

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY FOUR)

“THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT”

EPHESIANS 6:13-17

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

In this evening's Lesson we will consider the **“Sword of the Spirit,”** which is the **only offensive piece of equipment** in the **panoplia**-the *“whole armour”* of God.

In verse **17** Paul writes, *“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*

As was the case with the **“Helmet of Salvation,”** the word *“And”* at the beginning of the verse, connects the **“Sword of the Spirit,”** with all the other pieces of armour mentioned previously. Although the **panoplia**

was comprised of several different pieces of armour, it represents a “**unit.**” Therefore, not one piece of equipment can be missing if the Christian soldier is to successfully wage spiritual warfare in God’s power, and for His glory, against the “*evil one.*”

We noted that the Greek word **dechomai**: (**dekh’-om-ahee**), which is translated “*take,*” applies to the “**Sword of the Spirit,**” as well as to the “**Helmet of Salvation.**” The word is in a construction in the Greek which indicates that Paul is issuing a command that is to be obeyed without delay. The “**Sword of the Spirit,**” like the “**Helmet of Salvation,**” is bestowed upon each believer by the hand of God. The believer is to accept it deliberately, and receive it readily from God’s hand without delay, and he or she is to wield it effectively, in order to “*withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*” (verse **13**).

The Greek word translated “*sword*” is **machaira**: (**makh’-ahee-rah**). The Greek term **machaira**, refers to the Roman **gladius**, a short sword made from iron, about 2 feet or 60 centimetres long, which was used for close hand-to-hand combat. The Greek historian of the Hellenistic period, **Polybius**, described the **gladius** as follows: “It has an excellent point and a strong cutting edge on both sides, as its blade is firm and reliable.” The Roman soldier wore the **gladius** on his girdle or belt. Few weapons in world history have had such great tactical importance as the Roman **gladius**.





The first weapon the Romans used in battle was the **pilum**, a spear specifically designed to kill enemies from long distances, or to limit them in the use of their shields. The spear was extremely difficult to remove after hitting the external part of a shield. Once the enemy ranks had been shattered by the initial shower of spears, the Roman soldiers drew their short swords and charged their opponents. According to Roman tactical doctrine, the **gladius** was used to attack with devastating thrusts and short cuts. Its relatively short and double-edged blade made it ideal for cutting and thrusting in the confined space of hand to hand combat on the ancient battlefield.

Stabbing wounds produced by the **gladius** were almost always fatal, especially when the enemy was struck in the abdomen, the main target for thrusts. But the **gladius** also proved to be effective when used for cutting or slashing. Each Roman soldier was trained to adapt to any combat situation that might develop. It was extremely difficult to approach a soldier who was well trained in the use of the **gladius**, for it was short and could be moved rapidly. The fact that it was two-edged made it possible to strike on either side without changing its position in the hand, and its razor-sharp point could pierce armour.

Out of all of the weapons in the arsenal of the Roman armies, the **gladius** was the one which contributed most to the expansion of the Roman Empire.

The only offensive piece of equipment in the Christian soldier's armour is the "**Sword of the Spirit.**" Paul refers to it as the, "*sword of the Spirit,*" because it is the Holy Spirit who both supplies it to the believer, and enables him or her to use it effectively. The Holy Spirit enlightens us to know God's Word, He applies it to our lives, and He teaches us to use it both defensively and offensively.

David Guzik explains that, "The idea is that the Spirit provides a sword for you, and that sword is the word of God. To effectively use **the Sword of the Spirit**, we can't regard the Bible as a book of magic charms or tie one around our neck the way that garlic is said to drive away vampires. To effectively use the sword, we must regard it as the word of God...If we are not confident in the inspiration of Scripture, that the sword really came from the Spirit, then we will not use it effectively at all. But we must also take the sword of the Spirit in the sense of depending that He helps us to use it. Not only did the Spirit give us the Scriptures, but also He makes them alive to us, and equips us with the right thrust of the sword at the right time."

Paul clearly identifies the Word of God as the sword of the Christian soldier. The Greek word translated "*Word*" is **rhéma**: (**hray'-mah**), which means, "that which is or has been uttered by the living voice." **Rhéma** refers to any sound produced by the voice which has a definite meaning. It focuses upon the content of the communication. **Rhéma** speaks of a specific statement. Just as a Roman soldier's **gladius** was applied with skill and precision to a vital area of the body of his enemy, so the Christian soldier must use the Word of God carefully and expertly, applying specific principles from it to every situation he or she faces. In **2 Timothy 2:15** Paul wrote the following to Timothy: "*Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a*

good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth” (New Living Translation).

Commenting in respect of Paul’s use of **rhéma** in this verse, **John MacArthur** states that, “The term Paul uses here for word is not **logos**, which refers to **general** statements or messages, but is **rhema**, which refers to **individual** words or **particular** statements. The apostle is therefore not talking here about **general** knowledge of Scripture, but is emphasizing again the precision that comes by knowledge and understanding of **specific** truths. Like Jesus did in the wilderness, we need to use specific scriptural truths to counter specific satanic falsehoods.”

The Greek word **logos** refers to the **total** utterance of God, the **complete** revelation of what God has said. The word, **rhéma** on the other hand, means a **specific** saying of God, a passage or a verse that has **special application to an immediate situation**. It implies a use of the Word of God that is applied to a **specific** experience in our lives. In **Ephesians 6:17**, Paul uses the word **rhema** and not the word **logos**, because the “*sword of the Spirit*” is the Word of God applied to a **specific** situation in the believer’s life.

The Holy Spirit supplied **rhéma** (word), is the **machaira**, the **gladius**, the razor-sharp, two-edged sword which is placed in the hand of the believer. The **rhéma** Word is the Spirit’s specific, well-chosen answer to the attack of the devil. Like a Roman soldier with a **gladius** in his hand, the Spirit brings a flashing, sharp, double-edged Word to our mind to block the enemy’s sword-thrust, and then to strike decisively with a skillful thrust of our own.

In the following quotation, **Ray Stedman** provides helpful insight as it relates to the word **rhéma**:

“Perhaps you have had some experience with this. Sometimes, when you are reading a passage of Scripture, the words seem to suddenly

come alive, take on flesh and bones, and leap off the page at you. Sometimes they seem to grow eyes that follow you around everywhere you go, or develop a voice that echoes in your ears until you cannot get away from it. Perhaps you have had that experience in some moment of temptation or doubt when you were assailed by what Paul calls here '*the flaming arrows of the evil one.*' And immediately a passage of Scripture that supplies the answer comes flashing to mind. That passage of Scripture is God's **rhema** for you.

Or perhaps you have been asked a question that caught you off guard for a moment and you were about to say, 'I don't know,' when suddenly you had a moment of illumination and a word of Scripture came to mind that provided the answer. Perhaps this experience has happened while sitting in a meeting where some message has come home to your heart with an unusually powerful effect. You were greatly moved, and in that moment you made a significant and lasting decision. That illuminating word of Scripture was God's **rhema** for you."

Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones notes that the reformer **Martin Luther**, before his conversion, was in spiritual darkness, though he was a theologian and a monk. He was trying to save himself by his works. He was fasting, sweating, and praying; and yet he was miserable, unhappy, and in bondage. Erroneous teaching concerning the Gospel held him captive. But he was delivered by the **rhéma** word of Scripture—"*the just shall live by faith*" (**Romans 1:17**). From that moment he began to understand this Word as he had never understood it before, and the better he understood it the more he saw the errors taught by the Roman church. He saw the errors of her practice, and so became more intent on the reformation of the church. He proceeded to do all he could in terms of the exposition of the Scriptures. The great doctors in the Roman church stood against him. He sometimes had to stand alone and meet them in close combat, and invariably he took his stand upon the Scripture. He maintained that the church is not above the Scriptures. The standard by which you judge even the church, he said, is the

Scripture. And though he was one man, at first standing alone, he was able to fight the papal system and twelve centuries of tradition. He did so by taking up *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*

The Greek word **rhéma** represents a concrete expression or quotation from the Bible. The thought is that the Christian soldier is to know his or her Bible so well that he or she can use the right verse or passage to answer each different onslaught or thrust of Satan. This method of warfare is perfectly seen in the temptation of Christ recorded in **Matthew 4:1-11**. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2 After he fasted forty days and forty nights he was famished.

3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.”

4 But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the highest point of the temple,

6 and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you’ and ‘with their hands they will lift you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

7 Jesus said to him, “Once again it is written: ‘You are not to put the Lord your God to the test.’”

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur.

9 And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you throw yourself to the ground and worship me.”

10 Then Jesus said to him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: ‘You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’”

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and began ministering to his needs.

In this encounter we see that each thrust of Satan was blocked by our Lord with an appropriate quotation of a verse or sentence from the Bible. This wielding of the “*sword of the Spirit*” requires great skill. It is dependent upon a thorough knowledge of the Bible. The effective Christian soldier keeps himself or herself alert like the “blessed” man of **Psalm 1**, by constant meditation in the Word of God. It by so doing that he or she can receive a **rhéma** Word—a specific saying of God that has special application to an immediate situation, or a specific experience, in his or her life.

In **Psalm 119:9-11**, the psalmist wrote,

9 How can a young person maintain a pure life? By guarding it according to your instructions.

10 With all my heart I seek you. Do not allow me to stray from your commands.

11 In my heart I store up your words, so I might not sin against you.
(**New English Translation**)

“Storing up the Word,” or “hiding it in our heart,” is the best way to ensure that we receive a Holy Spirit engendered, **rhéma** Word as a sharp two-edged sword with which to fight.