



The Spiritual Armor

Part 2: The Sword of the Spirit

In our last issue we began looking at the spiritual armor as another important resource that God provides for us as we live in a world that is under the jurisdiction of the evil one (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 5:19). We pointed out that two of the items that equip us for the inevitable spiritual battle we will experience in this life are given to us purely as gifts. These are the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit. The other items require us to develop the particular character traits indicated by their names (truth, righteousness, peace, faith) in order for them to be effective.

We also looked specifically at the helmet of salvation and the important role it plays in identifying us as children of God in the battle. In this issue we will focus on the sword of the Spirit, which is the only offensive weapon included in the spiritual armor. While it is given to us freely from God, it is not a “once for all” gift like the helmet of salvation. Instead, God repeatedly provides it on an “as needed” basis.

If God makes us responsible for developing the defensive parts of our spiritual armor but provides our only offensive weapon Himself, this clearly signifies our need for complete dependence on Him whenever we engage the enemy in direct spiritual warfare. The battle truly is His; not ours (Ex. 14:14; 2 Chron. 20:15). He is the One with unequivocal authority in the spiritual realm, and only because of Jesus’ finished work on the Cross of Calvary, including His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father, are we as the Church able to be covered by His authority as well (Eph. 1:19-23; 2:4-6).

While the sword of the Spirit is clearly identified as the “Word of God,” the Greek word used (*rhema*) covers more than the written Word. It refers to any uttering or message from God, whether written or spoken. This means that at critical times when we come against the enemy, God will either bring to our minds aptly chosen Scripture verses or speak to us or through us with His own divinely powerful words. However He does it, the words given will be specifically crafted to counteract the assault of the enemy and to command his obedience, whether we are fighting our own battle against temptation, seeking divine insight or intervention, or working to set a child of His free from evil spiritual bondage.

The sword of the Spirit is equally powerful in the spiritual battle for man’s personal salvation. When we rely upon it, it is able to tear down the enemy’s strongholds and render foolish all that man has conceived in his mind to exonerate him from the need of God (2 Cor. 10:4-5). God’s Word will always accomplish the purpose for which it is given (Isa. 55:11; Heb. 4:12).

With such a powerful weapon available to us, our immediate responsibility in offensive spiritual warfare is to open our spirits expectantly to receive what the Holy Spirit wants to impart to us and to resist operating in the flesh. As in any physical battle, however, preparation is also important, especially when “wrestling” against entities of higher spiritual rank (Eph. 6:12). While minor skirmishes against demons can usually be quickly won with spontaneous “pop shots” issued in the name of Jesus, being victorious against higher-level beings may require greater effort and spiritual preparation on our part.

Not only must we become knowledgeable of the enemy’s diverse strategies, but our lives must provide a clear channel through which the Spirit can flow. If we are living in sin or with our minds focused on the things of this world or the desires of the flesh, this critical avenue for receiving the sword of the Spirit will be blocked. Perhaps this is why prayer and fasting are often connected to spiritual warfare in Scripture (Dan. 9:3; Mat. 4:2; 17:21; Eph. 6:18). They help to clear this channel.

A lifestyle of memorizing and hiding the Word of God in our hearts (Ps. 119:11) is also excellent preparation for spiritual warfare, as it increases the arsenal of truth from which the Spirit can draw when needed. Jesus used quoted Scripture alone to defeat Satan in His wilderness temptations (Mat. 4:1-11).

Whatever level of darkness we confront, we must remember that God never violates the free will of any individual. Therefore, if a person has deliberately allied himself to darkness or refuses to forsake a pattern of habitual sin, the spiritual entities attached to him can claim a legitimate right to remain in place. They cannot be forced to leave until these free will choices have been renounced and forsaken.