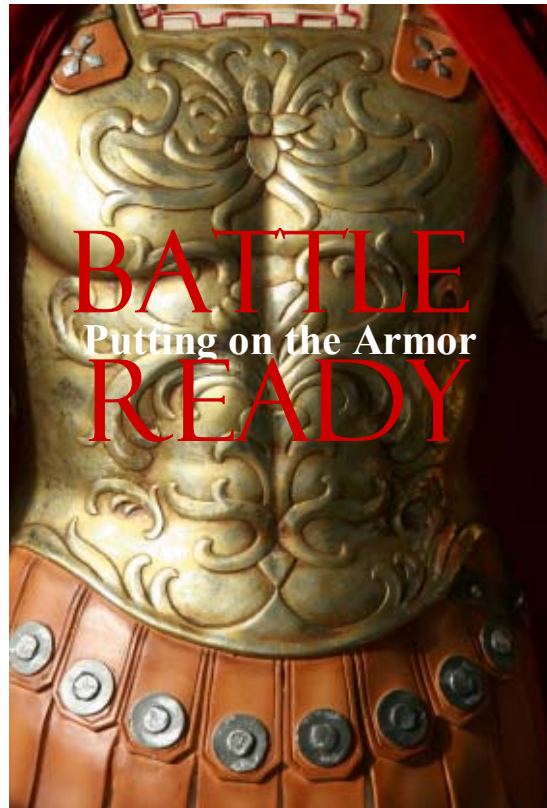


*The Covenant Pulpit*



***"Armed and Dangerous"***  
**Brandishing the Sword of the Spirit**

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## Introduction: The Deadliest Warrior

Have you seen the new TV show, *Deadliest Warrior*? Each episode pits two of the most feared warriors civilization has ever known against each other. Along with 21st century science and the latest in computer graphics imaging, *Deadliest Warrior* uses world-class martial arts and military history experts to provide insight into what made each of these combatants tick. They analyze every facet of their unique combat skills. Finally, each episode culminates in a simulated, head-to-head final fight between two legends of the battlefield. The winner is declared “the deadliest warrior.” Some of their showdowns have included Pirate vs. Knight, Taliban vs. IRA, Viking vs. Samurai, Green Beret vs. Spetznaz<sup>1</sup>, and Ninja vs. Spartan.

When it comes to spiritual warfare, there is no match for the Christian when he is clothed in the armor of God and strengthened in the power of God. Today in our study of Ephesians 6, we come to the last piece in the armor of God. Every piece so far has been a defensive one, but now we come to the first offensive weapon in the Christian’s arsenal. In Ephesians 6:17 we are told to take up “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*” There is nothing more powerful or effective in spiritual warfare than the word of God. When we take it up as a sword, we become “the deadliest warrior.” No matter who or what you match against it, the Word of God will always win. The message for us today is this:

***Arm yourself with the Word of God  
and you will become more than a conqueror!***

When we are armed with the sword of the Spirit, we are dangerous—not destructive or out-of-control, but dangerous. We are dangerous to the status quo and to the kingdom of darkness. When we brandish the sword of the Spirit in the shadow of the gates of Hell, the kingdom of darkness begins to totter. When Christians are dangerous, sinners are safe! When we arm ourselves with the Word of God, we bring blessing to the world and glory to God. But to Satan and his forces of evil, we are dangerous.

In the early church, Christians were referred to by the world as “*these men who have turned the world upside down*” (Acts 17:6). Wouldn’t it

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<sup>1</sup> A type of Russian special forces soldier from the cold war era.

be great if the same could be true of us today? If we arm ourselves once again with the Word of God, we too can turn the world upside down in our day for the glory of God.

I truly believe that God is calling us in our day to arm ourselves with the Word of God and to conquer in his name! We have had enough Christian retreats. It is time to advance. My prayer is that God would raise up in our day more men and women who would become "*doers of great deeds*," as King David's mighty men were called (2 Samuel 23:20). May God bring forward Christians who can use the sword of the Spirit like the men of war from the tribe of Benjamin, of whom it was said that "*every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss*" (Judges 20:16).

It is time to take up the sword of the Spirit! The average Christian's knowledge of, use of, and obedience to the Word of God has never been weaker, as statistics and the condition of the Church suggest. The famine Amos prophesied is plaguing our land. It is "*not a famine of bread, nor thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord*" (Amos 8:11). Why should we starve when we have God's Word readily available to us for feasting.

Neither do we need to go into battle unarmed! I hope you hear this call today and answer it. If you are not sufficiently convinced, here are **three reasons** why we should arm ourselves with the Word of God. Each is related to one of the enemies we face in the Christian life.

**1. Only the word of God can conquer *the world*.** William Gurnall in his spiritual classic, *The Christian in Complete Armor* made this point, "*God's army overcomes every enemy by one of two ways—conversion or destruction. The Word of God is the sword with effects both—it has two edges.*" As we move into the world in our daily lives, armed with the Sword of the Spirit, we encounter a culture that is often opposed to God, his truth, and his Christ. The "*world*" is the impersonal, secular, and humanistic aspect of the culture in which we live. The way we conquer this worldly system is by using the sword of the Spirit to either convert unbelievers or to destroy false beliefs and ideas. The word of God might put false beliefs to death, but it also brings dead sinners to life.

Be careful though. The sword of truth must be wielded in love. We should desire no one any harm. Christ taught us to love our enemies and to bless those who curse us. We should never become self-righteous or smug or judgmental. It is not flesh and blood we are after, but spiritual forces of wickedness. We must humbly and boldly wield the sword of the Spirit to pierce hearts and break shackles.

The word of God is an effective weapon because *it will never become obsolete*. As the prophet Isaiah boldly declared, “*The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever*” (Isaiah 40:8). Likewise, Jesus said that “*heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*” (Matthew 24:35). God’s Word is indestructible. It is sharper than anything else. Everything that comes against it is sliced in two or broken in half against it. Every weapon in history has at some point become outdated by technological developments. But the word of God will never become irrelevant, powerless, or untrue. The world may change, but the word of God is changeless. It is the timeless truth for all times.

The word of God is also able to conquer the world because *it sets prisoners free from sin*. When Jesus began his earthly ministry he claimed to be fulfilling Isaiah 61:1 which says, “*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of prison to those that are bound.*” The gospel of Christ is a message of liberty and a key to the door of sin’s prison. When we hold out the sword of the Spirit, God powerfully releases people from sin and unbelief. As Charles Wesley put it in his great hymn:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night  
Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray  
The dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free;  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.*

Furthermore, the word of God is able to conquer the world because *the sword of the Spirit carries with it the power of God*. In Romans 1:16 Paul confidently says, “*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.*” Notice that the gospel is itself the very power of God. The power resides in the message, not the messenger. Only the preaching of Christ and his saving work has the power to conquer unbelief and unbelievers. God will always and only change people through the preaching (or sharing) of the word of God. It brings *faith* to its hearers when the Holy Spirit is working in the heart (Romans 10:17). It also gives us *new, spiritual birth* (1 Peter 1:23) when it is implanted like a seed. It nourishes the young believer as milk nourishes an infant (1 Peter 2:2). It

fortifies the mature believer with the “solid food” of truth (Hebrews 5:14). It is the foundation on which the church is built (Ephesians 2:20).

The word of God has this power because it is “*the sword of the Spirit.*” It is the Spirit who “breathed out” the Word<sup>2</sup>, and therefore it is the Spirit who makes us skillful in handling it. How can we not arm ourselves with it when we see its power to set sinners free!

The word of God is also able to conquer the world because *it destroys fortresses of unbelief.* In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 the Apostle Paul explains how Christians should fight spiritual battles. He noted that our weapons are not of the flesh. They are spiritual and divine in nature. Therefore, they have “*divine power to destroy strongholds.*” He goes on to add that “*We destroy every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*” As we wield the word of God, the fortress of unbelief—no matter how high or thick—will come crashing down. And after destroying the defenses of unbelief, the Spirit of God comes rushing in like an invading army to take every thought captive. The word of God lays siege to rebellious minds and hearts and then enslaves them to the loving and good lordship of Jesus Christ.

Charles Spurgeon once compared the gospel to a caged lion. “*It does not need to be defended,*” he said, “*it just needs to be let out of the cage.*” Sometimes we spend too much time defending the word of God instead of letting it loose to do its work. The best demonstration of a lion’s power is not given with a lecture and a PowerPoint presentation of the lion’s anatomy and habits. Just let a lion loose in the wild and observe it as it hunts its prey. The same is true with the word of God. Read it. Speak it. Live it. Share it. Then stand back and watch God work! With the word of God, we can conquer the world with the love and truth of the Lord Jesus!

**2. Arm yourself with the Word of God, because only it can conquer *the Enemy.*** More dangerous than the world is the spiritual Enemy of our souls, Satan. In his first Letter, Peter tells us that “*your adversary the devils prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). He is elsewhere depicted as “*the great dragon...that ancient serpent*” (Revelation 12: 9). He is a dangerous foe with malicious intent. More than that, he has the “*spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” at his disposal to do his bidding. We must wake up to the fact that we have a real, spiritual enemy.

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<sup>2</sup> See 2 Timothy 3:16; Although the word used here for word in the original focuses on the act of speaking, the term “word of God” here refers to all the ways God has spoken in history as they are recorded in the sixty-six books of the Bible. It is a comprehensive term.

Although he is intent on our destruction and our failure to follow Christ, we should not be afraid. God has not only clothed us in the armor of God, but he has also given us the sword of the Spirit with which to route the devil when he attacks. Greatest of all, however, is the fact that Jesus Christ himself has mortally wounded Satan, and Christ will destroy him forever when he returns (Revelation 20:10). He is the King prophesied in Psalm 45, who straps on his sword and rides out *"victoriously in the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness."* (Psalm 45:3-4). Because Christ has conquered Satan, we can resist him as Christ did: with the sword of the Spirit!

In the life of Jesus, we see that *the Word of God defeats the temptations of Satan*. In three of the Gospels, we are given an account of Satan tempting Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. The heart of the devil's scheme was to lure Jesus into proving himself as the Messiah and into using his power and privilege to bypass the Father's will. Satan tempted Jesus to take shortcuts around obedience and to trade in the work of redemption for his own comfort.

The Tempter came and tempted Jesus three times. Each time Jesus responded with the word of God. The first two times Jesus simply said, *"It is written..."* and then quoted a relevant Bible verse. The third and final time, Jesus added an emphatic, *"Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'"* (Matthew 4:10). Then the devil left him and angels arrived to strengthen and refresh him. The sword of the Spirit in the hands of the Word of God himself won a great victory that day. We must follow Jesus' example here if we are to also overcome the Enemy.

Temptation can be a soul-wrenching, agonizing experience. It can feel like you are being pulled by the gravitational pull of a black hole. Satan will block your way and try to convince you that there is no way out. Like a master chess player, he will move his pieces into position and say, "checkmate!" But when you pull the sword of the Spirit out of its sheath and raise it against him, all the power of God will force him to flee. It may leave you exhausted, but God will send angels to strengthen you. No matter how big and ferocious the devil may appear, the sword of the Spirit can defend you. As Luther's great hymn puts it, *"The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo! His doom is sure; one little word shall fell him."*

Sometimes temptation is more subtle and deceptive. Satan becomes the undercover spy, the mole, the man on the inside who tries to trick us into God-grieving thoughts or behavior. But with the sword of

Spirit we can have confidence that our Enemy cannot outwit us. The word of God will sharpen our vision and hone our skill of discernment. Like radar, we will be able to pick up the Enemy's every movement and intercept his conspiracies.

Next, the word of God is able to *defeat the lies of the Enemy*. Jesus described Satan this way, *"He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies"* (John 8:44). Get the point? It's fairly obvious, isn't it? Satan is a liar. He can't be trusted. He seeks to undermine our obedience to the truth by blurring our understanding of the truth. But again, for the Christian who keeps his sword of the Spirit sharp and in hand, Satan can be conquered. Even his lies and deception will be defeated.

For a soldier, it is not enough to own a sword. He must be trained to use it, keep it sharp, and always wear it. For us to conquer our Enemy, we need to be skilled in the word of God. In his head-to-head showdown with Satan, Jesus prevailed as the deadliest warrior because he was highly skilled with the sword of the Spirit. We too need to be skilled in handling the sword of the Spirit. Hebrews 5:13-14 tells us that immature believers are *"unskilled in the word of righteousness,"* but mature Christians are *"those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."*

Each day we are faced with decisions, truth claims, conversation, opinions, and difficult situations. The only way to be ready to sort fact from fiction, truth from falsehood, good from evil, is to be skilled in the word of God. And yet many of us go off to battle every day and leave our sword at home. If your sword is too big to fit in your backpack or briefcase, then get a dagger. However, as we are about to see, it is not enough to keep the sword of the Spirit *on* you, it has to be kept *in* you.

**3. Finally, you should arm yourself with the word of God, because only it can conquer your own heart.** The enemy that is often overlooked is our own hearts. We are our own worst enemies. Satan can tempt us because we are tempt-able. We sin because we are sinners. The devil doesn't always need to deceive us. We deceive ourselves. The human heart is a tricky thing. We might be sinners saved by grace, but we are still *sinners* saved by grace. There are portions of our heart that are still in rebellion against the King of kings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Romans 7 and Jeremiah 17:9.

So we must not only use the sword of the Spirit on the outward enemies of our faith. We must also turn it on ourselves. God uses his word to conquer the rebellious areas of our heart until all is brought under his rule. Like the Israelites in the Promised Land, there are still places within us that need to be conquered. When we devote ourselves to studying and doing the word of God, it dissects our hearts. It performs open-heart surgery on us. As Hebrews 4:12 says, "*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*" It does this in several ways.

First, it instructs us with *principles*. It gives us commands and instructions for how to best glorify God in all of life. Like a lamp it keeps us from stumbling. Like a compass it charts our way in the journey. Like guardrails it keeps us from falling off the "straight and narrow." It sets boundaries and parameters. The psalmist made this point when he said: "*How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.... I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* (Psalm 119:9, 11). You don't need lots of life experience to glorify God, but you do need principles from his Word. And to be skilled with the word we must "store up" his word in our hearts. We need to memorize and internalize his word. If his word dwells in us powerfully, it will transform us powerfully. How well can you quote God's word? Is it written on your heart?

Secondly, it encourages us with *promises*. We need to stand on these "*great and precious promises*" (2 Peter 1:4) when the tide of temptation rises. They act like anchors to keep the storms of life from tossing us around. We need to be strengthened and encouraged with the promise of who God is and what he has given to us in Jesus Christ. The promises can be raised like a sword to cut down every doubt, fear, and anxiety. How many promises from Scripture can you name? Which ones are most precious to you? I would beg you to dig deep into the Scriptures and mine them for the precious metal of his promises. They often make the best sword!

Thirdly, the word of God teaches us with the lives of *people*. The Scriptures are filled with the lives of numerous godly men and women who serve as both positive and negative examples. From their lives we learn what works and what doesn't. We see the consequences of both faith and unbelief, of obedience and disobedience. Furthermore, we see that we are not the only ones who struggle with sin and failure; but more importantly, we see how God works in the lives of broken men and

women to fulfill his good purposes. All the saints in the Scripture cheer us on in our race to know God in Christ and to live for his glory everyday. The Apostle Paul told the Roman Christians of his day, *“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”* (Romans 15:4). Study the lives of the men and women in the Bible. Learn from them. Let God’s grace shining through their lives serve to light your way in this world. The same God that they walked with now walks with you!

Lastly, the word of God changes us with *power*. The first Psalm gives a description of the man (or woman) who is truly blessed. He does not take advice from evil men or imitate the practices of sinners, *“but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night”* (v. 2). It goes on to compare him to a tree that bears its fruit in season and never withers away. *“In all that he does, he prospers”* (v. 3). We can’t bypass that process though. You can’t expect to prosper in your walk with Christ if you do not daily meditate on his word. Like a cup of tea, we must steep ourselves in the word of God. We have to soak it up, drink it in, and feed on it. It must shape the way we think, act, feel, speak, live. We need ongoing, extended exposure to the light of God’s word.

Does your spiritual life seem to lack power, blessing, and joy? How often do you study God’s word? How intently do you ponder it and apply it to your life? You see, reading the word is not enough. We must do it. We must let it read us and shape us. As James says, *“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourself.”* We need *quantity* time in the word; but we also need *quality* time in the word. We must read it daily and study it deeply. Someone has said that *“what goes deep into your heart will go wide into the world.”* We cannot expect to conquer Satan or the world with the sword of the Spirit unless Christ first becomes enthroned in our own hearts as King.

Before the word of God will truly conquer our hearts with all its power, we must come to the point where we can say with the poet John Donne,

*Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand, o’erthrow me, and bend  
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> “Divine Meditation XIV”

Our sinful nature, like an enemy castle, needs to be conquered by Christ.

The sword of the Spirit is a mighty weapon in God's hand. It brings life and blessing and health. In our hands it also becomes a mighty weapon. With it we can conquer the world, the devil, and our own sinful nature. So arm yourself and conquer for Christ and his kingdom!

### **Conclusion: Overcoming vs. Underwhelming**

Taking up the sword of the Spirit will make the difference between what Randy Pope calls a *precautionary* church and a *prevailing* church. Precautionary churches never stray outside their comfort zones and take every measure against danger, harm, or failure. They live under the motto: "*We have nothing to gain, and everything to lose.*" Prevailing churches, on the other hand, view themselves not as a "*make-no-waves organization, but as a wartime army engaged in battle.*" They display a remarkable sense of purpose and live under the motto: "*We have every thing to gain, and nothing to lose.*"<sup>5</sup> One might say that prevailing churches are more than conquerors while precautionary church are less than Christ desires.

God is calling us today to be a prevailing church and prevailing Christians. He wants us to trade in our safe and comfy Christianity for the sword of the Spirit. When it comes to spiritual warfare, I really believe he wants us to be "armed and dangerous."

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<sup>5</sup> Randy Pope, *The Intentional Church*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, pp.15-16