
The Wrong and the Right Sword

By Dr. Sam Wolfe
Huntsville, Alabama

ALL THEY WHO TAKE THE SWORD WILL PERISH WITH THE SWORD.
(Matthew 26:52)



Introduction: Jesus spoke these words to Peter who, as Jesus was about to be apprehended by His captors in Gethsemane, drew his sword and cut off an ear of one of the servants of the high priest. What Peter did is illustrated by a fictitious story I heard years ago.

A young bull yearling was greatly disturbed by a train that ran through the field where it was in pasture. Every day the train came through his domain and the little bull became so irritated by it until he decided to do something about it. One day when he saw the train coming, he got out on the track and began to paw the rock covered ground and bow his head. Suddenly he started running toward the train and met it head on. Two bystanders observed the incident and one said, "Oh how brave." The other replied, "Yes, but what a mess."

As the little bull took matters *to his head*, Peter took matters *into his own hands*, to use an old expression. Impetuous, bold, sharp, shrewd, daring – These words describe the person who takes matters into his own hands. Jesus used another word – "fool." Oh what a foolish mistake we make when we resort to human means instead of yielding to divine guidance and relying on God's grace and power.

Jesus told Peter to put up his sword and that He could have asked His Heavenly Father to send twelve legions of angels. That was one alternative, but He had other means – His sovereign power. Did He not restore sight to blind eyes, speech to dumb mouths, hearing to deaf ears? Did He not raise the dead, and cure the leper? The One who spoke this universe into existence by the same power could have slain the crowd of captors.

Now, the circumstances determined Jesus' response to the situation. In the will and purpose of His Father, He was to be crucified by human hands – so He was to be obedient to the Father and submissive to His captors. When He walked on the water, that which was over the heads of His disciples was under His feet. Likewise, in Gethsemane, the circumstances were under His control, although it appeared otherwise. Jesus had prayed, "*Not my will, but Your will be done.*" And that was His motivation that led Him to the cross, to the grave and to His resurrection.

My objective in this article is to show how Jesus' statement, "*They who take the sword*" shall always perish by their foolish response to their contrary circumstances, their trials, and their difficulties of life. Let's consider three swords we are inclined to take. And may we be reminded that it is always foolish to "*take matters into our own hands.*" Note first:

A. The Sword of Self – As in the example of Peter

Peter took it on himself to defend Jesus.

This was the sword Peter used in Gethsemane. Note Jesus' words to Peter in Luke 22:31-34:

"Simon, Simon, behold Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen your brothers. And he

said unto Him, *Lord I am ready to go with you, both into prison and to death.* And Jesus said, *I tell you, Peter, the cock shall not grow this day before you shall thrice deny that you know Me.*"

Peter had been converted from rebellion and unbelief to saving faith in Jesus as His Savior and Lord, but the fallen nature of Adam was still in control. It is called the "flesh" or the self-life. And that was what he resorted to when he drew his sword, *taking matters into his own hands.*

We cannot help but appreciate Peter's concern, his courage and daring attempt to defend his Savior, but we cannot appreciate his audacious and foolish action. We must keep in mind that Jesus needed no help from Peter—He had thousands of angels at His command. In taking his sword, Peter perished in that he failed in his impetuous and ridiculous response of the self-life.

Peter had not learned the difference between the physical and the spiritual arena, and he was in the wrong one – the flesh. His action was stupid audacity in trying to defend the One who had the power to put the man's ear back on his head. Oh, how tragic that we make the same mistake so often. Zechariah 4:6 says, *This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts.* The greatest lesson we could learn is that we cannot fight our spiritual battles with human weapons. These battles are actually the Lord's that we must fight with biblical and spiritual weapons, and He will supply the guidance, the wisdom, the power, and the know-how to fight. Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:12, *"We wrestle not against flesh and blood,"* but against the powers of darkness—Satan and his demons.

Self has no power in the arena of the heavenlies where supernatural powers are at war, but the Spirit-filled believer who yields matters to the mighty hand of God is a formidable victor in spiritual warfare. Don't take the wrong sword by *taking matters into your own hands.* **Take the Sword of the Spirit – the Word of God and fight with confidence in the power of truth.**

B. The Sword of Strength – As in the example of Samson

Samson took for granted that he could win with his own physical strength.

Samson, the last of the Judges, served Israel for twenty years. Known for his great **physical** strength, he became better known for his **moral** weakness. He established a relationship with Delilah, an ungodly woman whom the Philistines used to learn wherein his strength lay. He was a Nazarite unto God and his long uncut hair was a sign of his commitment to God. While asleep in her lap, she kept questioning him until he told her the secret. The Philistines then cut his hair and overcame him, for the Lord had departed from him, but not until then did he realize it – *"He knew not that the Lord had departed from him."* They captured him, put his eyes out and forced him to grind at the mill. He could no longer depend on his physical strength – *He had taken the wrong sword.*

C. The Sword of Sympathy – As in the example of Jonah

Jonah thought he could have his own way while disobeying God.

Jonah's trip to Tarshish led him into a storm that almost caused a shipwreck and the loss of many lives. He was thrown overboard into the tempestuous sea, and into the belly of a whale. From there he returned to Nineveh where the Lord had commanded him to go to preach to over a hundred thousand

souls who could not tell their right hand from their left – poor spiritually blind people with no hope but in God.

At the preaching of Jonah, the people turned to God in repentance, but to the displeasure of the preacher. Jonah perished in that he desired the destruction instead of the salvation of Nineveh—this because of the wickedness of the people he thought were not worthy of forgiveness. So full of self-pity, Jonah asked God to let him die. But God was merciful to Jonah, by causing a gourd to spring up over night to provide for him a shade from the burning heat of the sun. Then the Lord caused a worm to destroy the gourd over night to show that He was in control of the situation. But Jonah, **having taken matters into his own hands**, and at odds with the Lord’s will ended up in a dungeon of depression.

Oh what a terrible state Jonah was in—like the old expression, “between the rock and a hard place.” Although Jonah was displeased, God’s prevailing grace was shown to Nineveh as it was to Jonah. Is this not a demonstration of the sovereignty of our God?

Self-pity is a terrible attitude and condition to endure. When we take matters into our own hands we perish in the clutches of self-pity, souls perish, and we end up under the dying gourd under God’s chastening hand. Self-pity springs from our self-life and God is not pleased to honor it. He still loves us, but He does not answer prayer that comes from a heart of self-pity. The Lord heals the broken heart, delivers from distress, relieves our depressed spirits, but is not moved to answer prayer—He responds only to faith in *the sword of the Spirit*—His own Word. Therefore, be careful which sword you attempt to use. My friend, refuse to receive offenses, and refuse negative attitudes. Ask the Holy Spirit to remove from your heart animosity toward any and everyone who may or may not have hurt you.

Conclusion:

We often ask ourselves and the Lord—Why this severe trial and time of testing? It does not hurt to ask, but we hardly ever receive the answer that satisfies us. But know this, trials should lead us to the right sword—that is God’s purpose. The Savior’s Sword – the Word of God, is the one we must resort to. And it is revealed in the Scriptures. Paul, in Ephesians 6, tells us to *“take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.”* Can’t get any more explicit than that.

Multitudes of Christians, in times of trial and temptation, have made shipwreck of their lives by using the wrong sword.

- ❖ Our SELF-LIFE is a show of the flesh, but the Holy Spirit will not honor it.
- ❖ Our STRENGTH is a demonstration of human means, but it is rejected by God.
- ❖ Our SELF-PITY may be gratifying to us, but it leaves you feeling like taking a shower with your clothes on. These are some attitudes we must guard against. *Beware of the danger of taking:*

The Vindictive Sword.

- **Anger** – displayed does not diminish the problems you may face, but will compound them.
- **Bitterness** – hurts the embittered, and does not help the situation.
- **Resentment** – a get-even attitude is certainly grieving to the Holy Spirit. The Lord said, *“Vengeance is mine, I will repay.”* We make a mess of things if we don’t let God handle them.
- **Spite** – is certainly not the Spirit of Christ.

Proverbs 4:23 says, *“Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life”* The thoughts of the mind, and the attitudes of the heart must not be colored and controlled by the impetuous use of the sword of anger, of bitterness, of resentment or of spite. Paul sums it up with this exhortation, *“Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and evil speaking be put away from you”* (Ephesians 4:31). We cannot think rationally nor pray in faith from out of an impure heart. Testimony is tarnished; influence is destroyed; love is diminished. The *issues of life* become confusing and confounding—**disappointing blunders**.

So my friend, take the *“Sword of the Spirit,”* God’s Word. There are over eight thousand promises in the Scriptures, and God has not failed to honor any of them. Satan hates and fears the Word, but I love it. Do you? There are enough promises to address any situation we will ever face. Here are three confirming and comforting statements regarding the faithfulness of God to honor His Word:

Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there has not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. (I Kings 8:56).

And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof (Joshua 23:14).

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not thither, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

❖ Learn to Love the Word

I suggest that if you want a developing appetite and appreciation for the Word of God read often Psalm 119. You will understand why David had such an appreciation for the Word. He tells us that the Word is Pure, True, Righteous, Light, Settled in Heaven, Comforting, Sweet, and it makes us Wiser than our enemies.

❖ Follow David’s Example of Meditation

He said, *“Your testimonies are my meditation.”*

Thinking and focusing on God’s testimonies will take us into the deep rich soil of truth and will reveal truths that the casual reader will never learn. Consequently, we will grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith will increase, as will our love for the Lord. And it will lead us into sweeter communion with the Lord and more effectual prayer. In fact, these things are used by the Holy Spirit in the school of prayer. So, my friend I reiterate we must take the right sword.

“And take the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.”

I want to emphasize in closing that the *Sword of the Spirit* is used for two purposes:

1. For Offense against Satan in spiritual warfare,
2. For Defense in protection from the attacks of the powers of darkness.