

Ephesians Series

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"The Sword of the Spirit"
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Let us open our bibles to the book of Ephesians. We are still in chapter 6 where we are looking at the spiritual warfare of the Christian. We are living in a world where it is necessary as a Christian to face the fact that we will be in spiritual battles until either we die and return to the Lord or until He comes suddenly. It is very important to understand that the bible teaches that, so that you will not be surprised or discouraged at the spiritual warfare that you may face. So, we find a very clear teaching about the necessity of taking up the full armor of God as a Christian in Ephesians 6, after he has spent five and a half chapters teaching us how to live, telling us the truth about the wonderful salvation of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in every Christian, the calling to build the church, and the calling to be a witness—that is to live a godly life in an ungodly world, a light in the darkness, a child of light beginning with your marriage; moving on to the raising of children and going into the workplace. It is a very practical book about living as a Christian and so he says in verse ten: "Finally... (This is what he wants us to remember as he closes this letter.)..."

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the full armor of God that you may be able to withstand (or to stand firm) against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the full armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day and having done everything to stand firm. Stand firm therefore having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace in addition to all taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the fiery missals of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit and with this in view be on the alert with perseverance and petition for all the saints. Pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak."

The bible is God's word. I did not use to believe that. There was a time in college that I listened to those who taught me that the bible is not really true, it is really pretty much stories that were told around a campfire over a number of years and finally they were written of down hundreds of years after those stories got started. That undermined my faith and I went through a terrible time and I began to search in the library about God's word, the bible. Is it true? How can we know? At the end of that study something was very revealing to me and that is that the bible is the most heavily attested document in ancient history that the world has ever known; that the science of textual criticism which is a science—the study of ancient manuscripts—done with all kinds of different literature; that science of textual criticism has searched back the manuscripts of the scripture that we have back to the very first century in which they were given so that that testimony is that we have the original documents in all of the manuscripts that we have and we can be sure that when we read our bibles in their translation that we are reading the very word of God.

That surprised me. I did not know that. And of course I have studied that for many years in seminary. Then I found out that the names and dates and places of the bible were more accurate than any other ancient document. In fact, each year as you read some of the journals and biblical archeology

you find that the bible is more and more well attested of being accurate of the names and the places and even the events, the social customs, the description of clothing, everything; over and over it is further attested. Then we have, especially in the New Testament, the testimony of history even outside of the bible—that Jesus Christ did live, that he did die upon the cross, and even outside testimonies that he rose from the dead.

What I am saying very simply is that what we call the bible, the written word of God, is the most attested, accurate, consistent document of ancient history and when you are reading it, you are reading what was written by who authored it, on the dates and places as they are given. We believe the bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul spoke of the Old Testament: all scripture is inspired by God—God breathed—and profitable for teaching and correction and reproof and training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete. That means that the Bible, all scripture, has God’s breath behind each word in the Old Testament and the New Testament; that it is *all* of God’s mind. There may be words of human authors who had different training and vocabularies and backgrounds, but when we have looked at the speaking of the Old Testament Prophets: Moses and on—and we look at the teaching of Christ and His apostles, we are looking at God’s word behind every word they said. It is God’s movement of His Spirit to guarantee that every word they spoke and every word they wrote comes out as true under the protection of God’s inspiration.

Now people in the word laugh at this (there was a time I laughed at it); in fact when I took Sociology of Religion I found out that the history of Sociology and its development as an academic discipline was based upon, in many ways, the rejection of the bible as true and that it came out of the liberal theology trying to show that the bible was a community product of sociology rather than inspiration directly by God.

As I was reading a dissertation on the Ten Commandments one time, there was all kinds of theories as to how the Ten Commandments came to be, that they may have had a connection to the Hittite documents and laws, to the old Assyrian laws, and things of that nature, and that somehow somebody or some community of people drew from here and drew from there and put together this wonderful document that is unique in ancient history—the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments. The only problem with that theory is that when you read all of the ancient law documents, you cannot find any laws like any of the Ten Commandments.

You can find laws like this: If a man steals then you should cut off his hand, but you do not find a moral statement in its absolute form: “Though shall not steal” from a god. You do not find: “Honor your father and mother” as a moral absolute; “You shall not commit adultery” as a moral absolute; “You shall not murder...you shall not bear false witness...you shall not covet in your heart...” there are no laws that deal with that: the inward heart of man. From every angle: history, literature, manuscripts, textual criticism, this word is absolutely unique in the history of the world. There is nothing like it among the Hindus and Islam, in any other world religion. It is the word of God. It is all true. It is inspired by God and it tells us many things. It is the concrete revelation of God to you today and the only one that exist in the world. Today, this is it.

Now you can go into nature, and Paul said in Romans chapter one that God has revealed himself in the things that he has made so that we are all without excuse, but the problem is man’s sinful heart looks at the creation that God has made and suppresses the truth in unrighteousness and worships the creature rather than the creator. That is what science does—atheistic science—it worships the creature

down to the very smallest atom and particle of an atom and particle of a particle, whatever that is? Quarks? I don't know. They use Electronic microscopes to see the very nature of the structure, the atomic structure, of this universe and they are amazed. They are amazed and they walk away and say, "I cannot believe what I saw." And so instead of lifting up their hands and saying, "What a great mind that created such an amazing thing," they say, "This is all by chance. It is amazing isn't it?"

The word of God, the word which God has brought into humanity, is the only light in the darkness and so when we come and say, "What can I know about the invisible God?" You can sit around all day and meditate and watch nature and listen to people talk and say, "Well I think God is like this..." but you know what? You will be wrong, because God has revealed himself in this word. All scripture is inspired by God and only scripture is inspired by God to teach us the truth. Jesus prayed to His father before He went to the cross: "Father, sanctify these disciples in the truth. Thy word is truth."

The bible is not something you add to your inspired writings and say, "Oh isn't it beautiful?" I love the phrasing in the Elizabethan grammar of the King James Bible. It is like unto Shakespeare. It is beautiful. It inspires me when I read it. But that is not what the word of God is. The revelation of God to man is God's authoritative, inherent, comprehensive, and sufficient revelation of Himself to us: of who He is and who we are and how we can know the only true and living God of this universe. He is the one who has initiated revelation in a fallen world.

After Adam and Eve sinned, it was God who came to Adam, God who came to Eve and God who came to Satan and said to him: "This world will continue but I will bring forth a seed of a woman who will destroy you." And on that basis the rest of the Old Testament and into the New Testament is about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Savior of a fallen race. And it is no accident that when John began his gospel, he began it this way, "In the beginning was the Word...*that is before the world was made the Word existed...*and the Word was with God and yet the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. *And on a night in Bethlehem* the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth."

All the Old Testament is God's inspired written word about the incarnate truth: Jesus Christ. And everything since then is about that incarnate Word. Now as Christians we are to put on the whole armor of God and Paul is very clear here that when you put on the belt of truth: that is you have to believe that God is true and that His words are true as the foundation of your life and of your backbone and everything else, you put on then the breastplate of Jesus Christ's righteousness: that you are accepted before God, not of your own righteousness, but under the righteousness, the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ; that is our assurance that we are children of God. He shed His blood to atone for our sins and He gave us His righteousness to make us presentable to God.

You put that on in the morning and you put on the shoes of the gospel to be the foundation of everything you do, wherever you go. Pick up the shield of faith to extinguish the fiery missiles of the evil one and the helmet of salvation: this grand scheme from eternity past to eternity future when the new heavens and the new earth are made for those who love Jesus Christ today and you think of that complete salvation that surrounds your thinking. It helps you to think straight. But when it comes to fighting, there is only one piece of armor that is offensive and that is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

This fight against Satan and his wiles to bring you into sin and destroy your life in your own sinfulness can only be fought with the sword of the Spirit. He can only be stopped with the sword of the

Spirit, which is the word of God. It is the only way for you to be able to resist him in an active way so that he flees from you in the moment of temptation and trial. The good news about all of this armor is that it is sufficient, for Paul says over and over: if you take up the full armor of God, you will be able to resist in the evil day. And if you will take up the word of God, the sword of the Spirit, and use it each day in your battle against the evil within your own heart and the temptations of Satan that comes towards you to destroy your life, if you will take up that sword you will win. That is a promise and that is the encouraging part of all of this armor. Yes, we will be in a spiritual battle to the day that we die, but God has promised; he has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness; he has given us everything we need to put on the full armor of God and defeat the greatest enemy of God and the greatest enemy of our souls. That is encouraging.

What does all this mean? Well, it means you must read your bible. You must read it regularly. Now there is some debate today where pastors say, “Don’t command your people to read their bibles every day because there is no command to do that and it will bring guilt on their conscience and make them feel bad.” But you know what? There is plenty of examples in the Old Testament and even in the New Testament of the bible being read daily by believers and there is enough command, especially in Psalm 119, where it teaches that every single day the believer meditated and read upon God’s word for strength to live. That is enough for me. I don’t have to have anything else.

And I will say this: that if you are not reading your bible any particular day, you have gone to war without a sword, and that is foolish. It is asking for a wound. It is tempting God that you don’t need the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, before you go to work, because you are strong in yourself. You don’t need the sword of the Spirit when you get up in the morning to remind yourself as a husband: Now remember how Christ has loved you? Son, he is now calling you to love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it. You need to remember that, before you speak to your wife this morning. You may say: “No, I don’t need God’s word, because I have it all together.” That is foolish! It is asking for a wreck spiritually. In fact, it invites God to discipline you and show you why you need Him and His word all the time.

God’s word is the only revelation of truth outside of this universe that you see with your eyes. It is the absolute truth you need to change your thinking into godlike thinking. You have to take it out of your scabbard and wield it each day against satanic temptation to win the battle for that day.

A coach will make a quarterback or a receiver carry a football around with them all the time, to treat it like a baby—go to class with it, go to bed with it—because he wants them to get so use to it, it becomes a part of them. A basketball coach will do the same thing. You have to carry a basketball around with you all the time—always dribbling it, always fingering it—just to make yourself proficient in the use of it. In the same way the Christian must become so skilled at handling and carrying forth the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, that it becomes second nature in order to win the battle.

Now this morning I have been very frustrated all week because to talk about the word of God is basically to talk about the entire bible. And to bring something about this into one message has greatly frustrated me and I have struggled with it more than most messages. But I hope what I do this morning will help you to see the importance of the truth that God has given us in His word, that we must use His word, and that we are promised to win.

So first of all, what is the sword of the Spirit? Well we have already answered that: it is the word of God. That is what Paul says, and what he means by that is the Old Testament and what would

become the New Testament. And he uses the imagery of a sword. That is in itself is interesting if you understand the whole bible, because in the Old Testament the sword was often in the hand of the angel of the Lord: angel of the Lord that appeared to Joshua and the angel of the Lord that appeared to David. This angel of the Lord who speaks as if he were God speaking we believe is the Son of God: the word of God appearing to these patriarchs and these leaders before he was born in Bethlehem as Jesus. The thing that got Joshua's attention was the captain of the Lord's host who spoke as God held in his hand a sword. And Joshua didn't know if he was going to have to fight this man or this man was coming to protect Israel. Then when he realized who it was he bowed down to Him.

The sword is associated with the word of God all through the bible. And when you look in Revelation chapters 1-3 you find several times that the Lord Jesus Christ himself is pictured in a vision of John with his hair white like wool, his face like the sun shining in his strength, and out of his mouth comes a two edged sword. Now this is a vision. It is an imagery of a vision. But what that sword that comes out of the mouth of Jesus Christ, which he will use to smite the nation, is His word. He will speak and it will be done. What He says will be carried out by His power. And in Revelations 19 where it speaks of that last day of the destruction of all flesh and all men, it is the Lord Jesus Christ that comes riding on a white horse into the battle with a sword at his side and written upon Him is called the word of God.

Now, the Lord Jesus Christ taught more about the word of God than anyone else did in the bible. In fact he taught over and over that His words were given Him by the Father in heaven, every word he ever spoke, and that he gave those words faithfully to men. He claimed divine inspiration from His Father in heaven and then He claimed divine inspiration when He spoke to His disciples. That is why I believe that the bible teaches that we have the word of God and all the word of God that we are going to receive until Jesus comes. How do I know that? Well, the bible teaches that when the last of the apostles died there would be no more words from God.

Now there is a great debate about this today because you find people on TV, books in bookstores, preachers of all kinds saying: "I got a word from God. I was praying and I asked God to give me the word and this is what came into my mind." And I want to say to you that if the word of God is not inspired by the Holy Spirit through apostles and prophets it is not God's inspired word. And if you fall for that lie you are doing exactly what the Israelites did in the Old Testament where the false prophets were preaching against Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah and Jeremiah were given words from God. God said, "Thus saith the Lord..." And he told them: "tell Israel and Judah that they will be destroyed by the Assyrian army and by the Babylonian army. You need to preach to that." Well they did and Jeremiah was thrown into a pit for preaching that; into a well covered over and forgotten.

The false prophets preached this: "Peace, peace, you are the people of God. God will not destroy you. He has promised. You are a good people. God will bless you."

And yet the bible teaches that Isaiah and Jeremiah rebuked these prophets: "They preach peace, peace, when there is not peace." And then they would declare the armies were coming to destroy Israel and they did.

There have always been false teachers and false prophets. So how do you discern the difference? Jesus said in Mathew 24 that after Him would come false prophets, false Christs, but do not listen to that.

Well I believe that the bible teaches that the only word of God for us today came through the Old Testament prophets, the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles, and that is what the early church believed, so that in the second century, the bible, the New Testament, came together as a result of each book either being written by an apostle or written by someone who lived with an apostle, to give it authority. That is how we came to have the New Testament. You see, Jesus explained this when he was on earth. And I would refer you to Revelations 21 in a little bit, or maybe this afternoon, where we have the scene of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. The streets are of gold and the walls are of precious jewels, and then a statement is made in Revelations 21: “That the city has only twelve foundations, the heavenly Jerusalem has only twelve foundations, each named for one of the twelve apostles.” And that word foundation is used in Ephesians 2:20 when it says that “we are no more strangers but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God and we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.”

So the foundation of the church and of the heavenly Jerusalem is only of the twelve Apostles that Jesus taught and Jesus told them that they would be the ones. In John 14:25 he said to them, “These things have I spoken to you being yet present with you, but the comforter, who is the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you (*speaking only to the twelve*) all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatever I have said unto you.” Now what those words mean by the grammar is: is that Jesus is telling the twelve that after He is gone the Holy Spirit will come to them, and the Holy Spirit will reveal new things to those twelve, those eleven now; and that he will bring to their remembrance the things that Jesus said when He was on earth.

They alone have this promise. This is not something to pass onto every Christian and say, “The Holy Spirit will teach you new things.”

If we believe the bible we have to decide: who is speaking, to whom are they speaking, what do they say, and what does it mean? And when you take that text, what it means and says is: that Jesus was speaking to the eleven alone on the way to the garden of Gethsemane, and on the way to the cross, and He said, “When I am gone the Holy Spirit will come and teach you all things and bring to remembrance the things that I have said.” That is the miracle of inspiration: where the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of these Apostles that they would write down accurately and perfectly the things Jesus taught them, the things that He said, and the new revelations the church would need.

In fact, Jesus said in John 16:12 to those eleven men, again on the way to the cross, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes He will guide you into all truth for He will not speak on His own authority but whatever He hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine, therefore I said, ‘He will take what is mine and declare it to you.’”

Our Lord is speaking to the eleven apostles. He is telling them he has many more things to say to them, but they are not able to understand them right now, but the Spirit of truth will come and guide them into all the truth, because He will speak what He hears the Father and the Son saying to these men. These men will teach the truth to others. These are special promises to the apostles, but I have heard them and read them applied to either all Christians or to new prophets and apostles that supposedly have come on the scene. In fact, every single one of the cults uses these passages to justify their existence on the basis of a new prophet or leader. So what are you going to believe? Jesus, who

said to these eleven men: “You are the ones whom I have given my words, you are the ones who the Holy Spirit will teach and apply to the church, and you are the foundation with me being the cornerstone.”

Paul said in Ephesians 2:20: with Christ being the cornerstone, the foundation of the apostles and the New Testament prophets being the foundation on which the church builds, not receiving new foundations, but builds it walls on each side on that foundation, there are no new words from God. If there are, we need to write them down and put them in the back of our bible. The only problem is that if you put them in the back of your bible after Revelation you have to put them after these words: “If anyone adds to the words of this book, let him be accursed.”

The apostles laid the foundation of the church and the New Testament prophets like Agapes contributed to that foundation. But Jesus and His apostles understood, and the first century church understood, that when the last apostle died that was it. That is why John ended Revelation with those words in 100 AD and then he died. That was it. Jude, who we think is the brother of the Lord Jesus or one of His brothers, wrote in verse 3: “Beloved when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Once for all; that means this is it. Through Christ and His apostles and the New Testament prophets, we have in the New Testament the last words of God till Jesus comes again.

Now turn with me to I Corinthians 2. The Holy Spirit inspires these words as Jesus taught. However, the Holy Spirit must illumine your mind to understand savingly these words. Have you ever noticed sometimes when you read the bible, you go through it and say, “Well, I can’t even remember what I just read? I got to go back and start over.” Your mind is distracted. Satan’s birds are stealing the word from your mind and heart as you read. You think, “I didn’t get much out of that.”

At other times you run across a verse and it’s like you have been hit with a hammer on the head and you step back and say, “Whoa! I didn’t understand that before!” Or, “That was so amazing!” I remember when I had such an amazing moment in reading the bible, trying to figure out who Jesus was and how to go to heaven. I ran across John 5:24, “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in me has eternal life and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life.” I scratched my head and I said, “Does that mean what it says? That it is not by my goodness that I go to heaven but by faith alone in Christ and that I can know today, today while I am walking, and on the day I die that I have passed out of death into eternal life and will not come into a condemning judgment before God? Is that what that says? I looked at it. I read it. I dissected it. I diagramed it. And that is what it says. It was like stepping on the threshold of heaven that God had promised sinners like us that we can know now that we are right with God. That is amazing. That is what I am talking about here.

I Corinthians 2:11, “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the Spirit of a man which is in him. Even so, the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.” This is that connection of the Spirit to the Word. The Spirit of God inspires the word of God through men, because the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God for He is God.

In verse 12 he says, “Now we have received not the Spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God that we might know the things freely given to us by God which things we also speak.” Now he is claiming inspiration here as an apostle, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those words

taught by the Spirit combining spiritual with spiritual. This is Paul's claim as an apostle: that he was inspired by God in the words he spoke.

And then he says in verse 14, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual (*that is been made spiritual by the Spirit of God*) appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man." And what that means is that you can read the bible and understand the grammar. That is not hard. It is not a magic book like some people treat it today. There are not secret meanings in the numbers of the Hebrew letters, like some people claim. That was something that was talked about in the fourteenth century and rejected by the protestant and Catholic Church completely. These are just words understood by the average man on the average reading, but to take root in your heart, to bring forth faith, the Holy Spirit has to illumine your mind and open your mind to see them. Do you remember what happened when Lydia was listening to Paul preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the word of God on the river bank? The bible says the "Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."

There has to be not only Spirit inspired words, but the Holy Spirit has to help us understand what they mean so that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the words of Christ." Now we all love good Christian books and I love my churches confession as one of the most amazing documents ever written in Christian history. Its accuracy to the scriptures in defining what God is like, who man is, what salvation is, and how to live as a Christian is amazing, but it is not the bible. And you may love to read good Christian books and feel like if you are reading a nice Christian novel you are at least doing something for your soul, and I want to say to you: no you are not. **Nothing** replaces the scriptures as the word of God written. Not even my preaching on Sunday morning.

The Bereans were more noble minded than all the rest who listened to Paul because they searched the scriptures daily to say if those things were so. There is daily bible reading. So how are you to use this word of God if it is really the word of God? Well, the Roman sword was a short two edged sword designed for close-in-your-face combat. They had a spear that they could throw long distances and they had a spear that they could jab and keep a soldier away from them. But when those soldiers were past the spear they had to pull out their sword and fight face to face. They may be cut, they may be wounded, but they had to fight with that sword and that is the image that God chose to inspire Paul to write and explain to the Christian: that is how you use the word of God—close combat. At the most dire moment when you are most threatened instead of turning away from it and saying, "I am not worthy to read the bible at this point." Instead of closing it and saying, "I am not getting any sense out of it so it is not worth it," the believer of the word of God opens this book and understands that there is no book in the history of the world like this, and there is no other religious text in the world today or in all of history which is truly the word of God, except this one.

Now you may say, "You are being intolerant of other religions." Well, I understand the accusation, but it is not true because Jesus and the bible both made claims of uniqueness above any other religion of the world. And when we hold forth the scriptures as the only inspired word of God we are saying that Christianity is the only true religion that saves for heaven. It is the only provision to atone for man's sin where another has to die and pay the price instead of the man paying the price. Every other religion is that way.

The bible is God's word. If Jesus were to appear in this room and speak words to you today for the church in Clinton I have a feeling you would never forget that the rest of your life. You would be amazed at His appearance, you would listen to His words, and you would cling to them and say, "I got to do it just exactly like He said."

Let me say to you: He has already done that and He is doing it today when I read this and when I explain it's meaning to you, He is speaking. I am not claiming inspiration. I am claiming that His word is inspired and authoritative and sufficient.

The word has two purposes and Paul explained it himself in 2 Corinthians 2 when he said, "When I preach the gospel of Jesus Christ two things happen: it is the savor that is an aroma of life unto life or death unto death." In other words it is not neutral. You can't take it or leave it, because you always either take it or leave it; and when the word of God is read in your devotions or with your family gatherings at the table at a meal, and you read the bible one of two things is going to happen: it is going to be a savor of life unto life or death unto death. When I preach, or Mitch teaches, when you go to Sunday School Class young people and boys and girls, and your teacher teaches the word of God to you, you are either accepting it as God's word and living upon it or you are rejecting it and walking away from it and saying, "I don't need Gods truth."

Now adultery is a pretty big sin because it destroys a marriage, it breaks the marriage vows, it brings another person into terrible sin and all their family and friends as well, and on and on it goes; it is a terrible sin, but there is no worse sin than saying to God, "I know this is your word, but I am not going to do it. The hardness of heart is not just for those sinners that are out in the thoroughfares; those drunks and adulterers and prostitutes; the sin of rebellion God said through Samuel to Saul is as the sin of witchcraft. When you take God's word and you cast it behind your back, you are in affect casting God behind your back. That is why we plead with you when we say to you, "Christ is risen. He is alive. Go to Him today and He will receive you." We plead with you to go to Him today, because he has promised to welcome sinners and to forgive them and to embrace them as children and to start a new life for them.

But if you hear His call: "Come unto me who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest," and you turn away and say, "Thanks, but no thanks," you are turning away from the Son of God as much as those Pharisees did in the New Testament who said that Jesus was of the devil.

You see, the word of God brings God's truth present. Present to our ears, present to our minds, and it always calls us to do something with it: either accept it where it becomes a part of your life—life unto life—or reject it and it becomes a part of your condemnation—death unto death. It is unique. It is special. There is nothing like it in the history of the world, and we have it printed in black and white to carry around with us which most Christians before 1500 could never do. We have got them on our shelves, by our bed stands, on our bookshelves, we give them as presents, and we hand them out to whoever wishes them; yet do we treat them, God's word for what it really is: God speaking to me as if He is present with me?

We need the word of God to battle against Satan and his attempts to destroy our lives. The Lord Jesus Christ, when he was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, it says in Mathew 4, fasted for forty days and forty nights and at the end of that time Satan came to him when he was most hungry and most weak, fully man as hungry and as emaciated as you would be after forty days of fasting; Satan came to Him and he said, "If you are the Son of God, (*IF*), turn these stones into bread." That temptation would be the temptation that you feel after you have been famished and hungry, and

you feel like you could eat anything; and all you have to do with the power of Almighty God who created the worlds out of nothing is point to a stone and say, “Turn to bread,” and it would. And Jesus said to Satan: “It is written man shall not live by bread alone but by every word (*not just some words*) every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

That is how unique this is. It is the only record of words that have come from the mouth of God in the universe. It is the only source of absolute truth. It is the only place that will train your mind to think like God thinks because His mind is behind every word that was inspired. It is the only place where you can understand the purpose of creation, the way of redemption, how to live each day at home, at work as a Christians that brings glory to God and how to prepare your heart for an eternal glory in the new heavens and the new earth that has yet to be made. This is the only way that you can understand and know God’s thoughts, God’s mind and God’s will today. What are you doing with it? What are you doing with it? Has it become like the Hebrews where Paul said, “You have become dull of hearing. Instead of giving you meat I need to bring to you the milk of the word again.” How can you become dull of hearing with such a treasure of God’s revelation in your hands to look at and read and the answer is: that is how hard our hearts are, even as Christians: that if we do not keep the word of God in our minds we might as well sheath our sword and say to Satan, “Come and kill me: take me over.” But the one who takes hold of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and goes into battle each day, every day, will find themselves winning, will find themselves winning like Eleazar.

Eleazar was one of David’s mighty men and he struck down the Philistines with the edge of his sword until his hand was weary and until his hand clung to the sword. That means he fought and fought and fought against Philistines, the enemies of God’s people until his hand was immobilized on the sword’s handle. That is what we need to do.

I am calling you along with me to read the bible. Read it every day. If you don’t have fifteen minutes to read the bible, then you have fifteen minutes you can give up elsewhere. Nothing is as important as reading the bible. Nothing for your life to keep your conscience tender, to keep you reminded of God’s truth, to help you to be prepared as Jesus was to appeal to God’s word to defeat the temptations of the evil one to sin; and I want to say it as plainly as I can: Jesus shed His blood on the cross to give you this word and to help you to live for His glory, for He is the word of God.

You may be interested in the word of God. You may even believe it is true. You like to dabble in it. Read it here. Open it there. Put your finger on it and try to find a special verse to try and guide you into something—which is terrible to do. But until you have been willing to bow your head when you read it and say to Jesus: “Thy will be done,” as you read it; you have not read the bible. Because if it is true, Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my word. You will keep my commandments. My words are life. If you are truly my disciples, let my word abide in you, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.”

Now some of you may be saying as I close now, “Why is he talking about all this to us. We are here in church. We are the choir he is preaching to. We believe the bible is true. We want to believe it is true. I try to read it. I try to understand it. I try to live by it.” The reason I am preaching to you about this is because Paul was preaching to the Ephesian Christians who were just like you. And the point is: there is no secret. If you live in a city like Ephesus where immorality was done down at the temple everyday and drunken orgies were taking over the streets and people were stupertitious and bought little statues of Diana to put in their homes so that Diana would bless their crops; and if they were

willing to sacrifice their children's virtue like the other children that went down to worship Diana...if they lived in that culture and they knew that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, they still needed the sword of the Spirit when they went out into the streets everyday to work, to shop and to play; they needed to live for the glory of the Son who shed His blood for them and who died to bring them the truth.

You need the word of God. You need to study it. You need to read it. You need to learn how to study it. You need to understand its commandments. You need to believe in its promises, because God has promised that if you will take up the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, you will win!