

Standing Firm: *Knowing the Resources Give* – Part 6
Ephesians 6:17b

“...and take up the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”

Introduction:



This oil on canvas portrait currently hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London and was produced by an unknown author in the late seventeenth or eighteenth century, hundreds of years after the man depicted lived. There are several intriguing features in this painting. 1) You'll notice that the man is pointing to a book that he's balancing with his other hand, lit up from the glow of a candle that is hidden from view. 2) A suspended banner beneath his right hand reads *"To scatter Roman darkness by light, the loss of land and life I will reckon slight"* written in Latin. 3) In the background of the portrait are the words *"Gulielmus Tindilus Martyr"*, which tells us both the identity and demise of this mystery man. **William Tyndale** died a vicious death in 1536, strangled to death by an iron chain, after which his body was burned and blown up by gunpowder that had been spread around his incinerated body.

What crime could have been so heinous to warrant such an execution? What evil had he perpetuated to necessitate such a violent end? The answer is both simple and telling: *Tyndale had the audacity to translate the Bible into English, the native tongue of the people in England.* It had been **ILLIGAL** to teach the Bible in English up to this point, a revealer of the spiritual condition of the nation at that point. *"England lay covered under a dark night of spiritual darkness. The church in England remained shrouded in the midnight of spiritual ignorance. The knowledge of Scriptures had been all but extinguished in the land. Although there were some **twenty thousand priests in England**, it was said that they could not so much as translate into English a simple clause from the Pater Noster---the Lord's Prayer. The clergy were so bogged down in a mire of religious superstition that they had no knowledge of the truth."*¹ An English Bible was a threat to the power of the church and the authority of the State. Religion ruled, but knowledge of the Word through the Spirit was all but wiped out. But during the Reformation that started in 1517, an awakening of knowing God in Christ began, and that was prompted by a commitment to understanding God's Word, not simply the Church's teaching on it. Tyndale gave his life and death to put the Word of God in each person's hand. In response to a Catholic clergyman, Tyndale

¹ Steven J. Lawson, "The Daring Mission of William Tyndale", xv-xviii.

said “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy who drives a plough to know more of the scriptures than you do.”

What is the significance of this story and man? It is a living reminder that we are always one generation away from losing the authority and teaching of Scripture, and that loss happens both **active** (jettisoning the Bible altogether) and **passive ways** (much more subtle and dangerous). Al Mohler stated the second this way: “*The secular age exerts a subtle but constant influence on churches and Christians. If not careful, churches will look less like churches and more and more like the secular world around them...churches simply stop talking about or teaching important truths revealed in Scripture. The demand is just be quiet.*”² The battle line is and always has been **the Bible**, how it is viewed, used, and understood. The Bible is the weapon our enemy fears and cowers at, knows, and tries to discredit. Suffice to say, there is no piece of armor that is as important as the sword, one that must be wielded well to both thwart and cut through the lies of Satan himself.

The Illustration Explained: Sword of the Spirit

We finally get to an offensive weapon in the armory given to every believer, but even this weapon is unique. We started this study a few weeks ago looking at the **battle that rages** for the hearts and minds of people, particularly those who are believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our adversary is a constant schemer, and he works tirelessly to discourage, deceive, accuse, tempt, confuse, and cause to doubt. He cannot keep anyone from God’s call, but he will actively blind along the way (2 Cor. 4:1-2). He cannot take away the sealing work of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13), but he surely can make us feel like we are distant from the Lord or not saved at all. He operates at the level of our thinking (mind) and feeling (heart), to compel us to have the wrong view of God, others, and ourselves and to allow our emotions to flow downstream. That is why the **armor that God gave us** is *defensive, constant, and powerful to counteract, particularly in our minds and hearts*. We are to be consistently using the armor of God, always prepared to **stand firm** in the midst of the constant onslaught of the overt and subtle attacks from our enemy.

It’s significant that the last piece of armor is used both defensively and offensively. There are **two main types of swords** that Bible records: 1) The first is a large and broad Thracian sword which was used to cut deep swaths into an oncoming enemy (Luke 2:35; Rev. 1:16, 2:12, 16). 2) Here, however, the sword mentioned is a *makaira*, a short sword or large knife that was used for many purposes, including carving and sacrifice, as well as a dagger wielded by soldiers. In the NT it is used as a soldier’s weapon in all but two instances, one referring to believers being slain with a sword (Rom. 8:35) and referring to a surgeon’s knife (Heb. 4:12). We’ll come back to the second usage in a few minutes.

The emphasis, then, on the passage is NOT that the sword is a general weapon of one that indiscriminately would hack blindly but a short, intimate weapon that a soldier or surgeon would wield with precision and skill. It is the **Sword OF the Spirit**, meaning it is a sword that is *empowered* by the Holy Spirit to use in battle. Then Paul gives us the specifics, that this sword is unequivocally the Word of God. So the point of this piece of armor is **how believers are to USE the sword**. It should always be with us, would be attached to the *belt of truth*, and used to parry the enemy’s blows and strike with precision in a counter-attack.

In order to understand how we better wield the sword, let’s consider a few things:

² Albert Mohler, “The Gathering Storm”, p. 22.

The Affirmation of Scripture

What do we affirm about the Bible by faith, and what does the Scripture affirm about itself?

- **God is the ultimate author of Scripture** (2 Peter. 1:20-21) – The Bible was “breathed out” by God through the Holy Spirit to human authors
- **Scripture is both Authoritative & Sufficient** – (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Is. 11:2) – The Bible is the final authority in all of life and truth, and is sufficient to change the hardest of hearts and most depraved of minds
- **Scripture is both Infallible and Inerrant** (Ps. 19:7-8; Prov. 30:5-6) – It both is true in all that it says and without error in any part
- **Scripture is complete** (Rev. 22:18-19; Deut 4:2; 12:32) – This is the special revelation God wants us to have, is part of the “all things” He’s given us for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3) and is not to be added to or taken away from – which is why we teach from the whole of it, both New and Old, hard and easier passages.
- **Scripture is effective** (Isaiah 55:11) – “*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.*”
- **Scripture is the source of truth** (John 17:17), of Spiritual growth (1 Pet. 2:2), guidance (Ps. 119:105), comfort (Rom. 15:4) and maturity (2 Tim. 3:16).

Thomas Guthrie said, “*The Bible is an armory of heavenly weapons, a laboratory of infallible medicines, a mine of exhaustless wealth. It is a guidebook for every road, a chart for every sea, a medicine for every malady, and a balm for every wound. Rob us of our Bible and our sky has lost its sun.*”

Far too often the Bible has been put into a secondary place of the trivial, earmarked for sentiment rather than the source of truth and light. A cursory knowledge of many has had negative effects in individual lives, families and churches. People are willing to **proof text**, yanking passages out of context to fit their desires or prove their point (“Love your neighbor” as the catchall to sanitize any and every sin), use Scripture to berate, being continuously negative without ever giving hope (see: Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus day...and ours), allowing Scripture to be used only as **quant, powerless statements** that fit on magnets or boards from Hobby Lobby, or a **general but never specific** understanding and knowledge of God’s Word, making one dangerous (like a first year Greek student!). Whenever ANYTHING is put at the same level of authority as Scripture (Church, government, science, ‘experts’), the proper place and effectiveness of the sword will be diminished.

The Work of the Spirit

But what role does the Holy Spirit play in all of this? How is it the Word “OF” the Spirit? How does the Holy Spirit interact with the Word of God? A quick survey of Jesus’ teaching to His disciples on the night before He went to the cross, after the upper room and on His way to Gethsemane, explains the purposeful work of the Spirit. Remember, it was here that He reiterated to His disciples what was about to happen, though they could not wrap their minds around it.

John 14:16-17 - *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another Helper**, to be with you forever, 17 even the **Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, **for he dwells with you and will be in you.***

John 14:26-27 - But the **Helper, the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, **he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.** 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. **Let not your hearts be troubled**, neither let them be afraid.

John 15:26 - But when the **Helper comes**, whom I will send to you from the Father, **the Spirit of truth**, who proceeds from the Father, **he will bear witness about me**

John 16:7-11 - Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is **to your advantage** that I go away, for if I do not go away, **the Helper** will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, **he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:** 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged

John 16:13-14 - When the **Spirit of truth comes**, **he will guide you into all the truth**, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 **He will glorify me**, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you

The Holy Spirit was given to us as a Helper, a gift, an advantage that the disciples did not have during the time Jesus was on the earth. Notice that the Holy Spirit is described as: 1) The Spirit of Truth, 2) He will TEACH us all that Jesus taught, which is the nature of discipleship (Matt. 28:20); 3) He bears witness of and glorifies Christ – in other words, He helps us see Christ in the Word so that there is no separation of searching the Scripture and somehow missing Jesus (see. John 5:39-40); 4) He guides us in all truth; 5) He convicts the world of their sin, self-righteousness, and coming judgment.

The Spirit is our teacher, guide, and the One we lean on to understand Scripture, to use it effectively, and to have hope that when we wield it offensively for the sake of the gospel, He will bring conviction of sin. This is the context of **Hebrews 4:12-13**, which says: “**For 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.** 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are **naked and exposed** to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” This is how the Spirit works through the Word as we use it in our interaction: The Word cuts through the outer, superficial, and external issues of man and gets down to the issues of the heart where the Spirit brings conviction of sin and awareness of judgment. This takes skill for sure. It means that we must understand people, situations, and lean on love. Jesus approached the story of the prideful Pharisee much differently than the Samaritan woman at the well (Luke 18:9-15; John 4), which were different from the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30). We must lean on the Spirit on unique situations when we do not know what to say (Luke 12:12), but we also must have the TRUTH stored up so that He has truth to guide us in. This is what we trust in when we **counsel or lead in discipleship**.

Wielding the Sword

Finally, we want to look at how we grow in using the Word of the Spirit well. The term “word” here is NOT *logos*, which is typical, which would have referred to general statements or messages. It is the word “*rhema*”, which refers to individual words or particular statements. Why does this matter? It matters because the point is NOT simply about the *general knowledge of Scripture* but a specific knowledge that allows us to be precise in our own lives to thwart temptation and lies but also as we

seek to show others the truth. If I picked up an actual sword today, I'd have no idea how to both defend and attack. It takes hours and hours of practice to be able to use a sword skillfully, and the same is true of Scripture. With the time we have left I want to look at the most skillful use of Scripture that we have recorded, which both deflected the blows of our enemy but caused him to flee.

Turn to **Mathew 4:1-11**. Notice a few preliminary observations of this text. This was at the outset of Jesus' public ministry, right after His baptism. The Holy Spirit led Jesus out to the wilderness, which is comparable to a desert, not a wooded forest. It was dry, desolate, and rugged. There Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights, depleting Himself of human strength and making Him the most prone to bad decisions (just like you and me). Here he was **tempted, intentionally, directly, by Satan himself**. He thwarted Satan's attacks two ways: *dependence on the Spirit and the Word, NOT on access to His divine attributes*. In other words, He functioned with the same resources you and I have at our disposal, not delving into His divine resources. Jesus faced temptation like you and I, yet without sin, but He modeled for us the way to do it.

Satan presented **three distinct temptations**: 1) Distrust the providential care of your Father and take matters into your own hands; 2) Presume on the Father's care and put Him to the test – to test God is truly to doubt God; 3) Renounce the way and will of the Father and find an alternative, an imitation but one that He could have NOW instead of waiting. Each of these are common temptations and deceptions we face today. ***How did Jesus counter these? With the sword of the Spirit***

- 1) Satan tempted the first Adam with fruit, and second Adam with bread. Where the first failed, the second succeeded. Each time Jesus answered a temptation, He quoted Scripture "***It is written***" (v. 4, 7, 10). I often wondered if Jesus was simply proof-texting here or how He came up with the text to combat Satan. In understanding each verse He quotes, He shows us how the whole counsel of Scripture is useful for teaching and reproof.
To Satan's offer of bread, Jesus quoted **Deuteronomy 8:3**, a verse and section that showed **why** God gave and withheld food: "*And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" In other words, God was intentional with His people in both **what He gave and what He withheld, since God will never give us something that will take us away from Him or with the purpose of trusting it more than Him**.
When we are struggling to be content with what we have or trust in the providence of God, perhaps we remember **Philippians 4:19**, "*And my God **will supply** every **need** of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus*". He'll supply every NEED, not want. He will give to care and sometimes withhold to humble, making us more dependant and trusting by faith, which is supremely valuable to Him.
- 2) Satan tempted Jesus to prove or show God's power and provision by challenging Him to throw Himself off the Temple and have God save Him. Satan even quoted Scripture from **Psalms 91:11-12** – remember, he knows Scripture more than we do. If you are God, prove it! But clearly he was taking that Scripture out of context, and Jesus quoted **Deuteronomy 6:16**, which harkened back to **Exodus 17:7**, where Israel complained and tested God at Meribah and Massah. Israel was in the desert and dying of thirst, and instead of trusting the Lord, they complained and turned on Moses. To test God is to presume on Him, to doubt Him, and this Scripture countered that idea in full

- 3) Satan finally tempted Jesus with glory without suffering. He offered Jesus NOW what was offered in the future, glory without pain, a kingdom without the cross. Again Jesus quoted from **Deuteronomy 6:13**, a passage of warning for the people of Israel to “take care lest they forget the Lord”, to not chase after other gods of the land ---- since God is a Jealous God! God demands allegiance and full commitment, and does not offer shortcuts, only grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus not only knew verses, He knew context. He not only knew context, He believed the Bible was instructive for every situation and temptation. He not only believed that, but He trusted the leading of the Spirit and the Word of the Spirit to clarify the truth, even when He was at His physical limit of weakness. When He wielded the sword, the devil left Him! **James 4:7** says resist the devil and he will flee from you! He will when driven away by the proper and clear use of the Word of God.

Tyndale died to give the Bible to the people he loved in the language they knew. Imagine not having access to God’s Word in English!!! Our problem is NOT that the Bible has been taken away, Satan has simply allowed it to multiply (families own tons of Bibles – and we can download them for FREE), but has simply thrown every other bit of information on the pile, making the Bible feel token, marginal, or a nice relic to have around. It’s akin to having a sword or a knife on your shelf for show, but not knowing how to actually use it. I’ve been so pleased with many people who have come up and told me of their commitment to read God’s Word daily. Now, we build on it and understand what we are reading and put it into practice each day, storing up the truth in our minds and hearts to thwart the attacks of Satan and be ready to give an account for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.