

The Shield of Faith

Ephesians 6:16-17

The soldier who stepped out of the ranks and issued the challenge was an incredible sight. He was over nine feet tall – a giant among men. His weight was easily over 400 pounds and beneath his skin one could see the ripple of his bulging muscles. He wore a "**coat of mail**" armor that weighed over 125 pounds. He carried a spear that was some 14 feet long and its iron point weighed about 15 pounds – that's like putting a collegiate shot put on the end of a pole-vaulters pole. Altogether the great spear probably weighed 30 pounds. Of course, I'm talking about the famous man from Gath, the giant Goliath. When the shepherd boy, David proposed to fight him, King Saul offered his royal armor. Saul was a 52 and David was a 38. When he tried them on he said, "**I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them.**" You know the story. David used different weapons a different strategy. The result was one very surprised and very dead giant. David set aside the conventional armor and chose dress and weapons suitable for his unique battle.

We fight an enemy much greater and much more intelligent than the giant Philistine. Like David, we cannot use conventional means to fight such an imposing enemy. Paul said in v.12, "**for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.**" If we were somehow able to get a glimpse of the spiritual realm, if we could see just for a moment our real enemy and his legions of demonic forces, I think we would forever give up trying to fight him in our own strength. We would run to God's armory and take up the "**whole armor of God**" that we might "**stand**" and fight in the "**evil day.**"

Paul says in both v.11 and v.13 that we are to put on "**the whole armor of God**" that we may make a "**stand**" and not surrender to our enemy. So far we have examined the first three of the six pieces of the Christian armor:

First, there is THE BELT OF TRUTH. We need to be immersed in the absolute truth of God's Word. We must speak the truth of God's word to ourselves, to the enemy, and to each other. We also need practical truth. We must be known as truth-tellers and live truthfulness as a lifestyle.

Second, there is the BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. This is depending on the imputed righteousness of Christ with which God has already clothed us. And, it is depending on the practical imparted righteousness, guarding our hearts against sin.

Third, there are the SHOES OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE. Rom.5:1 tells us that when we believe the Gospel we have "**peace with God.**" We are no longer His enemies, but we are His own people, bought with the blood of Christ. And through prayer we have the "**peace of God**" that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil.4:6-7).

Fourth, there is the Shield of Faith (v.16).

Paul pictures the believer in the heat of battle. The air is thick with flaming arrows that had been dipped in pitch and set on fire. It's a life and death situation. How will he survive? Paul's answer is (Eph. 6:16), "**above all, taking the shield of**

faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."

The Bible is full of stories of believers who were in overwhelming circumstances, where they despaired of life itself. What did they do? They cried out to God and trusted in Him. In many cases, He delivered them from death. In other cases, He sustained them as they died in faith. You can read a summary of these stories in Hebrews 11, which makes the point that whether they were delivered or whether they died, they believed God and His sure Word. There it says, **"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."** Faith in God is the essential shield that quenches the arrows of the evil one. Today I want to draw four lessons from our text:

1. There is an evil enemy shooting flaming arrows at you.

We have already seen this (in 6:11-12), but it bears repeating. Satan is the evil one, a horribly wicked spiritual being who is relentlessly opposed to God and to God's people. As we saw, this is not just an impersonal force for evil in the world, but rather an intelligent, cunning personal evil spirit who commands an army of evil spirits at war against God, His holy angels, and His saints.

And this verse says that he is shooting flaming arrows at us. What are these flaming arrows of the evil one? What are **"fiery darts"**? They include all forms of temptation. It may be the temptation to pride and selfishness. It can be the slanderous things that others say about us. It may be the temptation to fear world events or to fear our own difficult circumstances, including health problems or death itself. There are the flaming arrows of discouragement, despair, and doubting God. Many of our brethren around the world face the arrows of persecution. They have lost loved ones and all of their personal possessions because of their faith in Christ. They are under intense pressure to renounce their faith in order to escape with their lives.

Every day Satan and his evil minions launch dozens of **"fiery darts"** at us. In our lifetimes as believers we face hundreds of thousands of flaming arrows from hell. Lets consider examples:

- a. Satan shoots the arrow of DISAPPOINTMENT. Maybe someone you trusted and thought was godly hurts you by something they say or do. Maybe you worked hard for years on a relationship only to see it crumble before you. Disappointment overwhelms you.
- b. Satan shoots the arrow of LUST. Maybe you are alone at your computer and a pornographic image pops up ... Maybe your co-worker seems much more attractive and understanding than your mate....
- c. Satan shoots the arrow of DOUBT. Maybe you've been through a divorce... or you've lost your job... or you're facing a terrible illness... and you're asking "Doesn't God care?"
- d. Satan shoots the arrow of CRITICISM. Sometimes Satan uses others to shoot his deadly darts. Ps. 64:3 says they **"sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows; bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the blameless."**

- e. Satan shoots the arrow of HATRED. Have you ever had almost unreasonable thoughts of anger and hatred toward another person? And you're thinking, "I'm a Christian. I mean, I love people in general."

In addition to all of these flaming arrows, Paul may be referring to the evil thoughts or images that suddenly pop into our minds. Maybe it's as you are praying or reading the Bible or worshiping God with the saints on the Lord's Day. Suddenly, you get a blasphemous thought or you picture in your mind a lustful image that seems to come out of nowhere. You had not been filling your mind with these things. In fact, you deliberately resisted the temptation to indulge in thinking about such things. And yet, this horrible evil suddenly comes into your mind, right as you are seeking the Lord. These are the flaming arrows of the evil one.

The enemy will follow up the arrows with the accusation, *"Ha! You call yourself a Christian, but look at how you're thinking! You're just fooling yourself! You aren't following Christ or you wouldn't have thoughts like that!"*

The goal of the fiery darts is to get you to shift your focus from God onto something or someone else. Satan's is to get you to be afraid, to get you to feel guilty or condemned, and shift your faith and your dependency from God to something or someone else.

How do you deal with this attack?

For a long time I have been fascinated with the stories of POWs from the war in Vietnam. Of the many men who survived the horrors of their captivity, almost all had two things in common: they developed a mental shield and they held on tenaciously to what they knew as truth. Everyday the North Vietnamese would pump propaganda into their cells via loudspeakers. They told these Americans that their government was corrupt, that the military had abandoned them, that their wives had divorced them and remarried. These brave prisoners developed different ways to block out the lies. One was a pianist. He played concerts in his mind. Another was an architect, he designed hundreds of buildings in his head. Still another was a golfer. Every day he played mental rounds of golf on the courses in his memory. They blocked the lies of the enemy with their mental shields and combated the lies by reminding themselves of the truth. They had ceased to fight a physical battle, but never stopped fighting a battle of mind and spirit. That's what every believer does in spiritual warfare.

2. The Shield of Faith is our Active Trust in Jesus.

Roman soldiers used two types of shields. One was small and light. It was employed in hand to hand combat. The other called a *scutum* or war shield was about 4 and a half feet tall and two and a half feet wide. It was the size of a small door. The shield was made of laminated wood covered with hardened leather and lined around the edges with metal. Usually there was an iron ornament decorating the front. They were so large a man could kneel down and put his entire body behind it.

These shields also could be linked together to form a moving wall. To storm city gates they were linked together to form a "tortoise" that provided protection from the top as well. This "**shield**" is a picture of "**faith**."

Paul says "**above all**" or "in addition to" the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness and the shoes of peace you also need the "**shield of faith**."

What is "**faith**?" The subject here is not "the faith" – the body of Christian beliefs but personal faith, our confidence in God, trusting in God, believing what God has said and being committed to it. It is actively trusting in God. Our "**shield**" against the devil's attack is our faith that God will keep His promises, that He will be faithful to us.

In several passages, the Bible says, "**The just shall live by faith**." 2 Cor 5:7 says, "**For we walk by faith, not by sight**." The image of the Lord being the shield of those who trust him is seen in many, many passages. Here are just a few:

- In Genesis 14, Abraham led his men against four kings that had taken his nephew Lot into captivity. Abraham defeated them and recovered Lot and his possessions. But afterwards he was afraid that these kings would regroup and come after him. At that point, the Lord appeared to Abraham in a vision and said in Gen.15:1, "**Do not be afraid I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward**."
- 2 Sam.22:31, says, "**As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him**" (cf. Ps.18:30).
- Ps.3:3 says, "**But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head**."
- Ps.5:12 says, "**You, O LORD, will bless the righteous; With favor You will surround him as with a shield**."
- Ps.91:4 says, "**He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler**."
- Ps.119:114 says, "**You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word**."
- Pro.2:7 says, "**He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly**."
- Pro.30:5 says, "**Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him**."

So while God Himself is our shield, Paul here applies that fact by saying that our faith, meaning our faith in God, is the shield that protects us from the evil enemy.

Paul says that we must *take up* this shield. It's not automatic, where if you're a believer, you're protected. Rather, you must actively trust in God when the enemy's arrows fly. How actively trust in God? How do we do take up this shield of faith?

A. Decide to believe God's promises.

I hope that you read the Psalms often. My normal habit is to read a psalm each day and then to read consecutively from the Old Testament and from the New Testament. The Psalms are experiential examples of men in desperate circumstances that trusted in the Lord for deliverance. Often, the psalmist's life is in danger. He rehearses his circumstances and then cries out to God for help. By the end of the psalm, even though his circumstances have not yet changed at all, he rejoices in God's promised salvation.

That's how you actively trust God. You analyze your situation. "God, I've just been diagnosed with cancer." "God, my teenager is rebelling against you and being sucked into this evil world." "God, I need a job to provide for my family." You tell the Lord your desperate situation. Then, you rehearse who God is and what He has promised and you make a decision to rely on Him.

B. Obey what God has commanded.

Faith and obedience are closely related in Scripture (John 3:36; Acts 5:32; 6:7; Rom. 1:5; 15:18-19; 16:26). Genuine faith necessarily results in obedience to God (1 John 2:3-4). So when I talk about trusting God, I am not divorcing it from practical obedience. If your faith is truly in God, you will obey His commandments. 1 John 5:3-4 says, **"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."**

Thus, an evil enemy seeks to destroy you. You take up the shield of faith by actively trusting in God and His Word. We do this by believing God's promises and obeying God's commands.

3. Taking up the shield of faith implies that we are not in the fight alone.

As I said, the Roman army moved ahead by the soldiers putting their shields side by side, forming a wall of defense. While each soldier had to hold his own shield, the strength came by doing it with all the others.

Our faith becomes stronger when we are united. When the enemies of Rome saw those wide columns of shields they often broke in terror. When we build strong relationships with other believers, we guard each other's backs.

So while each believer must take up the shield of faith individually, we do it together with others who are trusting God in the battle. You'll be stronger in the battle if you know that your brothers and sisters down the line are fending off the enemy's arrows by their shields. We must stand together and pray for one another, so that we can encourage one another in the fight of faith. Finally,

4. Taking up the shield of faith shows us Christ is sufficient.

A main reason God allows the enemy to shoot his fiery arrows at us is that it drives us to a deeper experience with Christ. We all tend to trust Him only to the degree that we are forced to trust Him. When the arrows are flying and we take refuge behind our shield, we come to know aspects of His glory and beauty that we did not know before the battle. As He delivers us, we know by experience, as David did, that He is **"my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold"** (Ps. 18:2).

Conclusion

Maybe you're thinking, "But I struggle with having faith in God in my trials. How do I get the faith that I need to make Christ the shield for my soul in times of trouble?" Five quick suggestions:

First, recognize that your lack of faith in God is a relational problem with God. If someone is completely trustworthy and you tell him, "I don't trust you," you're calling him a liar and creating distance in your relationship with him. Not to trust God is to say, "Your promises are not true. You're a liar." That's a terrible sin!

Second, confess your unbelief as sin and ask God's forgiveness. He will forgive if we acknowledge our sin and return to Him (1 John 1:9).

Third, ask God to give you faith to trust Him fully. Remember the man who begged Jesus to heal his son, saying (Mark 9:22-24), "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" Jesus replied, "If you can? All things are possible to him who believes." The man cried out, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

Fourth, don't try to work up faith; rather, look to the Lord Himself. He is trustworthy. He has never failed anyone, including the martyrs. Read your Bible to see who He is.

Fifth, do not trust in how you feel, but trust in the sure Word of God. Faith must often stand against feelings. God's Word is the compass to guide you when you're lost in the fog of trials. The world's counsel may seem right, but the counsel of God's Word is always faithful and true. Follow Him, not your feelings!

Young David had the right equipment and the right strategy to defeat Goliath. He said to him, "**Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands**" (1 Sam 17:47). That is taking the shield of faith. "**This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.**"