

The Sword of the Spirit - the Word of God

(Eph 6:17 NKJV) And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

This is the main offensive weapon we have in our arsenal. The other weapons of warfare we've looked at thus far were primarily for defense—to guard and protect the Christian against Satan's assaults. Here we are handed a weapon that is to be used offensively.

This sword is powerful enough to cut through Satan's strategies and deceits. But today we will see how it can also be used to make our enemy flee.

Today we will watch Jesus demonstrate how to effectively use the Sword of the Spirit as the devil tries to attempt our Lord to sin (Matthew 4:1-11). As we watch Jesus using this weapon against Satan, we will be able to adapt the Lord's methods for our own use.

The Bible tells us in Matthew 4:1-2 that “...*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.*”

Wait a minute! Does not the Bible say in James 1:13 say, “*Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*”?

Does not Jesus teach us to pray “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”? (Matthew 6:13). But here in Matthew 4 the Bible tells us that *the Spirit* leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Is the Scripture conflicting with itself?

No way. The key is really listening to what Jesus says when He is teaching His disciples to pray. We are to pray, “*lead us not into temptation.*” In other words, our prayer to God is that He would not allow the temptation to engulf us or get the best of us but to deliver us from the evil that could result if we yield to the temptation.

So the Spirit will lead the Christian, as He did Jesus, into the presence of many temptations and many trials but the Spirit, as we shall see, will also walk alongside us and carry us through the test, as He did with Jesus.

According to our text (Matthew 4:3) Satan is the *tempter* (1 Thessalonians 3:5). In the passage we are looking at he will attempt to tempt or entice Jesus in three ways: to *under-confidence*, *over-confidence*, and *other-confidence* with respect to God.

1. In the first temptation he attempts to make Jesus doubt His divine Sonship as the Messiah.
2. In the second temptation Satan tries to get Jesus to render a spectacular display of His confidence in God.
3. In the third temptation Satan entices Jesus to be ambitious for glory rather than to wait for the Father

to glorify Him with the glory He already had before the worlds were made (John 17).

Let's briefly look at each of the three unique attacks against Jesus by the enemy. With each encounter, we will learn how Jesus brandished the Sword of the Spirit.

1.) *The temptation to under-confidence*

(Mat 4:2 NKJV) And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

(Mat 4:3 NKJV) Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

Jesus had just fasted for forty days and forty nights. Naturally, Satan zeroed-in on the most obvious weakness of our Lord—He was hungry!

The subtlety in this temptation was that using His divine power to satisfy His bodily hunger would be perfectly legitimate. Wouldn't Jesus later use His divine power to feed the multitudes?

In this temptation, Satan was in essence saying to Jesus, *"You can't really be the Son of God. If this was true you wouldn't be feeling the way you do." Are you really the Son of God or just a mere man? Only mere mortals get hungry--prove to me you are the Son of God--command that these stones become bread."*

Satan was trying to get Jesus to *doubt* His Father and the relationship He and His Father shared. He was trying to get Jesus to step outside of the will of God in order to satisfy His intense hunger.

This should remind us of another Bible character (named Esau) who was famished and sold his birthright for a bowl of stew (Gen 25:31-35). Esau knew he was the firstborn of Isaac and all the blessings that came with that heritage but he put his hunger—he put his fleshly appetite first.

Jesus knew who He was—He was “God in the flesh (God in human form).” Just before He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, there was the scene in Matthew chapter three where He was baptized by John and the spectacular account where the Godhead came together—the Spirit descended from heaven as a dove and the voice of the Lord spoke from heaven saying, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

Nevertheless Satan tries to tempt Him to doubt the Word of His Father—that He was the “beloved Son” of the Father. How many times has Satan tempted you to doubt the Word of God?

Doubt is one of the first unbiblical, fleshly emotions Satan attempts to implant in the believer's heart. This is the same trick he played on mother Eve, in the Garden of Eden.

(Gen 3:1 NKJV) Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

How does Eve respond? She takes and eats of the forbidden fruit. How does Jesus respond to a similar temptation? Jesus counters this temptation (vv. 2, 3), which appeals to physical appetite (v. 4), with a quote from Deuteronomy 8:1-3. Let's listen to the quote in its context:

"Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers. "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

"So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

Jesus is engaged in "spiritual warfare." He is battling Satan, the prince of the power of the air. As He quotes from Deuteronomy chapter 8, He is reminding Satan that this isn't the first time he has used this trick. Satan won with Adam and Eve; he won with the children of Israel in the wilderness but he's not going to win against Jesus.

Notice Jesus' choice of weapons. He is carrying no weapon; He doesn't argue with Satan or carry on a theological debate, He uses *"the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God."*

Jesus is saying to Satan, *"Oh yeah, you want to tempt me to eat some bread rather than to obey my Father, let me tell you about some bread."*

Then Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy where the children of Israel had stopped trusting God—the same God who had delivered them from Egyptian bondage with signs and wonders from the heavens.

They had journeyed from Egypt to what was called the Wilderness of Sin and it was there that they complained and grumbled against Moses. In Exodus 16 they said, *"Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."*

So God rains from heaven strange material. In the morning when they awakened from sleep, when the dew dried up, there was on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. The people said, *"What is it?"* That's how this substance, *manna*, got its name. The word *manna* means, *"What is it?"*

All the children of Israel had to do was to take God at His Word. God said he would deliver them and kept His word. Would He now lead them out of Egypt with such a strong arm and then leave them to die?

God tests His children to see if they would trust Him after He provided the manna. He gave them rules of engagement—they could only collect enough manna to last them a day. Anything over and above that would spoil. The only exception to this rule was the day before the Sabbath. Since they couldn't collect on the Sabbath (the seventh day), on the sixth day they would be allowed to collect twice as much.

But the people still didn't take the Lord at His Word. They collected more than they needed and the portion they had left over the following morning bred worms and stank.

Like the Israelites, the average Christian will spend countless hours fretting about his or her circumstances and worrying about people and situations they can't change. They will doubt the Scripture and what it says about how God has promised to supply the Christian's needs (Matthew 6:33; Philippians 4:19).

In our text, Satan tries to exploit Jesus' physical weakness and tempt Him to doubt God's Word—specifically concerning who He was—*the Son of God*.

Like with the Israelites and Jesus, Satan will try to exploit our weaknesses and desires and longings and get us to move ahead of God and forget about keeping His Word.

But like Jesus, we need to take the sword of the Spirit and use it against Satan and his temptation. Like Jesus we need to take the sword of the Spirit and slice the temptation to doubt right into shreds.

We don't have to worry about where our meals are coming from—When the temptation to worry about sustenance comes, just quote the Word: *“God said He would supply my need.”*

We don't have to worry about what we will clothe our bodies with. When the temptation to worry about what you're going to put on and where you going to live comes, in faith and confidence just quote the Word, *“I'm not going to worry about 'What shall I eat?' or 'What shall I drink?' or 'What shall I wear?' For after all these things the pagans seek. My heavenly Father knows that I need all these things.”*

We don't have to worry about being alone or trying to find companionship—God said in Deu 10:18 *“He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.”* Just quote the Word that says, *“I'm going to be content in whatever state I am because He has promised to never leave me nor forsake me.”* (Hebrews 13:6)

Since Satan couldn't get Jesus to doubt God (to under-confidence), in round two, he tries to tempt Him in another area.

2.) *The temptation to over-confidence*

In the second temptation (Matt. 4:5, 6), Satan tries to get Jesus to show off His confidence in God.

(Mat 4:5-6 NKJV) Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

Here Satan tries to tempt our Lord to over-confidence or presuming upon His Heavenly Father.

The *pinnacle* referenced in verse 5 of our text was about 600 feet (182 m) above the valley below it. For Jesus to throw Himself down some 600 feet would be certain death if God doesn't deliver Him.

But more importantly, to throw Himself down would also cause Him to presume God's intervention just like it would be presumptuous for any of us to jump off a cliff—expecting God to send His angels to rescue us.

Another thing to consider is this: Had the Lord plunge Himself from the temple pinnacle and touched down on the temple area unharmed, the people might have acclaimed Him as Messiah—effectively bypassing the Cross. To bypass the Cross wasn't His Father's will.

Satan was saying, in essence, *“Why don't You do what the people are expecting and make some marvelous display? After all, the Scripture says **His angels** will protect You and You won't even hurt a*

foot as You come down."

During Jesus' earthly ministry He declared over and over that He was going to do His Father's will. He talked to his Heavenly Father about everything. His Father had sent Him on a mission to fulfill. He was on His Father's timetable. (John 7:6)

Have you fallen prey to Satan's enticement for you to act independent of the Father's will?

Have you fallen prey to Satan's temptation for you to do your own thing?

Have you ever been tempted not to "wait on the Lord"?

Have you ever been tempted to sin knowing that God would forgive you afterwards?

First of all, it is God's will that we trust Him in everything and for everything.

(Prov 3:5-7 NKJV) Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil.

Secondly, God wants us to live, day by day, totally dependent on Him. We find this teaching in Scripture:

(Mat 6:11 NKJV) Give us this day our daily bread.

(Mat 6:34 NKJV) "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

(Prov 27:1 NKJV) Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

(James 4:14-15 NKJV) whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

Did you notice something about Satan's strategy in this second temptation that wasn't used in the first?

Listen to Satan's words again:

(Mat 4:6 NKJV) and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

Satan misquotes and distorts the Word of God. He quotes from Psalm 91:11-12 but not accurately, for he omits a phrase that was not suited to his purpose. He left out an important phrase, "*in all Your ways.*"

According to the psalmist, a person is protected only when he is following the Lord's ways. Satan is trying to get Jesus to follow any desire for ambition and not the ways of His Father.

For Jesus to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple in some dramatic display to accommodate Himself to the people's thinking would not have been God's will.

When tempting us to sin, Satan will use the Word of God to his own advantage, even quoting it out of

context or misquoting it as he did against Jesus. I believe Satan is behind the many attempts by Christians to justify their behavior using the Word of God.

"If You are a Christian, go ahead and marry that unbeliever. For it is written: "It is better to marry than to burn."

"If You are a Christian, go ahead and take that job that will keep you away from church on Sunday. God understands. For He has said, "If anyone doesn't provide for his own, he is worse than an infidel."

"If You are a Christian, go ahead and buy that car that will put you further behind in debt. God knows what you have need of. For it is written, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."

"If You are a Christian, go ahead and fornicate. God knows that you are only human. For it is written, "The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Some time ago, a popular Baltimore pastor was discovered to have committed adultery. A friend of mine who attended this church confronted his pastor and got the following response: "God will extend to me His mercies as He did to King David when he had sinned with Bathsheba."

Satan had successfully deceived this pastor into falling prey to the temptation of exercising *over-confidence* in God. Perhaps this pastor should have prayed the prayer of King David in Psalm 19:

Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:13-14 NKJV)

Presumptuous sins are "deliberate violations" of the Word of God. Listen to what God says about these kinds of sins in the Old Testament book of Numbers:

"But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. 'Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.'" (Numbers 15:30-31 NKJV)

If Jesus had complied with Satan's suggestion He would have guilty of presumption and disqualified as our Messiah--He would have obeyed Satan rather than the will of His Father. Rather than taking matters into His own hand, Jesus submits to the will of His Father and counters with Deut. 6:16.

"You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah.

What happened in Massah?

(Exo 17:1 NKJV) Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink.

(Exo 17:2 NKJV) Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the

LORD?"

(Exo 17:3 NKJV) And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

(Exo 17:4 NKJV) So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!"

(Exo 17:5 NKJV) And the LORD said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go.

(Exo 17:6 NKJV) "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Verse 7 tells us about one of the things the children of Israel said while they quarreled with Moses:

(Exo 17:7 NKJV) So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

How would you like it if one of your children stood toe-to-toe with you defying your authority, saying to you, *"Tell me what you are going to do about it!"*

This is exactly what Satan was trying to get Jesus to act toward His Father. He was in essence saying to Jesus: *"Is the Lord with you or not Jesus? If He is with you Jesus just cast yourself down from this temple and He will save you... Prove to me that God is with you Jesus."*

Satan was taunting Jesus to take matters into his own hands and to tempt the Father to prove to Jesus that He was indeed the Son of God. After all, if Jesus jumps and the Father saves Him, He must be the Messiah.

In Matthew 4:7, Jesus says to him, *"It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" Jesus was telling Satan that an over-confidence that leads to presumption concerning the will of God might lead to the wrath of God.*

But this is exactly what Satan tempts us to do—to be over-confident in our relationship with God so that we think that because we are children of God that He is going to wink at sin in our lives.

Like Jesus, you and I should use the Sword of the Spirit by quoting to our flesh and to Satan verses like these found in Romans chapter 6: *"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* (vs. 1-2)

Here is another found in 1 Peter chapter 4: *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* (vs. 17)

Some of us have those knives that we've seen on the TV commercials where one is used for cutting, another for paring, and still another for chopping.

The Sword of the Spirit is an all-purpose weapon. It can be used to strike out at Satan when he tries to

tempt us to *under-confidence* (to doubt) and it can also be used against our adversary when he tries to attempt us to be *over-confident* and to commit presumptuous sins.

Thirdly, the Sword of the Spirit is to be used against Satan when he tempts us toward “other-confidence.”

3.) *The temptation to other-confidence*

In the third wilderness temptation Satan turns up the steam and launches against Jesus the temptation to find His confidence or esteem in something or someone other than His Father. Here we find the temptation towards ambition—*other-confidence*.

In 1st John chapter two we find the words:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

In the third recorded temptation, Satan was appealing to any trace of personal ambition that he could find in Jesus. He was hoping that he might be able to find just a hint of it in Jesus' humanity.

(Mat 4:8 NKJV) Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

(Mat 4:9 NKJV) And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

Satan was saying to Jesus, *"I'll make you king, if you would just fall down and worship me. Forget about all that suffering on the cross stuff Jesus, I'll crown you king right now"*

As with the other wilderness temptations, Satan uses this same tactic today and launches these same fiery darts against us. In our hearts there is that desire to be respected, revered and honored. We want people to like us. We want to be successful.

We want to be first. We can't stand it when our friends are promoted and we are passed over. Many of us want to be the biggest of the big shots.

Satan tries to take advantage of these desires and tempts us to take shortcuts to fame and fortune. He tempts us into putting our faith in other people and things. He tempts us away from waiting on the Lord and entices us into the realm of *other-confidence*.

Some of us may have learned in high school or college of a man named Abraham Maslow. Abraham Maslow is known for establishing the theory of a Hierarchy of Needs. This theory says that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs, and that certain lower needs need to be satisfied before higher needs can be satisfied.

According to Maslow, there are general types of needs (physiological, safety, love, esteem) that must be satisfied before a person can act unselfishly. He called these needs "deficiency needs." As long as we are motivated to satisfy these cravings, we are moving toward growth, toward self-actualization.

Maslow taught that satisfying needs is healthy; blocking gratification makes us sick or evil. In other words, we are all "needs junkies" with cravings that must be satisfied and should be satisfied or else, we become sick.

Perhaps what Maslow is describing is a characteristic of fallen humanity that Satan thought was lying dormant in Jesus. Jesus was God in human form but He came to this earth and the people who He created received Him not. Perhaps Satan thought that Jesus needed "self-actualization;" He needed to be esteemed—He needed to be liked; He needed to be worshipped.

Perhaps Satan in this last temptation was pulling out all the stops. He was dealing Jesus his best attempt to make our Lord fall.

Can you imagine—the Creator walking on this earth, alongside people that He formed and fashioned and no one recognizes Him; no one gives Him the honor due His great and holy name. No one follows him with pure motives—they would only want the bread and the fish.

Satan was telling Jesus in this last temptation, *"I will give you the kingdoms of the world if you just bow down and worship me. You can make a statement Jesus--that you are King--just worship me."*

And guess what...Satan had the right to offer Jesus the kingdoms of this world because the devil is, according to Ephesians 2:2) the "prince of this world. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says that Satan is the "god of this world."

Again, if Christ had Satan's offer accepted, He would have bypassed the Cross. Besides this, Satan was tempting Jesus with something that was going to be given Him anyway!

Let me share with you another thing that is going on with this temptation. If a child is playing with a toy you don't want him to have, how can you get it away from him? Take it by force, and he'll bawl for hours. The better way is to distract his attention by interesting him in something else. Then while his attention is diverted, you can take away the toy.

This kind of scheme is exactly what the devil uses to tempt the people of God. The lure of wealth or fame or pleasure distracts us and allows Satan to steal "faith in God" from our hearts.

Satan starts small and inconspicuous with the temptation but sooner or later you are no longer trusting in the Lord but in other things, like your bank account or your reputation or your influence or your ingenuity or your good looks or charm or charisma or friends or job.

Referring to all the parts of the Armor of God, Paul writes in Ephesians 6:13, *"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand (resist, stand your ground) in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."*

When Paul gets to the Sword of the Spirit in verse 17, he writes, *"and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."* The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.

Permit me to end this message with a quote from a sermon by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, preached in 1887. Here he is elaborating on the verse in Hebrews chapter four that says, *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any 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. And there is*

no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” (vs. 12-13)

Here is what Spurgeon said:

“The Word of God is alive. This is a living Book. This is a mystery which only living men, quickened by the Spirit of God, will fully comprehend. Take up any other book except the Bible and there may be a measure of power in it, but there is not that indescribable vitality in it that breathes and speaks and pleads and conquers as in the case of this sacred volume. There is a style of majesty about God’s Word, and with this majesty a vividness never found elsewhere.

No other writing has within it a heavenly life whereby it works miracles, and even imparts life to its reader. It is a living and incorruptible seed. It moves, it stirs itself, it lives, it communes with living men as a living Word... The Book has wrestled with me; the Book has smitten me; the Book has comforted me; the Book has smiled on me; the Book has frowned on me; the Book has clasped my hand; the Book has warmed my heart. The Book weeps with me, and sings with me; it whispers to me, and it preaches to me; it maps my way, and holds up my goings; it was to me the Young Man’s Best Companion, and it is still my Morning and Evening Chaplain. It is a live Book: all over alive; from its first chapter to its last word it is full of a strange, mystic vitality, which makes it have pre-eminence over every other writing for every living child of God.”

Child of God, its inevitable that Satan will come at you, as he did Jesus, to tempt you to doubt God’s love, grace and provision. He will come at you to tempt you to sin presumptuously, thinking that God will ignore your sin. Satan will come at you to tempt you to give in to your inner desire for ambition, honor, attention and respect from others.

When he does, you need to have ready at your side or in your heart, the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God so that you can resist these attacks. Are you ready?