



# Sword

**Ephesians 6:17 NIV**

**Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

## **When Is a Word More Than Just a Word?**

One of the great pleasures of children is sword fighting. They love to get long skinny sticks and whack them against each other in a battle of wits and strength. Our text today is a command. **Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** (Ephesians 6: 17 NIV) The Greek word translated sword describes a short sword, the type used in hand-to-hand combat. This was not for the artistic forms of sword fighting we see portrayed in movies, but rather for the brutal in-close attacks that Roman soldier faced as they closed in on the opposing army. This sword is from the Spirit, much like when David took with him the sword given him by Ahimelech the priest, to protect him from King Saul and his army. It is offered to us and we must take it if we are to protect ourselves from Satan and the evil demonic forces allied with him. It is not just any sword; it is the word of God.

The chief strategy of Satan is to separate us from God. He distracts us, frustrates us, pumps us full of pride, envy, and lust, convinces us that we can't wait, can't do what's right and are unable to control our urges. Satan has his own short broadsword he uses to cut us off from the Holy Spirit so that we either ignore God or turn against Him. I recently heard of the lead singer of a popular Christian band that did just that. He says he is an atheist now. Satan manipulates circumstances and even works in our minds to pick apart our faith in the Lord and he primarily does this by closing off our pipeline to His guidance and direction. Once we go off on our own without giving the Lord much thought, we are an easy prey to all the misery Satan can inflict on us. Along comes selfishness, cravings, greed, depression, angry outbursts, and despair. The weapon we are given to gain once more of all the goodness that comes from having Christ in our lives is the word of God.

Consider just how broken hearted the prophet Elijah was when after his great defeat of the prophets of Baal, he fell into the depths of despair running away from the murderous intentions of Queen Jezebel. He felt hopeless and worthless. Not all of us get to that great place of despair, but Satan does his best to try and bring God's most critical friends into that pit. He sat lonely and confused in a cave. Strange natural events took place as Elijah mourned his broken life. First there was a mighty wind that tore through the mountains. Then an earthquake and next a fire arose. In that point of despair, God spoke in a whisper to Elisha. The word of God came to him and it was enough to renew his strength and get on with the job the Lord had for him.

The Lord is just as willing to share His word with you as He is the Elijahs of His Kingdom. You are not any less precious to Him than David or Isaiah or even Peter or Mary the mother of Jesus were to the Lord in the past. A promise from God found in the Old Testament makes it clear the Lord wants to show you the way;

to guide you in all you do. **Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."** (Isaiah 30:21 NIV) As our key verse reminds us, we are to take up the word of God as a way to be protected from Satan's attacks. In our Ephesians command, "Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God", the Greek word *rhema* which is translated "word" speaks of a declaration, a saying, a promise or charge, a word. It is very similar to another Greek term "logos" and is almost identical to it. *Rhema* is something said, something verbalized. If the Apostle Peter is right, that God's promises are just as valid today as they were three thousand years ago, then we have this declaration from God Himself when putting these two verses together, that the Holy Spirit will guide us if we are open to Him doing it.

Let us consider three ways the Spirit speaks to us, guides us. The first and it is probably the most important is through Scripture. The Psalmist tells us that the Bible gives us directions, shows us the way. **Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.** (Psalm 119:105 NIV) The Bible says it is by the word of God, that He communicates with us personally. Hebrews 4:12 insists, **For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.** In other words, the Bible through the Spirit of God digs deep in us, uncovers who we really are and reveals that to us. Through the Bible, the Spirit speaks to us and guides us, so we understand ourselves better and what to do next. The great governor and master builder Nehemiah gave a vivid description of what happened when the Israelites who had resettled in Canaan following the Babylonian captivity heard read to them for the first time the Scriptures. He tells us that crowds of people wept as they discovered how far from God they were and how much of His help and guidance they had missed by not knowing the Bible. Perhaps it has been like that for you. The Bible, when you read it is a great letter of love to you from God and the more you get to know it, the clearer you see how good your life can be when you do what God says to do. I remember a man telling me that his entire family turned around when he stopped staying angry. He read in the Bible that we are not to remain mad overnight and as soon as he discovered that, he started practicing immediate forgiveness in his home. It saved his marriage he told me.

Second, the word of God comes to us as we pray. When Abraham sent his servant up north to where he had relatives living to find a wife for his son Isaac, the servant was befuddled by the task. How does anyone pick out a wife for someone else, let alone your boss's son? Even more unnerving for the servant, he wasn't allowed to bring the son Isaac with him to help him choose. Forty year old Isaac was required by his father to stay behind and accept whoever the servant brought back to him. It was a daunting task, but the servant made his way up to Northwest Mesopotamia and got to the town well just outside the village of Nahor, where his brother's family lived. As he stood by the well, young women approached with their water jars to fill for their households. The servant, not knowing what to do next, prayed and asked the Lord to give him a sign as to who was the girl for his master's son Isaac. He told God that if one of the young women he approaches offers to provide him water from her jar as well as provide water for the camels, she would be God's choice for the son to marry. Before he even opened his eyes, Rebekah, the beautiful daughter of Abraham's nephew. The servant rushed over to the girl to see if she was the one the Lord had picked out for his master's son. He asked the maiden for a drink from her water bottle and as soon as he had enough, she immediately told him she would draw enough water for the camels too. What great joy the servant felt as he considered the possibility that the Lord had answered his prayer and brought to him Isaac's future bride. The Bible says that the servant watched Rebekah closely to learn whether the Lord had brought him success in his journey. It turned out Rebekah was the perfect choice for Isaac and when the servant brought her home for him, Isaac immediately fell in love with her. If we just would stop to pray and ask God to show us what to do, we will be kept safe from many terrible mistakes and given insight into what would make our lives sweeter and more joyful.

There is one more way I would like to share with you on how God's word reaches us. The Bible promises you that God is always ready to guide you and show you what to do in every circumstance. **For this God is**

**our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.** (Psalm 48:14 NIV) Take a moment to let that sink into you. He is always ready to guide you. No matter how far you have drifted from Him, regardless of the mistakes you have made in the past, the Lord will show you your next steps. When God's people get together, there is a powerful potential for guidance. Acts 13 relays the experience the early church had finding out what God wanted done. It says that the people were gathered together worshipping and even fasting and the Holy Spirit spoke to the group. We don't know how it happened precisely. Perhaps it was like the surge of a wave as it lifts a boat full of passengers and crew up and they all are carried together by its might. It may be that everyone in the building just knew that the Lord wanted Barnabas and Saul to go off on a missionary journey together. The Holy Spirit linked them all with this single thought. Immediately, the group surrounded Barnabas and Saul and in a beautiful show of solidarity placed their hands on them as a way of showing their alignment with the Holy Spirit in this calling. One of the great places for God to lead you is with a group of fellow Christians meeting together because of their love of Christ. Who knows what God may say to you in that environment where the Holy Spirit is linking everyone together and the Scriptures are available to all of them to confirm God's guidance? Never forget that the Lord is ready to guide you at a moment's notice and you may not know for years, maybe even decades, how critical that direction was to you.