

A Mighty Weapon Ephesians 6:17

Introduction

Dr. Rosalind Picard is a high-tech MIT professor who works in the area of AI / Affective computing – her work was used in the development of the first smart watch – used for neurology patients – to monitor seizures.

Rosalind had made a decision in high school to be an atheist – she said, ‘I believed smart people didn’t need religion.’ She considered people who believe in God to be uneducated / etc.

One night – Rosalind babysat for a doctor and his wife – at the end of the evening they invited her to go to church with them sometime. Rosalind was surprised because they did not seem uneducated to her at all. She declined the offer – but did eventually accept their suggestion that she try reading the bible - - - specifically the book of Proverbs.

Rosalind: ‘When I first opened the Bible . . . I expected to find phony miracles, made -up creatures, and assorted gobbledygook - to my surprise, Proverbs was full of wisdom. I had to pause while reading and think.’

Rosalind went on to read the entire Bible, and it intrigued her more than she could have imagined. She felt a strange sense of being spoken to – and began to wonder if their might be a God. She read the bible through a second time but felt conflicted. She did not want to believe in God - - but still – she felt a peculiar sense of love and presence that she could not ignore. Her knowledge of Scripture grew - - and she eventually turned to Christ as her Savior.

Dr. Picard: ‘I lost nothing of my urge to seek new knowledge. In fact, I felt emboldened to ask even tougher questions about how the world works.’

She reflects back:

Dr. Picard: ‘I once thought I was too smart to believe in God - - - now I know I was an arrogant fool who snubbed the greatest Mind in the cosmos - the Author of all science, mathematics, art, and everything else there is to know.’

Of course – Rosalind is not alone in her experience with the Bible and the Christian faith

Hebrews 4:12 - ‘For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart

Spurgeon: ‘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 . . . No other writing has within it a heavenly life whereby it imparts life to its reader. It is a living and incorruptible seed.’

Today we come to the soldier's sword – in our consideration of the spiritual armor of God for the Christian

The Christian's sword is none other than the Bible / God's Truth

The Bible is portrayed to us as a mighty weapon in this fight

Just as a soldier would not dare go into battle unarmed - - - the Christian living in the battle field of this world - - - dare not enter the arena without his sword

People who try to follow Christ with little bible knowledge / little bible reading / very little bible memory - - - are at a great disadvantage / greatly weakened in the battle

The cause of much spiritual failure / being overcome by sin - - lies right here - - - goes back to a failure to effectively use the sword of the word in battle

But – disciples that make it their purpose to grow in the knowledge of the Scriptures - - - and to have Scripture ready in their minds to use against temptation - - - and spiritual attack - - - find that it is indeed a mighty weapon – indispensable for this conflict

This morning we will look at the Sword of the Spirit – the Word of God - - - and how to use it in battle

I. Take up the Sword of the Spirit - v. 17

The Roman sword Paul refers to here was a short sword - - - about 18 inches long – double-edged for hand to hand combat [μαχαίρα]

This was the term used for the sword Peter had when Jesus was arrested - - - and he cut off the ear of the high priest's slave

Paul says that the Bible – is a kind of weapon in the spiritual conflict

We wrestle not against flesh and blood / the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh

II Cor. 10:4 - 'For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.'

Things like Scripture and prayer – are mighty weapons in the battle

The Christian soldier needs to take care that he not neglect this vital weapon in the fight

J.H. Jowett: 'A man without a sword is in a sorry way when the devil leaps upon him. That was the tragic plight of Judas Iscariot. When the Chief Priests and scribes came to bargain with him, to induce him to sell his Lord, he ought to have had his

sword ready, and to have run it through the devilish suggestion. But somehow he had lost his sword, and he was undone.'

We face temptations in this world / hear competing voices telling us what to do

The Christian soldier becomes mighty when he:

- 1) Has clear knowledge of what God's Word says about the situation / temptation
- 2) Refers back the Scripture where that knowledge is found

Psalm 119:11 - 'Thy Word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee.'
[KJV]

If you don't read your Bible

If you don't know the Bible very well – have any scripture memorized - - - you simply will be at a disadvantage when temptation comes / you will be more vulnerable to spiritual failure when the waves of life roll in

Satan comes and tempts you to some sin – pride / anger / lust / resentment / greed

Satan says, 'Why should you forgive that person? They don't deserve it!'

If you have your sword ready – you'll say: 'Yes – but the Lord says, 'forgive one another just as God in Christ also hath forgiven you.' - Eph. 4:32

Using the sword – is when we apply biblical truth - - - in a context where we are tempted– or encounter a teaching or philosophy or worldview that is unbiblical - - - and we turn to the Scriptures and say, 'This is what God says'

A Christian who effectively wields his sword - - - is a Christian who thinks biblically

Satan comes along and says, 'this sin is not a big deal - - - everybody is doing it / etc.'

The Christian can reach for his sword and slay that thought with a number of Scripture verses

Gal. 6:7 - 'Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.'

If we neglect the Scriptures – or try to live out what God tells us to do with very little use of the Scriptures – - - we are like a soldier running into battle - - - insisting that his pea-shooter is a better weapon than the standard rifle issued to infantry

There was a holocaust movie made a while back - - - about the Warsaw ghetto - - - and in one scene a leader pleads for help from another and says: 'Give us something to use besides our bare hands'

i.e. - - - we need weapons – we are up against an army here

As a Christian - - - you are up against an army – but you don't have to plead with God for weapons!
- - - He has given them to you.

Spurgeon: 'This is the regulation sword. A soldier is not left to choose his own equipment; he must carry such arms as his sovereign appoints. This is the regulation sword in Christ's army. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is what you are bidden to take; and if you in willfulness resolve to exchange it for another, you commit an act of rebellion, and you make the change at your own risk and peril.'

There is no better example in Scripture of how to use the sword of the Spirit than Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness

In the temptation of Christ – we are given a clear picture of how we ourselves should use the Word of God to deflect and defeat temptations

II. Jesus Uses the Sword - Matt. 4:1-11

This is a temptation scene - - that occurred early in the ministry of Jesus

The temptations of Jesus reflected the fact that He is indeed the sinless Savior

A contrast can be drawn between Jesus and Adam

Where Adam failed and plunged the human race into sin - - - Jesus would succeed – and show Himself qualified to be our redeemer [late at the cross] – to undo the effects of the Fall

Where Adam's temptation looked to be a relatively low level temptation - - - the nature of Jesus' temptations looked to be on a much higher intensity

A couple truths about temptation:

Temptation is a necessary part of our own spiritual growth – and usefulness in battle

There is an old proverb that says: '**Smooth waters do not make skilled sailors.**'

A skilled sailor is someone who knows how to navigate and survive through rough and rocky passages

Any five year old can float on a rubber ducky inflatable in a 2 foot deep pool

But – sailors are those who can navigate ocean passages and sea ports – thru wind and rain

There are two sides to every temptation

Satan wants us to sin/ he wants our faith to fail – to dishonor Christ or our testimony / he wants to drag us down into the gutter of sin

I John 5:19 - 'The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.'

Back in the 1990's – Tad Walgreen and his wife Lauren - - both in their 30's - - - died separately from drug overdoses in seedy parts of town in Chicago

That happens every day - - tragic loss - / waste of human life - - - creatures made in God's image – yet enslaved to corruption - - - - but the reason their story made headlines -- Tad was the son of Charles Walgreen - - - and so was an heir to the Walgreen's fortune – worth over \$100B

Stuff like that happens - - because people make foolish decisions - - - decisions they are responsible for - - but it also happens because Satan came to steal, kill and destroy - - - and if we don't learn how to fight spiritual battles - - - he is looking for a way into our lives [he is relentless]

Temptation for the Christian - - - is an opportunity to show forth the incredible reality of redemption - - - 'I am no longer a slave of sin' - - - when we effectively dispatch temptation - - - we declare our loyalty to Christ - - and show that we believe God's Word

When a Christian turns away temptation - - - it is a way of saying, 'Satan - - - my loyalties are with Jesus Christ - - - and I am not falling for your lies / scams.' – I used to . . .

1st temptation – an appeal to the flesh / hunger

This was a real temptation - - - Jesus in His incarnation was fully man - with a human body

We will not face this exact temptation – we don't have the ability to turn stones into bread – - - but we are tempted to meet our needs in ways that steps outside of the will of the Father

Jesus was not going to use His powers – at the suggestion of Satan [turn stone to bread]

Iain Duguid: 'These situations presented three powerful temptations for Jesus to achieve good ends by the wrong means. There is nothing wrong with wanting food to eat or desiring divine protection, and Jesus had come into the world to rule the nations. But the significant point to notice is how Jesus answered these temptations. Each time He got out His sword.'

The Word of God had a specific answer to each temptation

Thomas Paine's book – 'The Age of Reason' made this account a matter of his skepticism - - - the idea that someone could fast for forty days - - - he believed to be fanciful

As with most objections to the Bible - - they fall apart with a greater knowledge of the facts

Billy Sunday: 'When I was a boy I used to hear men say that the Bible couldn't be true, for it was absolutely impossible for a man to fast for forty days and live. They thought that settled it. Then along came Doctor Tanner, and he fasted for forty days. That was the first time. He fasted again for forty-six days, and he fasted a

third time for 62 days, and after that we didn't hear anymore about a fast of forty days being impossible. The unbelievers quit quoting Tom Paine's - 'The Age of Reason' - on that point.'

On google – you can find out about the longest fast being in 1971 - - - a 27 year old guy fasted for 382 days on water and supplements. He started at 456 pounds and dropped to 180 by the time he was done.

Jesus – in His physically weakened state - - - deflects and defuses the temptation by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy [Deut. 8:3]

2nd temptation – throw yourself down - - - see if the angels come and rescue you - - - putting God to the test

Satan seems to say: 'Oh – if we are going to quote Scripture – I can do that as well.'

Satan loves to quote Scripture - - He loves to twist and give out half-truths

When you take a half-truth and make it the whole truth - - - you have just created a heresy!

The half truth is - - - 'God will protect you' - - - the whole truth includes – 'Don't put the Lord to the test'

Ps. 34:7 - 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.'

That is great truth - - but it doesn't mean I should jump into an alligator pit and call on God to deliver me!

Jesus' response shows that it is always sinful to try and force God to act in a particular manner

A swan dive from the pinnacle of the temple - - - was not the Father's will

We need to be discerning - - especially when Satan starts quoting Scripture

Fringe cult groups love to quote scripture

There was a group that set a date for Christ's return - - they quoted a verse from Amos about how God always tells his prophets what He is going to do before He does it [completely out of context] - - but they ignored the verses that say, 'No man knows the day or the hour . . .'

People are always trying to insert themselves into some bible prophecy

In Christian Science - - - they said the coming of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled with the arrival of Mary Baker Eddy

They said the woman of Jesus' parable – sweeping the house in search of the lost coin - - - was a reference to Mary Baker Eddy – sweeping the church of dogma - - - and finding truth

Today – you have people who want to claim to be apostles

One group out of CA - - - Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry

They have dead raising teams – they were in the news a while back – the toddler of a worship leader died - - - and they were calling on people to pray for his resurrection

Some have practiced something called - 'Grave soaking' - -- where you go and lay on the grave of someone you thought was spiritually anointed like C.S. Lewis - - - or perhaps Oral Roberts – try and soak up the anointing [occultic]

Sure – they can quote scripture - - but so does Satan

Christian's need to be vigilant / sober

One of their main speakers is doing a conference at 3rd Reformed in Nov. – [Bill Johnson] / more on that tonight

3rd temptation

This was essentially a temptation to a kingdom - - - without the cross

Satan says, 'I can give you a kingdom – but you must bow down to me.'

Satan offers people all kinds of rewards and gifts in this life if they will bow down to him

Satan doesn't show up with horns and a pitchfork - - - he shows up holding some of your desires and wishes in his hands and says he can make them come true - - - but you need to give up some of your biblical principles / bow down to Satan instead

Most temptations come down to the question: 'Who is our Lord? / who will we bow before?'

The Christian who wields the sword effectively - - - by his actions - - and words – declares – 'Jesus is Lord – begone Satan!'

Are you practiced in wielding the sword the way Jesus does here?

We can be tempted to pride / lust / anger / worry / greed / selfishness / disappointment with life

People strategize about all kinds of things: how to make money / how to score high on a test / how to have a nice lawn / how to lose weight

What about strategizing to defeat sin?

Ps. 119:11 - 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.'
[KJV]

Let's say – in one week's time – you become Job - - - your car breaks down / you lose your job / you contract the Corona virus - - - your dog gets run over by a car - - it's an awful week

You can turn to the bottle - - - many people do

You can turn to some sin / immorality - - - Bill Clinton this week said his affair with Monica was a way of coping with the pressures he was under

You can lash out - - become angry and bitter - - - try to make others miserable with you – might make you feel better for a little while!

The proverbial - - - dad comes home from bad day at work -- yells at wife

Wife yells at kid

Kid kicks dog

Dog goes and bites dad – who started it all!

There's a better way than all of those

You can reach for your sword

Phil. 4:4 - 'Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.'

The verses are there - - - we just need to pick them up - - - and put them in our armory

Conclusion

Thomas Guthrie [a Scottish Pastor]: 'The bible is an armory of heavenly weapons, a laboratory of infallible medicines, a mine of exhaustless wealth. It is a guidebook for every road, a chart for every sea, a medicine for every malady, and a balm for every wound. Rob us of our Bible and our sky has lost its sun.'

We should not be surprised when we are tempted by the devil - - - that is what he does

What is surprising is a Christian who fails to make use of his sword

The whole world lies in the power of the evil one - - but we have been delivered thru the cross of Calvary - - - in the battles we fight now -- we have everything we need to enjoy victory over sin