

The Great Teachings of the Bible and What They Mean for You: The Armour of God

The apostle Paul listed many defensive pieces of the armour of God, but only one was an offensive weapon. What does God want us to learn from the sword of the Spirit? In this lesson, let's explore what the Bible says about the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God

The sixth piece of armour Paul mentions in Ephesians 6 is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." How does a Roman soldier's sword help us understand how to use the Bible to win our spiritual battles?

The Bible, in Judges 7, records the story of Gideon and his 300 men:

Gideon and 32,000 Israelite troops gathered near the Midianite camp, but they were severely outnumbered by their 135,000 oppressors. Gideon was ready to do battle, but God had other plans. He was about to show His people just how powerful a God He was.

God told Gideon to let anyone who was afraid of the upcoming battle return home. Twenty-two thousand men took the opportunity to leave their ranks, leaving only 10,000 remaining. But God was looking for a smaller group still.

God then told Gideon to have the remainder drink from the spring, and all those who lapped the water like a dog would remain, while the rest were sent home. Finally, with only 300 men, Gideon and his little army surrounded the Midianites. On signal they blew trumpets, broke the pitchers covering their torches and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" (Judges 7:20).

Then the unthinkable happened. These 300 men—holding not swords, but torches and trumpets—routed the entire Midianite camp. Scripture records that God "set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp" (Judges 7:22). So, before the Israelites even had a chance to reach for swords, God plunged the enemy camp into chaos and wild defeat. The Israelites were delivered from their foes by a miracle.

This famous story illustrates an invaluable lesson: It is God who gives the victory. His sword is what will deliver us.

Taking the Sword

Throughout the world, there are certain individuals—real and fictional—whose identity remains almost inseparable from their weapon of choice.

From England, there is King Arthur and his sword, Excalibur. From the Middle East, Ali and his scimitar, Zulfiqar. From Spain, El Cid and his long sword, Tizona. From Scotland, William Wallace and his unnamed claymore.

The sword is the only item listed by Paul that serves in an offensive capacity. Even if we have all the rest of the armour equipped perfectly, without our sword, we amount to little more than heavily armoured moving targets. Perhaps this is why we remember the name of King Arthur's sword and not, for example, his footwear. While the rest of the armour is undoubtedly vital, it is the sword and only the sword that allows us to attack—to directly do the work that needs to be done.

What purpose did the sword serve in the Roman army?

The Roman *gladius* has become known as "the sword that conquered the world." Adapted from a Spanish design, the prowess of the *gladius* in close range combat made it a fearsome tool in the hand of a skilled Roman warrior. When sharpened, its dual edges wreaked havoc on unarmoured foes, while its tapered point could pierce through even heavy metal armour. A Roman infantryman would go into battle armed with more than just his *gladius*. He would also have a dagger (*pugio*), several one-time use spears (*pila*) and lead-weighted darts (*plumbatae*), but the sword was his main means of attack. The sword is the only weapon Paul lists as part of the Christian arsenal.

What is the Word of God?

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

God's Word—the Holy Bible—illuminates. It reveals to us the good and the bad, the wise and the unwise. It is the ultimate tool in learning how to live the best possible life, free from the restraints of stumbling in darkness.

John 17:17

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

God's Word is truth, plain and simple. We can have perfect confidence in the fact that His words are accurate, true and unerring. When followed, they guide us without fail in the paths that we need to walk.

We can be destroyed by lack of the knowledge of God (Hosea 4:6), but we will be blessed if we hear and keep the Word of God (Luke 11:28). And the knowledge is not just for us. We are to be ready to answer others who ask us (1 Peter 3:15).

Why a sword?

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The all-powerful sword of the living God is able to cut through every defence our enemy can raise—down to the very division of bone and marrow. When wielded by a servant of God, nothing can withstand its ability to cut straight to the core of a matter and uncover the truth. As soldiers in God's army, it is our responsibility and duty to use His Word to discern the truth and then follow it. When God's Word shows us something wrong in ourselves, we can use this spiritual weapon to "surgically" remove the offending thoughts and actions (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Unlike all other pieces of the armour of God, which are solely defensive, the sword is uniquely suited for both defensive and offensive roles. A solid defence is invaluable, but the sword is the only way we can complete the work we have been given to do.



Notice that Jesus Christ used the Bible to counter Satan's attacks (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). We must also learn to live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Swords are used for close combat, not long-range warfare. Could this imply the nature of the battle a Christian fights?

Acts 14:22

...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

James 1:2-4

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

The Romans relied in part on assailing their enemy from a distance with javelins and darts, but God does not give us that option as Christian soldiers. If we were able to fight our battles from a distance, we would never experience an actual trial.

At first glance, that might not seem like such a bad thing. But when we stop to consider that without trials, there is no growth, and without growth, we will not be able to enter God's Kingdom, we see that trials, however uncomfortable, are essential in our journeys as Christians. After all, the promises of Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26 and 3:5, 12 and 21 are given "to him who overcomes" and not "to him who remains as he is."

Paul only lists one weapon because we only need one weapon: There is no enemy the Word of God, coupled with His Spirit, cannot defeat. And so, armed only with our sword, we step out to fight our enemies head-on. The struggle is real. It is immediate, and it is in front of us. Our future in God's Kingdom is on the line, and we take up the battle so that we may hold fast to the future He has promised us.

What promises can we stand on?

Matthew 24:13

But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Romans 8:31

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

We fight knowing the end of the story. Two of the many powerful and sure promises in God's Word tell us that if we remain dedicated to God and His Word, we *will* make it to the end, and we *will* be saved. There is no doubt in this statement. God's promises are as sure as the one He told Isaiah: "Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isaiah 46:11).

So take up your sword. The battle is ours.

Reflection

A sword needs to be sharpened if it is to remain useful—and it certainly won't sharpen itself. Set aside some time every day for regular Bible study. Pick a topic you don't know as well as you'd like or a character trait you would like to improve and delve into it. Through continuous practice, we will keep our blades razor sharp and always be ready to defend the hope that lies within us.

