

OUR ARSENAL EPHESIANS 6:17-20

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints - and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

A small company of US troops were pinned down on top of a hill. They were caught in heavy crossfire.

The Lieutenant radioed to his commanding officer, "Sir, we're surrounded by the enemy." The voice answered, "*Good, don't let one of them get away!*"

Obviously, battles are won by aggression and courage. *And this is especially true in spiritual combat.*

Sit back disengaged and uninvolved - let Satan bring the fight to you - and it puts you on the defensive. But take the battle to the enemy and we put him on the run!

You and I need to charge into the fray - *speaking God's truth, sharing God's love, showing God's righteousness.* In the eyes of Satan and his demons we should be considered, "**Armed and Dangerous.**"

The Christian army needs soldiers who are bold and brave - who'll "*stand*" against the devil. Roy Putnam writes, "*It is the fearful who allow the devil to hold high carnival*

on this planet. The devil sets up his tyranny only because he has not been challenged!"

Who can forget the young shepherd boy who heard the Philistine giant defy the God of Israel. Righteous anger filled David's heart, "How dare this wicked Philistine blaspheme God! He needs to be shut up!"

At first King Saul tried to fit David in the king's armor, but it was too big, too awkward. David couldn't move.

He needed *spiritual armor* not *steel armor*. David marched into the Valley of Elah carrying a *shield of faith* - wearing the *belt of truth* - the *chest-plate of righteousness* - *cleats of peace* - a *helmet of salvation*.

The very same armor God has supplied you!

In the end, the shepherd boy slung a stone, and struck a giant, and lopped off his head with a sword.

David won the battle for God and His people because he took a stand against the devil in the strength of the Lord. And if we, like David, want to "*get a-head*" in the spiritual battle we also need to be brave enough "*stand*" - and take the battle to the enemy.

So let me ask you, *this past week did you dare to do something - anything - for the cause of Jesus Christ?*

John Wesley once said, "Give me one hundred people who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and... such alone will shake the gates of hell..."

For the last two weeks we've been discussing **the unseen war** - the spiritual battle. We've looked at **our adversary** - Satan, his demons, and their various wives... Last week, we clothed ourselves in **our armor**... Now this AM, we're loading up **our arsenal**.

We're looking at **the ammo** God has supplied - the weapons we can use to take the battle to the enemy.

Realize, the armor of God is *defensive* - but we also have some *offensive* firepower. In fact, Paul mentions two such weapons - **the Word of God** and **prayer**.

Their code names... the blade and the bomb.

The Bible is a **sword**! It's a weapon for the **infantry**. Prayer is a **shell**! It's a missile for the **artillery**. All Christians are equipped with a **blade** and a **bomb**!

And with just these two weapons you'll find all the firepower you'll ever need to take down any stronghold.

In the field of physical warfare, modern weapon systems are always becoming obsolete. Sherman Tanks and Tommy Guns have been replaced with M1 Abrams and M16s. There've been definite upgrades.

But our spiritual arsenal can never be improved upon. The weapons that were lethal in Paul's day are still *"the top of the line."* Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:4, **"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds."**

Our arsenal has been whipping the devil for millenniums - *but the sword is useless in its scabbard.*

The fuse has to be lit before the bomb will explode.

Our need is not more or better firepower - but the *confidence* to use our current arsenal, and the *training* to use it effectively! *That's our goal this morning...*

In verse 17, the first weapon we've been issued is **"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."**

Realize your Bible is many things... It's *a comfort, a sweetness, a book of wisdom and answers - it's also a weapon!* The Bible is a blade. It's a spiritual saber...

But first, it's the Great Physician's scalpel!

Hebrews 4:12 tells us, **"For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than a 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 Bible, it lays bare my true motivations... It slices and dices my selfish ways...

The Bible pierces my pride... With one swipe it cuts me open, and allows the Physician to do His surgery.

In short, God's Word *kills me to heal me!*

On the Day of Pentecost, before the thousands of folks who had gathered in Jerusalem, Peter pulled the sword from his scabbard - and he spoke God's Word...

Acts 2:37 records the results, **"When they heard this they were cut to the heart."** The Bible gets past the ears. It works on the heart. It's made of spiritual steel.

And the Bible is not only an effective tool in the hearts of men, it is especially useful against Satan!

1 John 2:14 tells us how certain men in the church fought successfully with the enemy. "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one." They overcame Satan with the Bible!

In Matthew 4, when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness he defeated the Devil with the careful use of God's Word. Three times Jesus quoted Scripture.

And here's the point, if our Lord drew the Sword of the Spirit in His encounters with Satan, how much more do we need to keep the sword close to our side!

In John Bunyan's allegory of the Christian Life, "Pilgrim's Progress," he records an encounter between his main character, Christian, and the Devil himself...

Bunyan writes of the conflict, "The Devil gathered up close to Christian, and wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful fall. Christian's sword flew out of his hand.

With the Devil's hands on Christian's throat he was pressing him to death... but as God would have it, Christian nimbly reached out his hand for his sword...

He caught it and quoted Micah 7:8, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! When I fall I shall arise."

And with that, Christian gave the Devil a deadly thrust, which made him move backwards, as one that had received a mortal wound... This time Christian quoted Romans 8:37, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

And with that, the devil spread his Dragon's wings, and sped away, and Christian saw him no more."

When Satan tries to condemn you, pick up your Bible and run him through with Romans 8:1, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

When he tries to frighten you, take the sword and thrust 2 Timothy 1:7, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

And when tempted to doubt God's presence, grab the Word, and touché - Hebrews 13:5, "For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" God wants us to be skilled swordsmen - *spiritual Zorros*.

Satan knows how lethal the Word of God can be to his diabolical schemes. This is why he'll do everything possible to keep your sword in its scabbard!

You can sit down to read a magazine, and spend hours, with no distractions - but just try picking up your Bible and the telephone starts buzzing in your pocket.

Take the family to a movie and everyone loads up without a hitch - but leave for Bible Study and the kids fall in the mud, you lose your keys, the car's out of gas.

Satan will do all he can to keep you from getting into God's Word! He knows if he can keep you *ignorant of the Scriptures* he can keep you *ineffective for God*.

And it's tragic how successful he's been with many, many Christians. A recent poll revealed that 93% of all Americans own a Bible - in fact, 75% of American households own two or more copies - yet 50% said they never read it. Of the people claiming to be born-again Christians only 18% read their Bibles daily.

After a similar survey George Gallup drew this conclusion, "It's time to sound the alarm... there exists today a shocking lack of knowledge about the Bible."

Tragically, churches today are filled with biblically-illiterate Christians. Our ignorance is now epidemic.

Recently, Sunday School teachers surveyed their classes to gauge their student's Bible knowledge...

Here are some of the reported answer...

Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers.

The NT Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luther, John.

Eve was created from an apple.

Joan of Arc was Noah's wife.

Golgotha was the giant who slew the apostle David.

Joshua was the son of a nun.

Sadly, today we have denominations, and churches, and pastors who will defend the veracity of Scripture to the death - *they just never bother to teach it!*

The prophecy in Amos 8:11 is coming true before our very eyes. 2800 years ago Amos wrote, "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD."

It reminds me of a young cajun named Claude... He was a zealous new Christian who lived way down on the bayou. One day, Claude approached his pastor, and asked him if he could serve in the church. The pastor asked, "Claude, can you read and write?"

Claude admitted school hadn't been his top priority. *He'd been too busy hunting gators and eating gumbo.*

The pastor asked again, "Well, do you know your Bible?" Claude replied, "Sir, I's pretty good in de Scriptures; I knows my Bible from limb to limb."

The pastor then asked Claude to name his favorite Bible story. He replied, "I like de parable o' de Good Samaritan." The pastor said, "Great, tell me the story?"

And here's how Claude told it...

"Onced dere was dis man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. And he felled among thorns and de thorns sprung up and choked him. And as he went on his way, he didn't have no maney and he medst the queen of Sheba, and she gives him a thousand talents of gold, and a hunder'd changes o' raiment.

And he gots into a chariot and he drove furiously. And as he was a drivin' under a big juniper tree, his hair caught in de limb of dat tree, and he hung dere many days. And de ravens brought him food to eat and water to drink, and he ate 5000 loaves and two fishes.

One night when he was a hangin' dere asleep, his wife Delilah comes along and cuts his hair, and he drops and he fells to de stony ground. But he gots up and he went on.

And it began a rainin' forty days and forty nights, and he hids himself in caves, and he lives on locusts an wilds honey. And while he was dere, he met a servant who says, '*Come, take suppa at my house.*'

And he says, '*No, I won't; I married a wife and I can't go.*' Well, de servant went out into de highways and de hedges and compelled him to come.

After suppa, he went on down to Jericho. Well, when he got dere, he saw dat old queen Jezebel sittin' way up high in da window, and she laughed at him. And he say,

'Throw her down outta dere'; and they throw'd her down seventy times seven. And of the fragments, dey picked up twelve baskets fulls - 'sides womens and childrens. Den da say, 'Blessed are da piecemakers.'

Now, who's wife you s'pose she be in de judgment day?" Wow, Claude had a few stories jumbled up!

Biblical ignorance is funny when it comes from a new believer like *Claude*, but it's distressing when it's found in a person who's been a Christian for a while.

Someone once commented on the ministry of a particular church, "It's a mile wide, and a foot deep." The seats get filled by fluff, and entertainment, and *a few Bible bits* - but there's not a lot of substance.

For people to grow spiritually they need to be fed a steady diet of not just *milk* - but the *meat* of God's Word. They need more than snacks and fast food. They need protein. They need to be challenged with a biblical perspective - *to see today in light of eternity*.

"To measure the success of a church's ministry its members should not only be counted, but weighed."

2 Timothy 2:15 instructs all Christians, "Study to show yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Later this summer we'll restart our *Through The Bible Study*. I encourage you to make it a priority.

Some of you don't grasp the importance of having *a working knowledge of the whole Bible* - and that doesn't come by accident. It takes a consistent effort.

Hey, I don't hound you to give, or serve, or sing... but I'm hounding you to come to the Bible studies.

It's for your own survival. Don't be home, watching TV while the devil is plotting your demise. A lack of Bible knowledge leaves you and your family defenseless. There's more at stake than you realize!

At the US Army artillery training school in Fort Sills, Oklahoma the instructors saw a noticeable difference between the trainees in 1958 and those in 1965.

In 1958 it was difficult to keep men awake, but not so in 1965 - the same lectures were attended by men who were alertly scratching down notes. The difference was that 1958 was peace time, while in 1965 soldiers were just weeks from facing the enemy in Vietnam jungles.

And make no mistake about it, *neither are we living in peacetime*. We too are in the midst of a fierce war. And if we're not equipped, we'll be easily defeated.

In 2 Samuel 23:10 one of David's mighty men, Eleazar, fought against the Philistines. We're told, "Until his hand was weary, and (it) stuck to the sword."

Eleazar held on to his sword so tenaciously his hand literally froze to the handle. And this should be our attitude toward the Bible. Clutch your sword with the same tenacity... A vice-grip is needed for victory.

Drop your sword and you've lost your edge!

Notice also Paul calls the Bible "*the sword of the Spirit*." This word translated "*sword*" refers to the Roman "*marchaira*" - or the "*double-edged sword*."

It was short, but extremely sharp and quite heavy.

It was not a weapon you'd give to a novice. If you weren't trained you could cut yourself to ribbons.

And likewise there are Christians I know who've grasped just enough of God's Word to be dangerous...

Some people will use their Bible knowledge to show off. Paul told the Corinthians, "Knowledge puffs up." It *can* become a source of pride. This is an improper use.

Other folks take verses out of their context, and force the Bible to say what it was never meant to say.

There's an old adage, "A text without a context becomes a pretext." The Bible was given to reveal *God's will* - not necessarily to justify *my desires*.

Another misuse of Scripture is to emphasize one passage without balancing your perspective with other passages... Read James, and never Paul - and you'll be bullish on *works*, but know little about God's *grace*.

In Acts 20:27 Paul said to the Ephesian elders, "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." Paul taught the whole enchilada. He gave them ALL the Scriptures, not part and parcel. As we say, it takes the *whole Bible* to make a *whole Christian*.

Another way to misuse the Bible is to use it harshly on one's enemies. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter took a sword and lopped off a man's ear.

It angered Jesus. He told Peter to put up his sword - and Jesus reattached the ear to the man's head.

And just like Peter many Christians - even some of us - have used the sword of the loving Holy Spirit to attack and gouge and slice vengefully into another person... And often it's left up to Jesus to repair the damage done by our abuse and misuse of Scripture.

When my son, Zach, was 5 years old his granddaddy gave him a pocketknife. I have no idea what my dad was thinking - *giving a 5 year-old a lethal weapon?*

Needless to say, we had to confiscate the knife. We informed Zach it belonged to both *him* and *his parents*.

We let him use it, but we monitored how and when.

For a while it was limited to when I was present.

And this is God's policy - handling God's Word requires **parental supervision**. This is why the Bible is referred to as, *"the sword of the Spirit."* It's the Holy Spirit who supervises the proper use of God's Word.

The Spirit helps us understand, interpret, apply the Scriptures - *without cutting ourselves or harming each other*. We need God's Spirit to safely use God's Word.

And this is so cool... What other book is there, where the author promises to help you understand what He's written? This is why before you read, always pray...

And speaking of prayer... The second offensive weapon Paul mentions is the **bomb** – it's **prayer!**

God has supplied us both **a blade** and **a bomb**.

Prayer is a very potent spiritual weapon.

It's been said, "The Christian army is the only army that marches on its knees." Our greatest advances for the cause of Christ come through faith and prayer.

Edward Payson once explained the priority of prayer in a Christian's life, "Prayer is the first thing, the second thing, and the third thing that's necessary..."

And Satan knows the importance of prayer.

William Cowper penned, "Satan trembles when he sees - the weakest saint upon his knees." Martin Luther put it, "My prayer is more than the devil himself."

Satan understands the power of prayer - that's why there's no limit to the extremes he'll go to keep you from praying. Our enemy's chief strategy is to frustrate our prayer life. If you think the distractions are numerous when you read your Bible - just try to pray!

Prayer is the Christian's heavy artillery! In prayer we bow before God in the safety of our homes, or church, or car, and lob spiritual shells on the enemy in far away places. Long before we confront the enemy face to face we can wear him down through persistent prayer.

In the Gulf War, United States ships in the Persian Gulf launched computer-guided missiles - "smart bombs" - that hit targets hundreds of miles away with pin-point accuracy. The technology was impressive...

But not as impressive as what happens in prayer.

From our knees we can launch spiritual bombs aimed at targets all over the world. Prayers of faith bomb satanic strongholds. They lay siege to hard hearts - break down defenses - bomb away excuses.

They loosen Satan's grip... *Long before we march in with the Gospel we set the stage through prayer!*

In Mark 3:27 Jesus said, “No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.” You don't march into a lion's den without first restraining the lion - and neither do you enter Satan's domain without first neutralizing Satan's influence.

This is what we do in prayer! Jesus is stronger than Satan, and we can ask Jesus to bind Satan, *or tie his hands*. Then we can empty his house of his captives!

Prayer is the heavy, spiritual artillery!

But as with most weapons some maintenance is involved to keep the big guns firing. Here, Paul gives us a 6-point checklist for keeping our prayer life cocked and loaded! Our prayers need to be **constant, creative, conducted, consistent, compassionate, combative**...

First, our prayer life needs to be **constant**.

In verse 18, Paul writes, “*praying always.*” 1 Thessalonians 5:17 puts us, “*pray without ceasing.*”

This doesn't mean we should stay on our knees for hours, and keep our eyes shut all day... But what it does mean is that we should live our lives in a constant attitude of prayer. *Is your life a conversation with God?*

Once our family was on our way home, driving 285. An event was happening at church, so I said a prayer.

When I said "Amen," Zach, who had just turned 6 at the time, leaned over the front seat and asked, "Dad, did you have eyes closed?..." He was worried.

Actually, I pray a lot with my eyes open. I like to walk or run, and pray. *No matter what I'm doing physically I can have an ongoing conversation with God!*

Author Thomas Kelly writes, "On one level we can be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings." To "*pray always*" is to keep my thoughts *on* and *open* to God.

Second, we need to keep our prayer life **creative**.

Paul says pray with "*all prayer and supplication.*"

Prayer comes in different shapes and varieties. There's *confession, thanksgiving, intercession, adoration, meditation, supplication, petition, praise...*

Variety is the spice of life - and it'll spice up a prayer life. Always pray the same prayer and it gets stale and mechanical. Alter you prayer's *objective* and *approach*.

Here're a few suggestions... At times don't be afraid to pray for *yourself*. If you don't ask, you won't receive.

At times pray for *your friends and family* - pray for a *missionary* - by all means, pray for *your pastors*.

At times focus on nothing but God - His glory, grace, greatness... At times stop and be thankful. Show a little gratitude for all God has done... At times get angry at evil and its perpetrators. Pray for spiritual victories...

And always ask God to make you more like Jesus...

Who can forget the little girl who knelt by her bed, alongside her mom, and prayed the sweetest prayer?

She prayed for classmates and playmates - family and friends - parents and pets. She even prayed for herself. But as she ended her prayer she surprised her mom by saying, "And now God what can I do for You?"

Paul tells us to pray "*with all prayer*" - be creative.

Third, our prayer life needs to be **conducted**.

God answers Spirit-directed prays. This is why Paul says "*pray in the Spirit.*" Pray under His influence.

Here's a tip - a prayer pointer... One thing that'll help your prayer life is to find a prayer partner - someone to *share in prayer*. Meet with a friend over coffee. Pray with a pal over the phone. Hey, even text a prayer!

I'm sure God can read text messages.

But whether you know it or not, you already have a prayer partner... The Holy Spirit wants to pray with us as we pray! We should pray in concert with the Spirit!

He motivates and elevates our prayer life. He guides our thinking as we pray. If we trust Him, He'll teach us how to pray *about a given situation* - or *for a friend*.

I've heard it said, "Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God."

When I'm led by the Holy Spirit, my prayer takes on a confidence it would've otherwise lacked. As the Spirit leads I know I'm praying in cooperation with God's will.

Both corporate and private prayer should be a symphony conducted by the Maestro - the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, an effective prayer life should be **consistent**.

Paul says to pray with "*all perseverance*." Don't pray once, then quit! Keep it up! Matthew 7:7 is a familiar verse, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

But read this verse it in the Amplified Version and you get the real sense of it, "Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you." The verb tenses imply persistence... "*keeps on asking*"

Recall the parable Jesus told about the man whose guest arrived late one night. His refrigerator was empty. He had nothing to serve, so he went next door to borrow food. His neighbor didn't want to get up, but he banged on the door until the sleepy-head gave in.

This man made a scene! He embarrassed himself and his neighbor. The slumbering neighbor was forced to crawl out of bed, empty out his bread box, and give it to the man banging on his door just to shut him up.

To me, this is amazing. Prayer is compared to a sort of **Holy Rudeness**. It's like banging on a door. You've not really prayed until you *get desperate*... It's not that God is *reluctant* to answer us. He just wants us to be *unashamedly persistent to the point of desperation*.

Often we ask once, and stop. "Hey, I asked God. I'm not going to beg!" Well, why not? God is God and you're a slug, why not beg? We deserve nada. All that comes from God to us is the result of His grace.

Often God refuses to answer *our prayer* because of *our pride*. We think God owes us. We forget to ask humbly. I believe, God often waits to answer our prayer until our *desperation exceeds our sophistication*.

Fifth, our prayer life needs to be **compassionate**.

Paul says pray "*for all the saints*." Don't just pray for yourself - pray for others - both your friends and foes...

I heard of a single Christian who was praying for herself constantly. One Sunday, the lady was challenged to intercede for someone else. She agreed.

She started by praying for her mom. She asked, "God, please give my mother a handsome son-in-law!"

Remember, *when was it that God finally healed Job?* It happened "*when he prayed for his friends*."

The greatest service you can render a fellow human being is to intercede for them in heart-felt prayer.

And while Paul is on this subject of prayer, he says in verse 19, "(While you pray, pray) *for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel*."

This is amazing! Paul traveled the world sharing the Gospel. He received revelations and saw the glories of heaven. God even used Paul to help write the Bible.

Yet he still needs the country folk of Ephesus to lift him up before God in prayer. He asks them to pray for his ministry - that he would be *fruitful* and *faithful!*

Which leads to a final point... Our prayers should be **combative**. Paul didn't ask the Ephesians to pray for his safety and comfort. His request in verse 20 is "*that... I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*"

So often our prayers only concern *smooth sailing*, and *safe waters*. "*Lord, protect us and keep us happy.*"

Hey, a Christian can be dead, yet be safe and happy.

Paul wants to advance God's kingdom - win people to Jesus. He asks the Ephesians to pray that he'll seize opportunities - and walk through open doors - and boldly speak God's truth even in the face of opposition.

Never forget, **prayer is no toy - it's a weapon.**

It fulfills its truest purpose when it's deployed in the heat of battle. We'll have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but only have a few short years to win them.

So, here's what we've learned about **the unseen war.**

First, we have an **adversary**. On our own we're no match for the Devil. That's why we need to beware of his wiles - and not back down. Having done all, *stand!*

Then we need to put on our **armor** – anchor your faith to God’s truth, not your feelings - put on right desires - God’s unshakable peace - an overarching faith - renew your thoughts with the hope of salvation...

And finally, let’s charge into the battle swinging the *sword of the Spirit* and *pounding the enemy with prayer*. The **blade** and the **bomb** are our **arsenal**.

Remember, **life is a battleground, not a playground**.

There’s an unseen war going on around us. May God help us to win many and mighty victories for Him.