



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 6:16-17

Ephesians

“The Christian’s Armor II”

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Kent. Well, we're resuming our study in the book of Ephesians this morning and we're about finished. We'll finish, Lord willing, next Sunday. So we begin the year by finishing our study in Ephesians. This morning we're finishing our study in the armor of God and our verses are verse 16 and 17 of Ephesians 6. So it's a brief reading of scripture and so what I think I'll do is begin reading with verse 13. Paul mentions the spiritual warfare that we are in and then he begins to give the pieces of the armor, the six pieces, we have looked at three of them and we'll look at the other three this morning, but let me read those verses that give us the full view of the armor of God.

Paul says in verse 13, 'therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day and having done everything to stand firm.' Evil day is probably a particular day of temptation that comes in the life of every believer. Not every day is particularly difficult. We are in a spiritual battle, as he says in verse 12, a struggle and it is constant, but some days it's more difficult than others and some days we face a day that is unlike the other days, in which things are particularly difficult, particularly tragic, particularly tempting, the day of evil. So always be clothed in the armor of God, because you don't know when that day is coming. So that's his exhortation, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the day of evil and having done everything to stand firm. Stand firm, therefore, having girded your loins with truth.

We could say, having put on the belt of truth and having put on the breast plate of righteousness and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, in addition to all, that is in addition to all these pieces of armor, taking up the shield of faith, with which you

will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. May the Lord bless this reading of his word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for this morning, the beauty of it, the sunshine, most importantly, the opportunity to come together as the body of Christ, as many and women who have been purchased from the foundation of the world and have put their faith in the savior and in so doing, receive forgiveness, life and I now have this opportunity to open the scriptures together and study your word. Father, we are reminded in this portion of scripture of the importance of the truth of the word of God. Paul begins this list of the armor that we are to put on with the belt of truth. Our minds are to be filled with your truth and then he concludes with the sword of spirit, which is the word of God. The instruction that we are to be able to use it, use it effectively in this life.

So Lord, as we take up the scriptures, take up the sword, take up the word of God, we'd pray that you'd bless us as we study, that you would teach us. We do thank you so much, Father, for the blessings we have in Christ, that among those blessings, the great wealth and treasure that is ours. Not only laid up in heaven but within us, is the treasure of the Holy Spirit, with whom we have been sealed, who protects us, who is the down payment of the inheritance to come, who is the surety and the seal that we will be brought in to that great inheritance someday. In the meantime, we have the power of the third person of the trinity, the life of the spirit of God within us, that not only empowers us, but enlightens us, who instructs us, who teaches us. And we pray that he would teach us well this morning and instruct us and give us not only a sense of the importance of the scriptures for our lives, but for the importance of the full armor of God and may we be urged by him and sense the urgency of putting it on daily, being fully clothed with that armor.

We do live in time of conflict and we need to be ready for that, Father. May we not be lulled to sleep by times that seem peaceful, by times of prosperity, but may we be alert and standing firm and we pray that you'd give us the victory. Thank you for the victory that we have in Christ, that our destiny is secured by him and for all the joy that that should give. We thank you for all the spiritual blessings you've given us. We are a needy people, though, Father. We constantly are in need of your grace and looking to you and we are needy in the material realm as well, Father, and so we remember that. We pray for those who are burdened with special needs,

we pray for the unemployed, we pray for the sick, for the grieving, we pray that you might give them encouragement, build them up in the faith, help them to look to you.

Paul reminds us that you are the source of our security, the shield of faith, as found in the shield of protection that you give as we trust in you. So we pray that all would be encouraged to do that. The physical needs that we have, we would look to you for the supply and the spiritual ability to live lives that are pleasing to you, that we might look to you for that. We pray, Father, for our nation and we pray that you would bless it. We pray for our leaders, we pray for our President, for the Congress, for the courts, for all those officials that you have placed over us, that you would give them wisdom in days of great decisions that must be made. We pray that you would enable them to make the wise decision for those decisions that are of a domestic nature and those that are of an international nature, we pray that you'd give wisdom.

We pray for our troops in Europe, we pray that you would bless them and protect them and we pray for our people here in this country, that you would bless them, particularly in a spiritual way. We do pray for financial and political prosperity and peace and yet, Lord, that, while it is important and while a good moral climate in this land is important, the most important thing of all is the spiritual welfare of men and women. So, to that end, we pray that you would bless with hearts that receive your truth, that come to know Christ in a personal way. And we pray that you would use us in that great work of the ministry, of the great commission, of carrying the gospel into our neighborhoods, in the workplace.

And to that end we pray that you would prepare us through our time of study this morning. We pray that you'd bless us as we return this evening to celebrate our Lord's death at the Lord's Supper, remembering what he accomplished for us on the cross. We are reminded of that supper every Sunday evening, that it is until he comes and so we are reminded that he is coming again and he promises at the very end of the Bible, at the end of the book of Revelation that he is coming and he is coming quickly. We look forward to that day, Father, and as we face the new year, we pray that it might be in this new year, that the year will not even be completed before he returns. We would rejoice to see that.

So we look to you, pray that you would keep those things on our mind, that we might live our lives in light of his coming again, live our lives in a way in which we treasure up riches in heaven. We commit that to you, we pray you bless us now, bless us as we sing our final hymn,

may it be a time of joyful signing and good preparation of the heart for the time of study together. We pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.

[Message] In the 16th century, Albrecht Dürer, who became the great artist of the reformation, made an engraving entitled, 'Knight Death and Devil.' The picture's a knight dressed in full armor, mounted on a horse and traveling to a city on a hill, that's pictured off in the distance. Engraving is an allegory of the Christian soldier on the road of faith that leads to the heavenly Jerusalem but the path that he travels is not an easy one. The enemy is close at hand. On one side, death stares up at him with an evil grin on his face, holding an hourglass, a reminder that life is short and uncertain. The devil is at his back with a grotesque head and a long spear. In his path there are lizards and skulls. All a reminder that the way of faith is hard, but the night remains steadfast.

He's looking ahead on his journey to the heavenly city and to the hope that's before him. It's one of Dürer's finest engravings and it pictures the theme of the last half of Ephesians 6, the spiritual warfare and the Christian's armor. Every Christian is a soldier. Our struggle is against unseen realities, powers of darkness, spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places. The picture that Paul gives is not of a knight in medieval armor mounted on a horse but a soldier standing his ground, engaged in hand to hand combat. In verse 12, he describes our spiritual conflict as a struggle and that word that Paul uses means wrestling and it's used that way in some of the extra biblical Greek literature of Paul's day and suggests the close, demanding nature of the struggle that we are in with our spiritual enemies.

It's like hand to hand combat and hand to hand combat in the ancient world, in an ancient warfare was grim to say the least. Homer gives some vivid details of it in the Iliad. He writes of shields clashing, of spears and arrows piercing livers and eyeballs, of swords hacking off limbs and in trails being spilled on the ground. In one battle, he describes a spear striking a warrior in the back of the head. The bronze push straight through his teeth and cut away his tongue, he crashed in the dust, the gold, bronze clenched in his teeth, pretty dramatic description, just one of many that he gives, but I think it gives grizzly nature of ancient battle. Ancient warfare was horrifying and Paul must have had a sense of what it was like, he must have known some of those details and that's why he describes our struggle here as that kind of a warfare.

It's a struggle that's every bit as deadly as those kinds of scenes that we might be able to picture. It's actually more dangerous. There's an unseen struggle with eternal consequences. So Paul urges readiness for battle. He says, 'take up the full armor of God' and then describes six pieces of armor. His model for the Christian is the Roman soldier, he was very familiar with Roman soldiers. When Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, he was a prisoner in Rome and he spent his days chained to a soldier, so it came naturally to him to make comparisons between the soldiers weapons and warfare and those of the Christian. We've consider the first three weapons or pieces of armor. The belt, which is biblical truth, which is to govern all of our thinking. The boots, which is the piece that comes from the gospel and gives us stability in the Christian life, as we seek to stand our ground and then the breastplate, which is the imputed righteousness of justification, which, when properly understood, leads to righteous living, holy conduct.

Now in verse 16 and 17, we see the next three pieces of armor, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit. First in verse 16, the shield, 'in addition to all this, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.' Roman soldiers had two shields. One was a small, round shield about two feet in diameter that was used in close hand-to-hand combat. The other was a large shield that they used when advancing in battle. It's the second shield, this large shield that Paul has in mind here. The word that is used is a Greek word that is related to the word door and that would suggest a large rectangular shape and the Roman shield was large enough to cover most of the body.

It was made of two layers of wood that were glued together and covered first with linen and then with Hyde or with leather and bound on top and bottom with iron. It was designed especially to protect the soldier against flaming arrows, arrows that were dipped in pitch and then shot and arrows that you can imagine had great potential for damage and would often cause panic within an army, as they saw this reign of flaming arrows coming at them. But these shields gave great protection to the soldiers. The soldiers could line up behind these rows of shields and they would form a kind of wall of protection and they would catch the flaming arrows and extinguish them.

So that was the shield that Paul had in mind, here and we have a shield. It's not a material shield of this kind, it's a spiritual one, it's a shield of faith. The act of believing and not just believing, not just having faith, but faith in the proper object, faith in God, relying upon here, trusting in his word. Proverbs 30:5 states, 'he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.' So the

shield of faith is taking refuge in him. It is relying on him and trusting in his word, trusting in his promises. That's what protects us against the flaming missiles of Satan and he showers us with those. We don't see them, but they're there. We are showered with these flaming missiles.

Charles Hodge, the great Princeton theologian of a century ago writes, 'it is a common experience for God's people that, at times, horrible thoughts crowd on the mind, which cannot be accounted for, by any ordinary law of mental action, which cannot be dislodged. They stick like burning arrows, fill the soul with agony, with thoughts of lust, thoughts of blasphemy and doubt, disturb the Christian and cause the Christian to wonder, 'how could I think such thoughts?' I'm reading my Bible, reflecting on good things and suddenly my mind begins to wander and goes into some terrible subjects or suddenly something comes to mind and it's very disturbing, I'm in the midst of prayer and my mind has suddenly settled on something that is most disturbing. How does this happen? Where do these thoughts come from?

Well, they can come from the flesh, but many times, those thoughts that simply pop into our mind, that seem to come out of nowhere, they come from the evil one. They are his flaming missiles, his fiery darts and he has many in his vast ___ [*Inaudible*]. He hits us with thoughts and temptations that enflame passions, excite ambition and pride and anger and our hearts, being what they are, deceitful and desperately wicked as Jeremiah tells us, we are often slow to extinguish them. We sometimes hold onto those thoughts and allow them to continue to burn and cause great trouble for us.

The only protection, the only shield we have is faith. It's only by looking to Christ and seeking his help that we can resist these assaults. Job is a very good study on this subject. If you have ever been afflicted as he was, he's the great example of that in the Old Testament and not just a man who was afflicted physically, that's how it all began but it was an affliction that occurred emotionally and spiritually as well. After he had lost his children, his wealth and his health, his wife came to him while he was sitting on an ash, covered with sore boils, looking at the situation, she said, 'give up your integrity, curse God and die.' After all, if God would do this, God would allow these things to come upon you, he can't be a very good God.

Now that was the doubt she was sowing in his mind, the doubt of God's goodness, at least God's goodness toward Job, but Job knew God and knew that God is holy, just and good and all that he does, he does according to his infinite wisdom. We may not understand it all but

we can know that if we know God and he knew God and knew that we must accept adversity as well as the good things that God lives. So in spite of his circumstances, he trusted in God, he held fast to his integrity, that's faith and that's what shields us from doubt. And then Job's friends came to comfort him and instead became arrows that afflicted him. They raised doubt about his own goodness and his own integrity and their argument was something like, we know that God rewards the good and he punishes the evil and you're suffering greatly, therefore, you must be evil, you must have done something bad, you must have brought all this on yourself.

So this lengthy dialogue goes on between Job and his friends and the result was Job went through a long period of great discouragement. Kent Hughes in his commentary on the book of Ephesians writes, 'some of the most lethal arrows, come from within our own can, come from our own friends with arrows of rejection and criticism and hypocrisy.' Now that's very true and you see that in the bible, you see that particularly in the Psalms because David's experience was just that. Frequently, those who were closest to him, those he trusted were the ones who turned on him. He writes, for example, in Psalm 64, of those who sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows, they shoot from ambush at the innocent man, they shoot at him suddenly without fear. They lie in ambush because you don't expect it to come from your friends but your friends are sharpening their tongue and they're directing their thoughts and their words at you in a hostile way. That's when we need the shield of faith because the word of God informs us of both the nature of God and the nature of man and it informs us that God is faithful.

Regardless of the circumstances, God is faithful always. He never abandons us but men often do. We're faithless and we can abandon our friends and we can turn on them. So faith in these things, in the word of God, in the knowledge that he gives us, gives us confidence in him and it gives us an understanding of the situation of what men are like and what we're like and it enables us to be the kind of people that forgive those who do transgress against us. Satan shoots his fiery darts at us in many ways, but faith snuffs them out. The apostle John wrote, 'this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.' Faith in God's word keeps us in close communion with him. If we're not in God's word, if we're not studying it, then we're not going to be in close fellowship with our Lord and that is essential because Jude writes, 'he is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy.'

Who is able to do that? Your friends? Your job? Your pleasant circumstances? No, what Jude says is he, God, is able to make you stand and that's what Paul is exhorting us to do in this

section on the spiritual battle, to stand firm. God's able to make us stand and not only to do that, he will make us stand in his glory and his presence, blameless and with great joy. So we're to look to him. That's the promise that he gives, as he gives us the victory, we are to trust in him. Faith is our shield, the next piece of armor is the helmet of salvation. The helmet of the Roman soldier was sometimes made of leather but usually of tough metal, either bronze or iron, it had a neck guard in the back and then it had cheek guards on the side and was durable enough that nothing short of an ax or a hammer could pierce it.

So it offered vital protection, protection to a most important part of the body, the head and the Christian has a helmet. The helmet that we have is salvation and it's significant that when Paul says take the helmet, he uses a different Greek word from the one used earlier in verse 13 and 16. This word for take usually translated, usually means receive and so take up the shield of faith and receive the helmet of salvation. Paul does not make that change for stylistic reasons. Paul changes the words, no doubt for the purpose of reminding us that salvation is God's work. It's not the result of our own initiative, it's not the result of things that we have done. It is a work of God, completely. Salvation is of the Lord.

Jonah tells us, we see that throughout the scriptures and so it is a gift. It is a gift to be received through faith. So that's the picture we have of Christ, handing us the helmet of salvation and we receive it. Salvation is a complete work, it is salvation past, present and future and what a joy that is to know, that salvation is a completed work and because it is a completed work, it keeps us safe, absolutely safe from the enemies' blows. A believer in Jesus Christ is absolutely secure. No one can snatch us out of his hand, he promises that in John 10. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, Paul promises that in Romans 8. God gives eternal life to the believer and put an emphasis upon that word eternal, it's eternal, it never ends. It's not temporary life, it's eternal life and that fact, the realization that salvation is settled. There's nothing tenuous about it, it is a settled fact for the believer. That gives great confidence and joy in the midst of the spiritual battle, in the midst of the most difficult trying of times gives confidence to fight, to face the challenges and the dangers in the path of faith to face death itself.

So the fifth piece of armor that we have is this helmet of salvation. At this point, all of the equipment that Paul has mentioned has been defensive. The sixth piece of armor, this last piece that he mentions is the only weapon of attack as well as defense. It is the sword, the Roman soldiers used a short double edged sword that was effective in close fighting and that's what Paul

has in mind here. He calls it the sword of the spirit because it comes from the spirit, the Holy Spirit gives us the sword and as Paul defines the sword, it is the word of God. So our sword is the scriptures, which have been given to us by the spirit of God through inspiration. All scripture Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16, is inspired by God. All of it, every word of it is God breathed. So it is inherent, it is completely reliable. We have it from the spirit of truth, that's what the Holy Spirit is. That's how our Lord describes him in John 14. The spirit of truth and so the word that he gives us is truth. It is the word of God.

Now the term that Paul uses here for word is not the familiar Greek word, logos, but the word rhema, which refers more to individual words and particular specific texts of scripture. So Paul is not referring to a general knowledge of scripture, as with the belt of truth in verse 14, but to knowing specific texts of scripture and using them effectively, like a sword, to cut through peoples defense and defend against error. It's knowing specific promises that help in time of trial, when we go through specific or particular difficulties. We need to know texts of scripture that address those very issues that we face. Gospel text, when we are not on the defensive, but on the offensive, when we are spreading the gospel and telling people about Christ, we need to know text from the bible that apply to that very issue of evangelism.

So the exhortation is to know the scriptures and know how to use the scripture, be efficient in that. We simply need to know the word of God and that is an emphasis of this portion of the book of Ephesians, but it is an emphasis throughout the entire Bible. Go back to the Old Testament, you see it. You see the importance of it in Deuteronomy 32, where Moses is concluding his ministry with the people of Israel, he's giving his final sermon to the nation and in his parting words he says to the people to take to heart all of the words that he has spoke to them, the words that had been given to him by God, to take to heart the word of the law that had been passed onto him, he says, for it is not an idle word for you, indeed it is your life.

That's how vital the word of God is to us. It's not just an interesting book, it's not just a good book to read, particularly on special occasions or occasionally. 'This is life itself,' Moses says, 'take it to heart.' That's what we're to do. It is our life. Paul says it is our weapon, both of defense and offense, a divine weapon and because it is a divine weapon, it is far greater than human reason, far more effective than clever arguments. We get a sense of how effective it is, how powerful it is, from what Isaiah says in Isaiah 55:11, where quoting God, he writes, 'so shall

my word be which goes forth from my mouth.' It shall not return to me empty, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the manner from which I said it.'

In other words, the word of God is effective. This is not like any other book of literature. Shakespeare is great literature and Shakespeare had insight on life and he spoke a lot of things or wrote a lot of things that were true. That's not the word of God. The great poets, the great writers who produce great literature have not produced the word of God. This book, the bible is unique of all literature. It is the word of God and because it is the word of God, the spirit of God attends it. He ministers through it, that's how he ministers and he makes it effective. It shall not return to me empty, God says. It is an effective word and so we're to use it and just as the Roman soldier used his short double edged sword to both defend himself and attack his opponent, we are to use the word of God to combat error and false ideas and false morals, all of that, which surrounds us, we're constantly faced with those false notions and the only way that we can deal with them is with the word of God.

A great example of that is our Lord, himself. When he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, Matthew records it in Matthew 4. Satan tempted our Lord in the most clever of ways, by using scripture. Satan knows the bible, he knows it very well, knows it better than you know it, better than I know it, better than anyone I know knows it. He's had millennia to study it and to master it and he's mastered it for evil, to turn it against its meaning and that's what he did with our Lord, he quoted the scriptures. He appeared as Paul said, as an angel of light, he didn't come as an evil being, he came quoting the very word of God to our Lord and yet our Lord dealt with it in the most effective way, the proper way, he responded to each one of those thrusts of the enemy with the scripture.

He quoted scripture back to Satan and Satan, in the end, left him. That sheds light, I think, on James' statement, James 4:7, resist the devil and he will flee from you. How do we resist the devil? He doesn't define it in that verse. We don't resist him by simply being zealous or with our emotions, we resist him as our Lord resisted him, with the word of God and when our Lord resisted him with the word of God, the battle came to an end and the devil left and he will flee from us when we use the scriptures and use them effectively and wisely. But of course to do that, we have to know the scripture. We have to be like the Psalmist, who writes in Psalm 119, 'thy word I have treasured in my heart that I may not sin against thee.' Now what he did, what the Psalmist did in Psalm 119, is what David did in Psalm 1.

David says in Psalm 1 that he meditates in God's work day and night. He delights in the law of the Lord, delights in the word of God, in the Psalmist of Psalm 119, treasures it all up in his mind, fills his mind with the word of God, which he says, protects him from sin, protects him from deception, it protects him from impure thoughts. The word of God sanctifies the mind. That is he cleans it up, it introduces pure thoughts, the thoughts of God, which have a cleansing effect upon our thinking and what we fill our mind with and then because it's truth, because it's light, it exposes error when error confronts us. So it's a defense, defense against sin, a defense against the devil's schemes.

John Bunyan illustrates this in Pilgrim's Progress, shortly after Christian is given his armor. He is met by a great monster, a Apollyon, the destroyer, the devil, who was prince of the city of destruction, Christian's hometown, from which he had fled. Apollyon tries to persuade Christian to return and once again be his subject, but Christian refuses and so failing to persuade him, Apollyon tries to destroy him and the two begin wrestling with each other and as they struggle, Apollyon knocks Christian down with such a blow that he loses his sword and without his weapon, the monster sees his opportunity and he moves in for the kill and just as he is about to deliver his final blow, Christian reaches out and he grabs his sword and then he runs through Apollyon, saying, 'nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.' And with that Apollyon spreads his dragon wings and flies away dripping blood over the fields as he goes.

The word of God is our sword and it is a defensive weapon that keeps the enemy away, that repels the devil, repels the enemy, but it is also a weapon of attack, as well a weapon of defense, it's a weapon of offense and of Hebrews 4:12, the author writes, 'the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edge sword and piercing as far as the division of the soul and spirit of both joints and marrow and able to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. It's very accurate as it cuts. It cuts through a person's defenses and exposes error and in so doing, it pierces the person with the truth, a shaft of light comes to the heart, the mind, through the teaching of the word of God.

In 2 Corinthians 10:4, Paul says the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. What fortresses of the mind, of error, of that which we have constructed or men have constructed within their mind to protect their self-centered life from being brought under the scrutiny of God. The word of God comes in and it

breaks down those fortresses. It did for Martin Luther. As a monk, he worked and fasted and sweated and prayed in a great effort to earn God's acceptance but it was all in vain. It led to nothing but frustration and anger in Luther. It was through the word of scripture, specifically the text that just shall live by faith that he was delivered and when he came to understand that salvation is through faith alone, he began to understand the word of God as he had never understood it before and he began to see as he understood the word of God the errors of the Roman church and he began to expose those errors. Luther became a captive of the scriptures.

When he debated the scholars of the church, he took a stand on the scriptures and in one famous debate, he lost the debate on the grounds of tradition, but he won the debate in terms of scripture, because he knew the scriptures better than his opponent. He taught the scriptures in the pulpit, he taught the scriptures in the classroom, he translated the bible into German and the reformation took hold and it spread throughout Europe. Later in his life, when Luther reflected back on that first great stand that he took with a diet of worms, he said, 'the word did it all. While I sat still and drank beer with Phillip and [Amsdorf](#), God dealt the papacy a mighty blow. While I sat, having preached the word, I sat, the word of God did it.' It's powerful. God's word does not return void.

One of the great watch words of the reformation was Sola Scriptura, scripture alone and you see that throughout the reformation, throughout Europe it was the scriptures that were being taught, Zurich Zwingli preached through the New Testament and the Psalms. He began with Matthew and he preached all the way through. In Geneva, Calvin did the same thing, he preached through the bible, book by book, verse by verse. It was this return to the study of the bible that gave power to the reformation. The word of God is life. The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword. It is powerful in our defense against error and in driving away doubts and fears all of those thoughts that Satan sows within our mind in various ways. It defeats the power of Satan and brings down his fortresses.

The church has only been powerful when it has been grounded in the word of God. Once it leaves that, it may have size, it may have glitter and glamour and it may have something that attracts people, but it doesn't have power. Its power is only present when it is grounded in the word of God and that is just as true for the Christian, personally, individually. We are strong spiritually. We are successful spiritually, maybe not financially but spiritually successful and content only when the Christian is studying the word of God. That's why Satan's greatest scheme

is to keep us out of the word of God. If he can't inspire governments to ban Bibles or burn them, then he tries to influence Christians not to read them and to leave them on their nightstands to gather dust. I read a story about a Scottish preacher who tried to help his congregation by teaching some of the illiterate members how to read.

So he spent a great deal of time with these different members and one of them was an old Scotsman to whom he gave a number of lessons, helping him through the easy portions of the Bible, when he was suddenly called away from the church for a period of time. A few months later he came and again, he went to visit this older man, the man wasn't there but his wife was and so the preacher asked how he was doing with this reading. Is he getting through the bible he asked? Oh no, his wife answered. He got out of the bible and into the newspaper long ago. Does this sound familiar? It does to me. How many of us know the sports page better than we know the book of Romans? It's a lot more fun to read about Emmett's 25th touchdown or read what the sportswriters have to say about Barry's call on fourth and one or begin to think about the matchup between the Cowboys and the Eagles this next week.

I enjoy reading it, I confess that but it's Romans that is life for us, it's John and Ephesians and Hebrews and all 66 books of the Bible that is our sword. Sports and news, those are all legitimate interests and pastimes, there's nothing wrong with them and I'm not going to stop reading the sports page after this sermon. But we always face this danger of allowing legitimate things and good things to interfere with the best things, with the vital things, crowding out our time of prayer, crowding out our time of study and if you are not in the scriptures. If that is not a central part of your life, then you have been duped by the devil. We need to know the word of God. There are people who have been Christians for years that never read through the entire bible once.

Now maybe that's true of some of you, I don't know. I don't know who has or who hasn't, I'm not thinking of anyone in particular, but I know that's true. It's really not that difficult to read through the bible. You can read through the bible in a year, reading, according to my calculations, five pages a day and you actually got a break this year because this is a leap year and so you've got an extra year, you can even rest on that day if you want. But I think you can finish before the year is up, if you read, consistently, five pages a day. I read, the other day, where H.A. Ironside had read through the bible 14 times by the time he was 14. He became a great teacher of the Bible. He was a man with great gift, you know that by reading his

commentaries, but he was a great man, a great teacher of the Bible, because he knew the word of God, loved the word of God. As one writer said of him, 'his mark is still on Chicago and the world' because he was a man who loved the scriptures. A love for the Bible is a sign of an earnest Christian. A desire to read and study it, a desire to hear it taught. After all, we are talking about the word of God.

The word of God, should we not have an interest in the very word of God? Of course we should and that is an interest that pays off. The Bible enlightens and empowers us. It promises to give understand to the simple and make us wiser than our enemies. Those are great promises and those are promises that everyone of us can realize if we will apply ourselves to the Bible, you're not too young to do that. If a man can read it 14 times by the time he's 14 years of age, everyone in here can do that and the promise is if we apply ourselves to the word of God, we will come to know it and be wiser than our enemies.

That means we must read the Bible regularly, daily if possible, it's not always possible to do that and I would not set up a law or rule for someone but certainly, we need to be reading it consistently. We need to be going over and over Bible truth, reading and rereading it and meditating on it. It's not enough to simply read it. We must think about what we're reading and we should memorize the scriptures, treasure it up in our hearts. That's what our Lord had done. By the time he's out there in the wilderness, as a young man, he knew the word of God. By the age of 12, he's got an amazing knowledge of the scriptures and we might say, 'well, sure he does, he's the son of God.' No, in his humanity, he knew the word of God because as a man, he applied himself to the study of it and he mastered it and he used it and he triumphed because of it and we, too, will triumph as we use it.

The word of God is our sword but it takes skill to be a swordsmen. It takes skill to use his scripture. It takes time and study and effort, but that's necessary. It's not optional, it's necessary if we are to enjoy victory in our lives and enjoy a vital Christian life. Well, today, we are at the end of 1995. I did not plan this to be a New Year's sermon, but in the providence of God, we've arrived at the end of the year and we're on the threshold of 1996 and we have 366 days this year before us, of which we must give an account someday. So it is a wise thing to consider how we're going to live our life in the year to come and what we're going to apply ourselves to. May I suggest that it's a wise thing and a very profitable thing for each of us to

apply ourselves to the Bible, to reading it, to studying it, to memorizing some scripture, gaining skill with the sword and learning to use the full armor of God.

We are at war, we are in an invisible war and it is a dangerous war. There are unseen enemies all around, there are temptations and dangers in our path, there is a day of evil coming. We don't know when it's going to happen, we need to be prepared for it at all times. So we don't know what is before us. We are on a path of faith that has many obstacles and dangers, but we can follow the path of faith confidently, we can follow it joyfully. It seems like an odd statement to make, we are in a battle and we can be joyful in the midst of a hot, intense battle and yet we can. We can be like that knight in the old engraving who looks forward to his heavenly hope and remains steadfast while surrounded by enemies, unaffected by the dangers are near and the obstacles in his path because he's a man of faith and he is clothed in his armor. He must always be in our armor. Christians are soldiers and daily we must be putting it on, putting on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the boots of peace, the shield of faith and taking the helmet of salvation, sword of the spirit, the word of God.

God has made adequate provision for every believer in Jesus Christ in this conflict against evil. He has made available a complete set of weapons. It is for us to put those weapons to proper use and as we do and do it God's strength, in his might, we will triumph. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us but do you know him who loves us? Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? Do you know him as your savior? If not, if you're here this morning without personal knowledge of Jesus Christ and look to him, trust in him, realize that you are a sinner, living in the city of destruction, under the wrath of God, but Christ is the way of escape. God has not left us in that condition, he has given a way of escape. It is the person and the work of Jesus Christ, he has paid the full penalty for sin in his death on the cross so that all believe who believe in him receive the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

Learn as Luther did that the just shall live by faith, not by works, not by effort, by faith alone, trust in Christ and live. May God help you to do that. May he help each of us to stand firm, fully clothed with the armor of God. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank you for the truth that we have for the apostle, which is truth from the spirit of God that was given to him. All scripture is inspired by you, it's profitable and we thank you, Father, for the gift of it. We pray that we will

apply ourselves to it, that we will make good use of the scriptures and not only that, but we will put on the full armor of God and that we will be able to stand in the day of evil, we will be able to stand firm against all of the temptations of the evil one. We pray that you'd make us strong, that we might live lives that please you. There be any in attendance that do not know Christ, pray that you would bring them to a conviction of sin, may the word be that sword, which cuts through their defenses and pierces them with the truth that they are sinners, in need of a savior and the savior has come in Christ, so that all who believe in him receive forgiveness. Move upon their hearts that they might believe and cause each of us to be earnest and zealous in the faith. We pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.