any copies of until the 14th century: some verses that are questionable, and people, because they don't have any earlier records of them, wonder about whether they belong in the Scriptures or not; some other verses that quote numbers differently from one passage to a corresponding one that seemed almost to be a copyist error where there's a little dot missing, and the dot unfortunately means ten thousand more, and so you don't get it. And so they'll get locked up in those kinds of things. Well, first of all, if we don't have any copies until the 14th century, you might be well to go, "Let me put that verse aside." I'll be happy to show you which ones they are - if you're worried about it. Or a number that doesn't repeat itself well. But you should know if you took all of those verses out, your understanding of God and His promises wouldn't change at all. Those are reportable verses. They're not promises made by God. They're not ones that you have to, "Oh, man, if you believe and are saved, you go to heaven." That's not an error, "Oh, we've got to take that one out." No, that's a good one. The things that are even in question in terms of print, if you will - discrepancies (and there're a lot of Bible difficulty books that you can read and that address those questions) - they add and they subtract nothing to the doctrines of the Scriptures or change the context or the content of God's Word to you and me. It hasn't changed. It's infallible in its totality. It's inerrant.

C. The Bible is complete

And it's complete, isn't it? You don't need any more than this; at least not by God's definition. This is the sword that He wants you to use. In fact, we are warned over and over not to add or to remove anything from this book. In fact, if we would try, God's pretty severe about it. He says things like, in Revelation 22:18-19, "If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life." You go, "Yeah, I don't want that!" I don't even know what that means, and I don't want that! You know? I want to stay right there where the Book of Life is. I don't want You to remove me at all. Or "from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." If you add to the book, if you take away from the book, you and God are going to have problems because this is His Word to you and me. This is what He wants us to know. You should see the Bible that way when you open it. He's serious enough about the Word that He wants it preserved.

Now, there are a lot of cults who distinguish themselves by adding to the revealed Word of God lots of books, lots of writings. They suggest the Bible is fine as far as it goes, but it doesn't really go far enough, that you need additional authorities and additional sources. So, the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses and others offer to you written works other than the Scriptures and ascribe of them equal reading and sometimes, because of their doctrinal position, of greater value. They say, "Our works are actually more important than the Bible

because you'll need our works to believe what we're telling you. You just read the Bible, you'll never get what we're telling you."

I grew up as a Catholic, and I taught a class (when I was first saved) down the street from our Catholic church on some of the questions I had about Roman Catholicism as a young, new Christian. And so the father, the priest of the church that we attended for years, came and sat in my classes - right in the front row - to intimidate me, I believe, or to frighten me. I don't know. But our greatest discussion was that the Catholic church's position for so long was that the teachings of the church, dogma-wise, and the decisions that the church made, from a papal position, were of equal value to the Scriptures. That was our big argument. In other words, "The Bible is okay, but what we say and do is of equal value." And that's not biblical nor does God agree with that. And we had good discussions together, and I truly believe this priest actually loved the Lord. But God doesn't explain everything in the Scriptures, but what He has given to us is exactly what He wants us to know, and it should be enough for you to seek and live for Him. That's the bottom line. That's the book in your lap, the sword of the Spirit. It is infallible, it is inerrant, it is complete.

D. The Bible is authoritative

It is authoritative which just means when God speaks, people should listen. If there's a blowhard somewhere just yelling what he's going to do if he doesn't get his way, you just go, "Well, he's just an idiot." But this is God speaking, and God usually gets what He wants. In fact, in the end, He'll get exactly what He wants. His authority and His judgment will be the final judgment, and whatever He decides, you're not going to be able to change that. Right? So, even if you don't believe in God, that doesn't really change who He is. He's not affected by public opinion. "Well, we don't believe in you." Yeah, that's gonna matter. No pressure from without. You can't veto Him out. You can't vote Him out. He's in. He's God! Psalm 19:9, "The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether." You're not going to be able to mess with Him. It's an authoritative book because God puts His name on it. He stands behind it. So, when His 'yay' is 'yay' and his 'nay' is 'nay,' there aren't going to be any courts of appeal. Right? So when He says in the Bible, "I have spoken, shall I not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19), or, "It shall come to pass" (various Scripture verses), or, "Heaven and earth can pass away, but My Word shall never pass away" (Matthew 24:35), you'd better believe that the book that's on your lap is authoritative. It's God's declaration to you and me. And when Jesus spoke to the people and shared God's Word with them, it says (there in Mark 1:22) that the scribes and the Pharisees and the people "were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" and the Pharisees who ran around quoting each other's books. No. The Lord just stood up and said, "Thus saith the Lord," and that was it. He didn't explain it or try to justify it. He just declared it. It's an authoritative book.

E. The Bible is sufficient

The Bible on your lap is also sufficient; sufficient meaning you shouldn't have to go looking everywhere else for how to live your life as a believer in Christ. Now, look, the Bible doesn't

talk about every point of medicine or law or environment. But when it comes to your spiritual or your moral or your psychological life, God leaves nothing out. This is you. This is what you need to be able to walk with God. Surveys come and go. Diagnoses and treatments change. Some people, because the initial solution they came up with created even more problems, have to change their whole way of life. But God's Word just gives answers. It doesn't cause problems. It doesn't produce questions. He just gives answers. This is all you need. We're going to start 2 Peter here on Sunday, and verse 3 of that book says, "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." You need life? You need godliness? Follow this! "Well, what about the environment? What about medicine?" No. Just follow this! And a lot of the questions of life get answered as you just begin to walk with God. It is infallible and inerrant and complete and authoritative and sufficient.

F. The Bible is effective

And may I add the word - it is effective. Now, it would be a horrible book if it declared all kinds of things, and you put it into practice, and nothing happened. But when God speaks, things happen. I'm always amazed, even just in teaching on a regular basis, that so often people will come up and say, "You know, the Lord spoke right to me this morning. How did you know what I was going through?" To which I have to reply, "Well, your husband called me, and let me in on it about 7:15 this morning." No. I say, "I have no idea what you're going through, and I can't plan a whole week of studies for just you." Here's God's Word, and God's Word just has a way of being effective, doesn't it? I didn't. God did. That Scripture in Isaiah 55 that says, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (verse 11). When God speaks - and even tonight, you hear God's Word - God's going to accomplish what He wants in your heart. And you can not be open to it, and maybe the Lord, "Here it is, but you're not listening." But if you're open to hear, God's willing to work. That's just the way He is. It's an authoritative and effective method by which we grow. If you're not convinced that the Bible is effective, then you're not going to share with people nor are you going to be very comforted when you read it because you're going to go, "Yeah, that's great, but look at my life," and you're not going to be having much boldness to go tell others because you're not so sure this is truly effective. If you buy a stain remover, and your favorite shirt has a big old stain on it, and you stick the stain remover on it, and you look, and you wait 15 minutes, and you go, "That didn't work," and you throw it away, and you never bother to read that it says, "Let it soak for 3 hours".....we come to the Bible, and we think, "Well, I read God's Word. I haven't seen any change. It's been like a minute and a half. He said He'd provide all my needs. I've been praying for 20 minutes. Where is He?" Well, God says you reap what you sow. That takes a while. Right? What you plant will grow. His Word is effective. Let it grow in you.

I've had people come in for counseling, and they say, "Pastor, I know you teach the Bible in church, but this is real life. I want some real answers. I don't need you to be preaching the Bible to me." Don't think we haven't heard that. That's like saying, "I don't believe it. It's not effective. God won't stand behind it." Don't just know part of the Bible. Learn all of it. The Bible says God will provide all of your needs (Philippians 4:19). It also says if you don't work, you don't eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). You should probably put those two together, and go to work so

God can provide. "I've been praying." Yeah, go to work. People come in, they go, "I don't have a job. Could you pray?" I said, "Where have you looked?" "Looked? No. We're just praying." "All right, knucklehead. You're never going to get a job." "Why is that?" "Because no one's going to bother to call you." "Could be a miracle." "Well, it might be, but I'm guessing not. You've got to get to moving. Start knocking on doors. Let's see what God'll do." It's effective.

G. The Bible is divine

It's divine, too, isn't it? In other words, this is God's book. This is the only book of God. This is not human genius. This is 40 authors, 1500 years, all walks of life, three different languages - and everything just works together well. In other words, one of the things that you find out when people bring all these extra books into the Bible is all of a sudden it all falls apart, this unity between everything that's written therein. And it no longer works together. But this does. It's divine. God-breathed, God-inspired, God-backed. That's what we've been given.

H. The Bible is determinative

And, finally, it's determinative. What that means is - what you believe about the Bible reveals both your relationship with God presently and determines your eternal destiny eventually. What you believe about what this book says reveals your heart between you and God today and really tells us, if you continue down that path, where you're going to end up in the long run, in the end. Your obedience and your faith in God's Word will change you. Jesus said in John 8:47, "If you hear God's Word, and you do it, then you belong to Him. But if you hear it and do it not, then you don't belong to Him." So it determines where you're coming from. You can say "I believe." You can say, "Oh, yeah. I believe that." But if you're not living it, then you're not telling the truth. And there'll be those who find that their life has been determined by their behavior, not by their claims.

There're a lot of people in church history that have died so that you could have a Bible in your own hands, in your own language, in print; folks who, for generations, fought to have one in the community. And they were tied to the pillars in front of church doors, or they were hidden in closets because to have them was to die. And yet we have - some of us have - I must have a dozen Bibles. I have a Dutch Bible. Since I grew up in Holland, it helps me learn Dutch stuff. I have a Spanish Bible. I have no idea, but I have one. "Dios te bendiga." I can say that. That's about it. And, "Donde esta tu bano?" (Laughing) I don't think that's even in the Bible, but I got that worked out. I have a Greek Bible and a Hebrew Bible, and I have a Bible from Hawaii in Pidgin. That's amazing. I just have a New Testament, but they've written it in Pidgin. In fact, the book of Acts is called "the Jesus boys." It's wonderful, and it communicates with folks whose education level is just right there, man. People have gotten saved. I have a lot of Bibles. But we need to believe that it is His Word. There're people that hunger for a copy of the Bible. And God says, "Here, take the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God."

Using the Sword of the Spirit

A. A sword carried without training is of little use

So God gives to us, as saints, this last piece of armor by which we are to stand. And we should be comfortable with it. An unbeliever probably owns a Bible. Most people do. Yet, if you don't know God, it doesn't profit you anything. Right? It might as well just be put away. Well, a believer who isn't learning the Bible is in about the same kind of shape. The issue is learning His Word.

B. A soldier wounded in battle can't blame the sword he wasn't equipped to use

If you're a soldier, and you're wounded in battle because you didn't know how to use the sword, you really can't blame the sword. "Stupid sword!" Some Christians carry around huge study Bibles. They've got beautiful covers on them. They use them Sundays for 35 minutes and then put them in the trunk so they'll know where to get them next Sunday. That's not exactly sword practice. That's not very wise. There are some people who come to church, and you say, "Let's open to Psalms," and by the end of the service, they're still looking for Psalms. "I don't knowPsalmsis that with an 'S'? I don't know. I haven't been able to find it." They're not very familiar with their sword. They'll go to every conference, every Bible event, every retreat; and yet the sword lies silent next to them. The pages of their Bible still smell brand new. Some of them have never been opened. They've got that gold flake, and they've had it for ten years. You've got to use it to be effective, and you've got to believe what it is and why God has given it to us. It's easy to be defeated in our war with the enemy if we fail to believe God's Word. Right? "I beseech you," Paul said, "by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2). That's what you want. You want this Bible to get in here, don't you? You want to react to the world - not with emotional response or anger - but you want to react with, "Well, what does the Lord say about what I'm seeing and what I'm going through and what I'm doing?" That's important - that we can respond that way to what God has to say.

C. The sword provides benefits and protection

If God's people set His counsel aside for something they think is even better, then they lay down the sword, and they lose the benefits of knowing God all together, and they're in danger of being overwhelmed by the enemy. And I suspect that the greatest danger for the church - in America anyway - is a lack of knowledge. We just don't know the Bible. We have all this teaching and very few people living it - which is tragic. Some people see diligent Bible study as too much work or it's not exciting enough because there are some churches that present whatever it is they're presenting in such a fun way, it keeps me interested. But a year later, I know nothing. I know absolutely nothing. I can paint now, but I don't know about quoting a Bible verse. Or people will just pick and choose studies. I'll give you a perfect example. Not this last time through (which I'm thankful for), but the other two times when we've gone through the entire Bible, by the time we get to Leviticus, people go, "Yeah. When do you start Joshua? I'll be back in eight months." And you would watch half the church disappear because it's Leviticus. This time, God bless you, you all stayed. We're going to start Deuteronomy here in February, so

I'll be keeping an eye on everyone. (Laughing) I actually took a picture to see who won't be here. This'll be great.

But sometimes we just like to skip over everything we don't like. We love the blessing verses; we don't like the judgment verses much. We don't like the Law much. We don't mind the prophets. We love the gospels. We don't want too much doom and gloom. And yet here's the Bible - the whole of Scripture is what God gives to us, the entire counsel of God's Word. Paul said to the Ephesians, "I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). I give it all to you. Every part of it is important because of all the things that we said. But you have to be able to view the Scriptures that way.

D. Jesus answered Satan's temptations by properly applying God's Word

When Jesus started His earthly ministry and was tempted by the devil for forty days, it was all about hand-to-hand combat, wasn't it? And He took the Word of God with each temptation, and He applied it properly. And even when Satan tried to misquote it to Him, He went back and just applied it right.

E. We must know God's Word and follow it

If I counsel a man who comes in, and he's living with his girlfriend rather than being married to her, and I say to him, "Well, you shouldn't be living with her," and he says, "Well why not?" And I say, "The Bible says that was a terrible thing to do," and then he says, "Well, the economy is really bad, and we both work, and this helps us both out," and I say, "Well, God can provide for you even if you do the right thing," and he says, "Well, when He does, I'll do the right thing," that's backwards. That's backwards. You've got to put God first and then trust that He'll do even as he's promised. Act in faith, then watch God work. Don't do it the other way around. God owes you nothing. You owe Him everything.

F. The sword is both defensive and offensive

But the sword is defensive in that it keeps you from sin and protects you from foolish mistakes, and it shines God's light on every situation so you know where to walk. But it's on the offense, too, because it'll allow you to take strongholds that the enemy has established in your life. Your fears don't have to be your fears; your anxieties can go; you can have peace in your life; you can know the will of God; you don't have to struggle through this world like people who don't know that someone's in charge of them and has their best interest in mind.

G. Heeding God's Word will make us wise and victorious

Every time I teach the Bible, I know that there's a war going on. I don't see it, but I know that it's there. When Jesus taught the parable of the sower, He said, "Sometimes the Word just falls on hard hearts." And I'm sure, as I'm teaching in places, that people just nod their heads, and they don't care, and nothing happens. And then there're those hearts that aren't very deep. They might spring up, but it doesn't last very long. They'll cry, "Oh, that was so touching, God

really spoke to me" and lasts until about tomorrow noon, and then they're done again. I know that there're those whose hearts are like thorns. They have a lot of cares of this world, and God's Word doesn't get in. But I know there's good soil too. When the lawyer came to Jesus to tempt Him, there in Luke 10, and he said, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" "What does the Bible say?" It's a great answer. "How can I have eternal life?" "What does the Bible say?" I don't think Jesus was asking for some help; pretty sure He knew what it said. But He was saying to this man who was out to get Him, "Better know what the Bible says because that's where your answer is going to be." So if we heed God's Word, we'll be good. We may not be great at science or philosophy or astronomy or economics, but you can be wise in Christ. And then you're wise in all the things that matter. Right? You can be the simplest person in the world, but you should have an advanced degree in God's Word. You should learn it and know it well.

We have friends that moved to Salt Lake City to do ministry for the Mormons, and they do outreaches, and they actually have converted Mormons that are on cable television every week giving their testimony. They've actually had some really good success getting the Word out that way. But when they were preparing themselves, we had lots of discussions about how maybe the best way to witness to the cults is not to read their books but to read God's book; because you can learn all about what they've said and done and what it says over there in the book of Nephi, but if you know what it says in the book of James, you'll be just fine. And you won't get tripped up when it comes in your direction. The error becomes very obvious when you know the truth. Right?

So when Paul said to Timothy, near the end of his second letter to him, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2) - "Timothy, just give the people God's Word. That's what they need from you. That's what you can do for them." Peter said to the scattered saints, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). So we should have a conviction about this book, shouldn't we? To know God's Word is a long way from having to say, "Well it's in there somewhere."

I would say to you - have a plan to read. We always put out yearly reading charts, little books, a printout for you. How many of you have actually read through the Bible? So proud of you. Good for you. Keep at it. You'll learn something new next time through for sure. But you have to have a plan. I tend to learn Bible books by chapters, not verses. I'm much easier to outline a chapter of thirty verses and go, "these are the subjects," and then it sticks with me far better than to try to remember what verse 26 said versus verse 29. Now because I use it a lot, some of it I just back into. Whatever you guys are doing for your jobs, if you do it enough, you don't have to think about it. You just do it. It's kind of like that for us, too. We're not as spiritually smart as you think we are. We just do a lot of it. So we look smart, but we're not. You should just come to a meeting, and you'll see it's not at all like you think it is. But it's important that you know what you believe. It's one thing to tell people what the Bible said. It's quite another to go, "Hey, let me just show you here what Peter had to say or what Paul had to say." Or, "Here's in Philippi," and you can kind of frame it for them so that, by the time you're done, if

they disagree, then you just go, "You and God will have to take it up, but that's what the Bible says." So learn the Bible. Learn it by topic. What's the topic of 1 Corinthians 13? Love. How about John 17? Jesus' prayer. How about Genesis 1? Creation. Revelation 2-3? Jesus' message to the churches. Matthew 5-7? Sermon on the Mount. You guys are well - your pastor must teach you well! (Laughing) That's about all that I can get out of that.

Can you imagine Jesus in the wilderness saying to the devil, "Wait right here, there's a verse, I just don't remember where it is"? (Laughing) "I wish Peter were here to help Me." Not good. Not good. Just because you own a Bible doesn't mean you have a sword. You've got to use it. And like Jesus said to the lawyer, "What does your Bible say?" Look, it is very easy for us to become complacent in our Bible study, to grow fat and lazy. We can do it in our flesh fairly easily. We can certainly do it spiritually as well. And it doesn't take much to just kind of start to cut corners.

I remember when I was first saved how excited I was to go to church. I went to Pastor Chuck's Sunday night services and Thursday night services for seven years after I got saved. Every week, I drove from Bellflower to Costa Mesa, and we loved Sunday nights because Chuck would start at 6:00, and he'd go till 9:30. We'd do 28 chapters. Wooooo! And Chuck didn't teach much. He'd read it, and then he'd comment, "Well, that's chapter 21." You'd go, "Ahhh." And then he'd go, "Chapter 22," and he'd just read it, and it would fill us. It wasn't like some heavy-duty thing. But he'd drag us through the whole Bible over and over and over again, and we learned it. I was so excited. And then I remember at some point going, "I don't want to drive thirty miles. I can get the tape." And we had cassettes at the time - something you, maybe, don't know about. But they're in one of those vaults for a time machine. You'll get to see them one of these days. And then you start giving up and just coasting. But then you run into a need in your life, and right away you're back in church. It's kind of like God rings your bell. "Okay, I'm in." You don't want to go on auto pilot. You don't want to just coast. You want to be in gear, you know?

Final Thoughts

A. How do you approach God's Word?

1. You can be like a butterfly and just fly around, light on a flower and then go off to the next one and touch a lot of blossoms, get no benefit from them at all.

2. Or you can come to church like a botanist with a magnifying glass and a #2 pencil, take notes and make observations. We see people like that. They'll come to church, and I'll say, "Well, how'd you like it?" He goes, "Oh, you did real well. The songs were okay, and we were pretty comfortable - kind of cold in here." But he's just making observations. That's all he knows. But he doesn't get anything out of it. He's just observing.

3. And then there's the bee. He digs into every flower, and he comes in empty, he leaves full.

There're a lot of spiritual butterflies in church. They flutter from this thing to that thing. "Hey, have you seen the bands over here, and the songs over here, and the concerts over there, and the seminars over there, and the movie?" No life in the body, no responsibility. And then there are spiritual botanists. They're just purely academic. They analyze the outward; have no heart for the material themselves. They'll tell you about lights and sound and production value. They just won't tell you about Jesus and His love. They never get that. They'll tell you what I did wrong, how long I went, was I too loud, did I not make contact. "You didn't look in my direction often." I'm sorry. I meant to do it like this, but I can't always do it. (Laughing) You've got to be the spiritual bee, right? You've got to come and say, "Lord, feed me. I'm hungry."

You believe all that about your Bible? Then you have a sword, and you can begin to use it. Until that happens, I think the devil's just going to pound you. You'll just get pounded. You won't be lost. God'll save you, but you'll be pounded, and life will be hard, and hope will be minimal and slim, and joy will be hard to find. But you know God's Word, you believe it, you live with it, you stand upon it, you share it, you obey it - life will change. And I know for us, as pastors, it's the one confidence that we have when we go to teach because it's the one thing that God uses that He promises to bless.

I was in Denver this weekend, and I shared with the services (both on Saturday night and Sunday) because we're on the radio there. And we get a lot of radio folks that come, and they just want to meet you, and they always say, (well, I think I've told you) "You don't look at all like you sound," which is never a compliment. "Oh, a younger guy with hair? Is that what you're looking for? Sorry!" (Laughing) But the fruit of the radio for me, and we're on almost 500 radio stations across the country, is that God's Word just works. Everything you depend upon or rely upon as a pastor is personality and eye contact and relationships and maybe mannerisms and you moving your hands, you're trying to keep people listening, and storytelling - whatever it is, there's a lot of that interaction that, whether you believe it or not, you depend upon when you go stand in front of other people. But the radio steals all of that away. You're reduced to this five-inch speaker that's kind of half attached in the back of some guy's old VW bug, and it's just bouncing around. It's not good quality sound. It's in and it's out. It's at a certain time of day. It doesn't always fit into people's schedules. They catch you for 10 minutes on their way to the market, and you happen to be on that radio. That's about all it is, and yet the fruit that we hear coming from the radio - the people that have gotten saved, the folks that we met, even in Colorado, who've come to know Jesus just from the radio - you just go, "That's amazing, Lord! It's amazing." Radio is expensive. It costs us hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to be on the radio. It would be a perfect place to go, "Let's cut some costs, and we'll do some other things." But I don't know how you can because it's God's Word that goes out, and you just stand in awe. We trust God will pay the bills. Now that might seem like a lot of money to you, and I hope it does because it does to me, but look what God does through it and how He blesses it. So we have committed to it because God's Word doesn't go out void. That's all. That's our confidence. And there are radio stations that we are on that we never hear anybody, nobody

ever responds, we don't get any letters, no one seems to order anything, no one calls and tells us.....at some point, we just go, "We're not going to stay on there. There's no fruit. There's no measurable fruit." And I think that's both intelligent and responsible. But when the Word goes out, we expect to see people get saved and lives being changed, and they do. And especially from KWVE. People come to church because they hear you on the radio. Then they say this, "You don't look at all like you sound." (Laughing) "Thanks a lot."

B. Next week, we will look at the power of prayer in our battles with the enemy

All right. Next week, we're going to do prayer - the power of prayer, verse 18. One verse. You should be all right. And then we will be done with that.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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