


## EPHESIANS 6:17

### THE WEAPON GOD SUPPLIES

“Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”<sup>1</sup>

 God's Word is the sole weapon provided to His people to enable them to fulfil His charge to stand firm on the ground that He won through sacrifice. Whenever we think of the Bible, we seldom think of it in militaristic terms. However, Paul appears to have admired the martial aspects of national life, since he so frequently referred to the advance of the Faith in militaristic terms. In our text, he clearly identifies this Word by the arresting phrase, “the sword of the Spirit.” He speaks of the Word as both a defensive and an offensive weapon.

There was a time when the copies of Word of God were rare. In those ancient days, the reading of the Word was a common feature of worship. The people listened intently, seizing on the teachings and incorporating them into their lives. Today, each home in Canada probably has at least one copy of the Bible—and in many instances, multiple copies. However, there is not a great deal of evidence today that Canadians read the Word, much less appreciate the instruction of the Word—not even among the professed saints of God.

Nevertheless, this Word is identified as “the sword of the Spirit,” implying that it is to be used against the foe. Many professing Christians admire the Word, declaiming devotion to the Word and avowing allegiance to what is taught. However, the mass of people are ignorant both of the Word and of the One that gave the Word.

I recall an occasion when I was invited to address a congregation. After a great deal of prayer, I decided to speak on the subject of the biblical ignorance of the saints. As I stood to address the congregation, I asked how many of the people had a copy of the Bible with them. Most indicated that they had brought a copy of the Word with them. Those that did not have a Bible with them were asked to take a copy of the pew Bible. Then, I invited them to turn to the fourth chapter of the Book of Hezekiah. The people began to turn in their Bibles, though it was obvious as I waited for them that they were not having much success in finding the passage.

After a period, I mentioned that the Book was found immediately after Second Samson. This announcement caused some confusion, but almost the entire congregation continued turning pages in a desperate search for the Book of Hezekiah.

A few desperate souls turned in their Bible to the index and scanned the books listed there. First one and then another, with a sheepish look on their faces, closed their Bible and looked up. When a number of people surrendered to the knowledge that they were not likely to find the Book of Hezekiah, I at last announced that I would be speaking from **AMOS 8:11, 12** and addressing the subject of the saints' ignorance of the Word of God. It is likely that some were offended, but I can assure you that I had a rapt congregation for the remainder of the morning.

The pastor felt humiliated—he should have! He had spent over twenty years with that particular congregation. To think that his people were no better trained than that left him aghast. However, in previous conversations he had stressed that he was a “counsellor,” not a teacher. The evidence certainly led me to concur with him. However, I could not help but recall that those appointed to the sacred desk must be “able to teach” [**1 TIMOTHY 3:3**] and also are required to be “able to give instruction in sound doctrine” [**TITUS 1:9**].

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Following the service, a man approached me and introduced himself. I recognised his name as that of a prominent theologian, whose writings I had read with great benefit over a period of years. He was quite amused, and said, “Young man, you certainly enjoy a lot of freedom in the pulpit. Seldom have I heard anyone speak as pointedly to the issue of biblical ignorance. I trust you will maintain your courage.”

I hope I am not speaking to people content to admire the Word without using the Word. God has given us this Word to use to the praise of His glory and for the benefit of all mankind. This Word is given us to enable us to resist the wicked one, to permit us to hold the ground which the Saviour has entrusted to us, and to pierce the heart of darkness. I invite you to think with me of this marvellous weapon God supplies.

**THE WORD, OUR SWORD** — Paul has itemised the items that comprise the panoply of the Christian warrior. Make no mistake, if you are a Christian, you are appointed to be a warrior. Though we are not to be warlike or combative, we are nevertheless warriors. The Apostle to the Gentiles has spoken clearly of this aspect of the Christian life in a letter to Corinthian Christians. “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5].

Practically speaking, we have but one weapon with which to defend ourselves when the enemy closes, and that is the Word of God. The broad implication arising from this knowledge leads us to conclude that we are responsible to be familiar with the Word, preparing ourselves to employ it whenever required. In the history of the race, it has not been that many years since the Bible was rarely found in the homes of common individuals. One need but return to a time in the western world before Wycliffe when the Bible had not been translated into the vernacular.

The Bibles that were available were written in Latin, a dead language. Only a few priests could read the Latin Bibles, and they delivered to the people what they wanted them to hear. The mass of people were ignorant of the Word of God, depending upon religion to make them acceptable in the sight of God and accepting without thinking the dictates of the clergy.

It is difficult for us to imagine a day when the Bible is not available to anyone. However, until the invention of the printing press and the courageous efforts of men such as John Wycliffe who translated the Bible into the language of the common people, there was no possibility of someone who was not a member of the clergy or of the nobility ever seeing a Bible, much less holding one in his own hands. How eagerly did the people of England seize the opportunity to read the very Word of the Living God in their own tongue!

I have a dear friend who has planted over twenty-seven churches in the Philippine Islands. Before travelling to the Islands, he will purchase cases of Bibles in the Ilocano dialect to distribute to the people in the jungle barrios. His method of church planting is to enter a barrio where there is no evangelical witness and ask if there is interest in having a Bible study. There has never been an instance where there were not a number of people eager to study the Word of God for themselves. There is often opposition from religious leaders, but given the opportunity to study the Word of God for themselves, the villagers will seize that freedom.

As they study the Word together, many become believers; and as they turn in faith to the Son of God, they seek to obey Him through identifying with Him in baptism as commanded in the Gospels. Having been saved, they begin to pray together and endeavouring to find the will of God for their lives, they soon ask about whether they should become a congregation.

Clemente prays with them, asking God to raise up elders and servants, which the Lord does. He spends a few months longer with them, focusing in particular on the leaders whom God has raised up, teaching them the great truths of the Faith and equipping them for service as the God's shepherds. The result is churches where previously there were no congregations.

I should mention that Clemente is an electrical engineer. He is not a trained pastor. He has, however, a passion for the lost and unbridled confidence in the power of the Word to transform people who read it. He is convinced of the work of the Spirit of God moving in the lives of those who are redeemed. Consequently, God uses him powerfully and to His glory.

I have been privileged to witness the power of the Word of God on occasion. I recall the first Bible study I ever led. The pastor of a Bible church we were attending asked if I would lead a study of the Word. I had never conducted a Bible study, but full of confidence in my abilities and unaware of what was entailed, I agreed. When we met for that first evening, imagine my chagrin at the discovery that most of the fifteen or so people gathered were preparing for missionary work as Bible translators. What would I say? How could I teach such people?

Nevertheless, I had given my word that I would conduct a study, and so I began. I asked on the first night what book of the Bible we should study. After considerable discussion, we settled on the Book of James. And so my education began. I had a wide margin King James Bible and a couple of devotional commentaries that I had acquired; so, thus armed, I began the challenging job of teaching the Word of God.

At our next meeting, almost everyone there appeared with a Greek Testament in addition to their various English translations of the Bible. Very quickly, I discovered how utterly unprepared I was to teach them anything. Somehow, I stumbled through the first night's study, concluding with a request that each participant read the Book of James at least once a day in preparation for the coming week's study. I spent a great deal of time in prayer and reading the Bible before the next study, but I knew that I knew less than anyone else present.

Before the study began, a woman asked if she could speak to the group. Thinking that it would surely eat up a little time and make my inadequacy appear a little less glaring, I readily assented to her request. She began by noting how unstimulating the lesson had been the week before and how she had half-heartedly decided to read James. As she read, she came under conviction that she was a fraud, pretending to be a Christian when in fact she had never believed. That week, she testified, while reading James, she had come to faith in the Living Son of God.

Almost immediately after she finished, a man asked permission to speak, to which request I willingly agreed. His testimony was similar to that we had just heard, except he confessed that though he was a believer, he had been "playing at church." Reading the Word, he came under conviction and had experienced revival in his own life in that week preceding.

These testimonies unleashed a torrent of confession as one after another individuals spoke of renewed love for the Saviour as result of reading the Word, as they spoke of reanimation of devotion to His service and as they spoke of reinvigorated love for His people. Revival broke out and God worked powerfully to glorify His Name. It was all because His people began to read the Word rather than reading about the Word. As they read the Word—treating it as the Word of the Living God—He worked powerfully to the praise of His Name.

Were there only these few instances in which I have witnessed the power of the Word, I would be content to believe that God's Word is powerful. However, I could literally invest the entire time allotted to our study this day, telling incident after incident of the power of God's Word. It is sufficient for me to note that during more than four decades of service before the Lord, I have repeatedly witnessed the power of the Word in the lives of multiplied individuals.

It is because the Word of God is powerful that Paul commands the young pastor of the Ephesian congregation, “Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Then, the aged Apostle unveils an awful prospect when he writes, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:2-4].

There is a truly awful day coming, and perhaps it is at hand, a day of which also the Prophet Amos has written.

“Hear this! The days are coming—

[this is] the declaration of the Lord GOD—

when I will send a famine through the land:  
not a famine of bread or a thirst for water,  
but of hearing the words of the LORD.  
People will stagger from sea to sea  
and roam from north to east,  
seeking the word of the LORD,  
but they will not find it.”<sup>2</sup>

[AMOS 8:11, 12]

There is a day when the professed people of God will not hear the Word of God, but they will search for answers to their questions. Unfortunately, they will seek answers they have already determined they want to hear. The Word warns that they hire preachers to say what they want to hear, affirming them in their sin, rather than saying what they need to hear, delivering them from the bondage into which they have sold themselves. When it is unleashed, God’s Word is seen to be powerful and effective. Listen to the teaching of the Word.

The Word of God is presented as a hammer [JEREMIAH 23:29], which God employs to break the hardened heart of man, and as a fire [JEREMIAH 20:9; 23:29] to refine the believer’s heart. It is a mirror [2 CORINTHIANS 3:18; JAMES 1:23-25], revealing man’s true condition. The Word is a water-filled basin [JOHN 15:3; EPHESIANS 5:26] to cleanse the heart from defilement and to sanctify the one who reads therein. It is a seed from which good works spring [LUKE 8:11; 1 PETER 1:23].

God speaks of His Word as rain and snow [ISAIAH 55:10, 11] that waters the good works sown in the life of the believer. The Word is spoken of as food [JOB 23:12]—it is presented as milk [1 CORINTHIANS 3:2; HEBREWS 5:12, 13] for baby Christians, as bread [DEUTERONOMY 8:3] and as meat, or solid food [1 CORINTHIANS 3:2; HEBREWS 5:12-14] for mature believers. It is also identified as honey [PSALM 19:10], emphasising the sweetness of the Word of God. It is also presented as gold [PSALM 19:10; 119:72], showing that the Word is our wealth. The Word of God is also seen as a lamp [PSALM 119:105; PROVERBS 6:23; 2 PETER 1:19] that provides light for the one who reads it so that they will not stumble in the darkness. And finally, God’s Word is presented as a sword [EPHESIANS 6:17; HEBREWS 4:12; REVELATION 19:15].

This Word may be used with confidence, for it was given by God. Peter testifies concerning the Word, “No prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”<sup>3</sup> [2 PETER 1:21]. Because it is the Word of God, it will accomplish all that God intends, even as Isaiah says:

<sup>2</sup> **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2003)

<sup>3</sup> **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, ©1996-2006)

“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

[ISAIAH 55:11]

**THE PURPOSE AND USE OF THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT** — It will be helpful if we establish what sort of sword Paul describes. In the ancient world, two swords were commonly available—the *máchaira* and the *rhomphaía*. The latter was the battle sword, a long and broad cutlass, used in combat, for instance, by the Roman Legions. The former was a short sword used primarily for defence, though it could also be used by an executioner. It was more of a dagger than a sword. It was more of a thrusting or piercing tool than a cutting tool. This *máchaira* is the sword to which the Apostle refers as given to us defenders of holy ground.

In light of this tidbit of information, we should recall the statement made by the author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians: “The word of God is living and active, 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” [HEBREWS 4:11]. To this point, the references I have made refer to the Word of God in the broadest sense. The citations primarily point to the living Word or to the completed canon of Scripture. However, the text points us to more specific aspects of the Word.

Paul describes the equipment God has provided to protect His child when the enemy comes against him or her. However, when the enemy has closed, the child of God will be required to defend the territory God has assigned. To accomplish this, God has provided “the sword of the Spirit.” Each Christian is responsible to learn how to use this sword, and then to actually use the sword God has given.

The Word of God is to be used to defend ourselves and to enable us to hold firmly the ground the Saviour has won. This Word is a threat to the devil and to his minions, if we will but use it. In a previous message, I pointed out that the sword we have received is the *rhēma*, and not the *lógos*.<sup>4</sup> To refresh your memory, recall that the distinction between the two terms is that *lógos* is a big word that is applied to Jesus Himself as “the Word” [e.g. JOHN 1:1-3], whereas *rhēma* speaks of a saying. It points to a particular, specific portion of the written revelation of God. For instance, in that prior message I pointed out that EPHESIANS 2:8, 9 is an *rhēma*, and GALATIANS 2:20 is an *rhēma*.

Preparing His disciples for His passion, Jesus had warned the disciples, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered’” [MARK 14:27]. Holding an exaggerated opinion of his ability to stand firm, Peter had protested vigorously, “Even though they all fall away, I will not” [MARK 14:29]. Jesus had corrected him by saying, “The rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me” [LUKE 22:34]. Of course, that is precisely what happened. Peter quailed before the accusation of a servant girl [LUKE 22:56], before another individual that associated him with Jesus [LUKE 22:58], and finally, with an oath he denied that he knew Jesus [LUKE 22:59, 60]. “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the saying [the *rhēma*] of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times’” [LUKE 22:61].

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<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Stark, Sermon—Ephesians 6:13-18, “Battle Dress,” October 25, 2009  
<http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/ephesians613-18battledress.pdf>

So, an *rhēma* is a short saying, a particular statement. In the context of the verse that serves as a text for the message, it would be a verse or a portion of the Word that presents truth. We who are Christians are responsible to assemble these sayings in our mind and to employ these sayings as we defend the ground over which the Master has made us responsible.

In that previous study<sup>5</sup>, I pointed out that the obvious intent of the Apostle is that the people of God will use particular portions of the Word to overcome Satan. We are to memorise Scripture and to use those portions of the Word we have committed to memory to resist the enemy and to keep him from pushing us away from the territory for which we are responsible.

I pointed to the example of Jesus during His temptations by the devil. I want us to review that testing to firmly establish the appropriate use of the Word for defending the territory God has assigned. “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written,

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

“Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you,”

and

“On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

“Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”

“Then the devil left him” [MATTHEW 4:1-11].

During His temptation, Jesus used particular portions of the Word to communicate truth in order to deflect the devil’s distortions. When the tempter sought to dissuade Him from fasting, Jesus used DEUTERONOMY 8:3. When the devil tried to induce the Master to depend upon showmanship rather than the Father’s timing, Jesus cited DEUTERONOMY 6:16. Finally, when Satan tempted Jesus with a shortcut to the Kingdom, the Lord spoke the words of DEUTERONOMY 6:13.

This is a demonstration of what Paul means when he instructs Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” [2 TIMOTHY 2:15]. Though the charge is given to Timothy in his role as an overseer and an elder, the responsibility rests upon each Christian to know the Word and to be prepared to use the Word wisely.

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<sup>5</sup> Stark, *ibid.*

Establish in your mind that we are to know the Word because we have read the entire Word, but in particular we are responsible to wisely employ portions of the Word as required while defending our secure position as children of the Lord and standing against the wicked one. The *rhēma* of the Lord—the sayings God has caused to be recorded for our benefit—are to be used as our means of defence against the enemy of the soul. No other weapon has been given us for this purpose—neither scholarship nor cunning, manipulation nor subterfuge, but only the Word of God which God has caused to be written down for our benefit.

Undoubtedly it would be beneficial for us to understand how important these particular sayings are to the Lord. The author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians states a great truth when he writes, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word [by the *rhēma*] of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” [HEBREWS 11:3]. It was not God quoting the entire Bible, but God using particular sayings of His Word, that brought into being all that we now see in this physical world.

Of the Master, this same author has written, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word [by the *rhēma*] of his power” [HEBREWS 1:1-3]. Jesus upholds the universe—it continues—because He speaks His will. His words delays judgement and ensures mankind’s continued existence.

I am intrigued at the manner in which Paul speaks of the institution we know as the church. He writes, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word [with the *rhēma*], so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” [EPHESIANS 5:25-27].

What saying does Paul have in mind when he says the church was cleansed by the washing of water with the Word? Perhaps it is that promise that the Master made when He said, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” [MATTHEW 16:18]. Perhaps it was that cautionary word that He spoke to Peter, and indirectly to all who wish to enter into the Kingdom, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me” [JOHN 13:8b]. Perhaps it is that the Word to which the Apostle refers is that statement that teaches disciples, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” [JOHN 13:14-17].

How important is the Word in bringing lost people to life in the beloved Son? Week-by-week I cite the apostolic statement, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” I conclude by noting the promise delivered by the Prophet Joel which Paul cites, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

Were you aware that this is an *rhēma*? This is a saying that points us to the will of God, just as the Apostle says in the verse that precedes these verses. “‘The word [the *rhēma*] is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word [the *rhēma*] of faith that we proclaim) [ROMANS 10:8]. Momentarily, he will point out the truth that “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word [the *rhēma*] of Christ” [ROMANS 10:17].

I take very seriously the responsibility to rightly divide the Word of truth. You, also, must take seriously the responsibility to handle the Word of God with care. In particular, we must prepare ourselves to employ the *rhēma* of Christ effectively, not only because the souls of others may depend upon what we do, but also because we expose ourselves to serious consequence if we distort this word. You may recall the cautionary warning Jesus gave those who are His disciples. “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word [*rhēma*] they speak” [MATTHEW 12:36].

If I mishandle the Word, if I distort the Word, if I abuse the Word, I stand liable before the One who gave the Word. I must answer to Him, giving an account for every misappropriation of His Word. The preacher who fails to speak the truth, the Christian who distorts the Word while acquiescing to evil, must give an account to God.

It is because of the serious distortion of some that I am compelled to warn against the error of what has become known as the word-faith movement. The teaching of some errant teachers is that your words have power to create reality. Of course, you have no power in your own self. However, it is in employing the Word of God that power is manifested, and that power is to His glory, not ours. The specific promise is that the sayings of the Word will give us victory in our conflict with the devil. We must not go astray and into dark paths that seek to inflate our own importance or that begin to drive us to pander to our own desires.

The immediate application for each Christian is to recognise that the Bible is given to us to be used in defending the territory we hold—the territory of righteousness secured through the sacrifice of the Saviour. This Word, when we employ it wisely gives hope to the hopeless, help to the helpless, courage to the timid, comfort to the disconsolate, strength to the weak and life to the lifeless. It causes the enemy to flee and assures us of victory.

I recall a story about a little Chinese boy. His father had captured a tiger and kept it in a cage in front of the family home. The neighbourhood children came to see the tiger, as children are wont to do, they began to make fun of the little boy and of the tiger.

“This is a ferocious tiger,” the little boy insisted. “He can hurt you.”

“He has no claws and he is harmless,” the children taunted.

Day-after-day the children teased the poor beast and taunted the little boy until he could stand it no longer. A day came when the children from the neighbourhood gathered in front of the little boy’s house to again taunt him and to tease the caged tiger. The little boy walked to the door of the cage, and placing his hand on the hasp that held the door secure, said, “You say this is not a ferocious tiger. You say that he cannot hurt you. I will open the door and let you see.” As the children shrank in fear, he said, “Want to see my tiger?”

Don’t talk about the Word of God; unleash it. Turn it loose. Use it.

As always, it is possible that I have spoken today, and you realise that you cannot use this Word to resist the evil one, because you have no right to the Word. You are an outsider, lost and under condemnation. You first need is to be born from above and into the Kingdom of God. God has said in His Word, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Listen to the promise appended to this saying: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

Believe the Word and be saved, even today. Child of God, use the Word to the glory of the Father and for the good of your soul. Amen.