

Faith-Full

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[0 : 0 0] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. Our heart is simply to get into the Word of God, but most of all, let that Word get into us and transform these hearts more and more into the image of Christ.

Now, I was blessed to be born and raised in this larger Greensburg, Decatur County area. And from second grade up, I went to North Decatur, was always a big fan of PE.

One of my favorite things that we did in junior high and high school that I think has now probably been outlawed is dodgeball. I'm sure it was probably because too many kids came home with a black eye or this massive welt on their leg.

See, behind the bleachers was the perfect dodgeball area. And believe it or not, I was small and quick back then. So I could sprint to the line, grab a ball, and be ready to fire that baby off.

[1 : 0 6] But you know, oftentimes, instead of throwing the ball as soon as I got it, I'd use it as a shield. And it's amazing the confidence that you gain when you can walk up to the line using a ball or maybe two in your hands as a shield to block other teams' throws and keep yourself in the game.

Well, today I want to talk about a different kind of shield. And unfortunately, this isn't a game at all. This is real life, real spiritual warfare. And trust me, you're going to need that shield of faith.

But before we dig into this, go ahead and grab your Bibles for me. Turn to the book of Ephesians, probably about 90% of the way through your Bible, Ephesians chapter 6.

And I still can't believe we're already six weeks into this series that's all about spiritual warfare. How can we stand firm in victory that Christ won on the cross and by his empty tomb?

See, the last few weeks we've been putting on the full armor of God, starting with the belt of truth, where we discovered that Jesus is what holds it all together. Then we looked at the breastplate of righteousness.

[2 : 1 6] We learned that we can guard our hearts by walking in the righteousness of Christ that covers us as we seek to live a life of holiness in him. Last week we studied about the shoes of peace.

We determined that we have to stand strong in the truth of the gospel that sets men free. And then today we come here to Ephesians 6, verse 16.

So you should be with me here. Here's what the Apostle Paul says as the Holy Spirit is guiding him. It says, So the armor that Paul is describing is a first century Roman soldier.

Don't forget that Paul is writing this in chains. He's on trial because of his faith in Jesus. But honestly, instead of the traditional picture of being behind bars, this is more like house arrest.

But instead of a bracelet on your leg, he would have a Roman guard attached to him at all times. And the picture of this shield is often a little different than what we may be picturing.

[3 : 3 0] We visualize a smaller, maybe round shield. Kind of like if you had the two dodgeballs in your hand, you know, to block stuff. But this shield that you quickly just put in front of you when somebody throws their sword at you or an arrow is coming your way.

But listen, this shield that's being described here by Paul is roughly two foot wide and about four foot tall. It was made of wood, often wrapped with cloth and leather, and even dipped into water before battle to extinguish the fire-tipped arrows that were coming at them.

This is also a shield that's big enough that if you crouch behind it, you can cover your whole body. Listen, they may not have had all the technology that we have today, but they were smarter than we often give them credit.

They wanted to win and come out of battle victorious. And they put a lot of resources into doing just that. And I'll tell you, this may come across a little strong, but it needs to be said to the American church.

Too many Christians are simply following a religion and not the biblical Jesus that we see throughout the word. And before we start pointing fingers, we look in the mirror at our own heart, our own motives, our own obedience to Christ, because it's so easy to come to church or two times a month, sing, listen, throw a tin in the plate, and then put Jesus back in his box until two or three weeks later when finally my schedule aligns again and I can make it back to church.

[5 : 05] This very comfortable, consumer-minded, half-hearted religion is where it's all about me, what I want, how I feel, what I think it should be.

And yet, we see a much different picture when we actually open up the word of God. Followers of Jesus living so differently than that picture. Instead of that selfishness, we see slaves to Christ, servant-hearted to the world around them, givers, not just takers, sacrificial, obedient, committed, victorious.

See, when Jesus is just a good American thing for us to do, when church is just an event on the calendar, when it's compartmentalized and it's just a piece of your life that doesn't intersect with everything else, when obedience to the word is considered radical, even inside the four walls of a church building, that's when the body of Christ is getting slayed in spiritual warfare.

No peace, no joy, too much stress, churches walking away from biblical doctrine to please the world, and yet, you and I aren't called to delight the crowd and cater to the squeaky wheels.

We're called to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and then love our neighbor with a Christ-like love. We are called to be His hands and His feet in this world.

[6 : 30] And what we're really doing is we're putting on the full armor of God so we can stand firm against the enemy's attacks, so we can walk in power, in the fruit of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

And boy, are we going to look weird. Even to some religious people, we're going to be weirdos, but that's okay. Because we are called to be a light in the darkness, to be set apart from the world. We are called to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, in freedom, and in life that is available to us as born-again believers in Jesus. So we're told in Ephesians 6.16, take up the shield of faith.

Now, you know as well as I do that faith has as many definitions as people. And it's often been used as an excuse to do terrible and ungodly things.

Many wrong definitions of faith out there. So I'm not interested in giving you my take on it or my definition because it doesn't matter. What does the Word of God teach about faith?

[7 : 33] Hebrews 11.1 says, Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance of what we do not see. We're not talking today about faith as just general facts about the Bible.

We're not even talking about a saving faith, even though that's so important and that's where it has to start. Paul is talking to Christians here about a practical daily faith or trust that we put in the Lord that shields you from every flaming arrow that the enemy will throw your way.

See this Greek word used here for faith, spelled P-I-S-T-I-S, pronounced pistis, is used 240 times in the New Testament. It means acting on truth.

So this is a daily action of trust in the God of the universe who created everything and still loves me. It's believing Romans 8.28 that says, And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

So let's talk about three choices we need to make when it comes to our faith and trust in the King of Kings. And here's the first thing. Choose faith over fear.

[8 : 48] Choose faith over fear. Listen, I've been quoting passages on this quite a bit here lately. Joshua 1, 1 Timothy 1. But let me take you to a different passage. Isaiah 41, verse 10.

God says, So do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

You know, I love the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the book of Daniel chapter 3, where this Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had built a 90-foot high gold statue.

He commanded that every person had to bow down and worship it. However, these three Jewish men were followers of Yahweh, the God that we worship. And they refused.

So they were brought before the king, and he gave them another chance to worship this false god. But they wouldn't. So they were ordered to be thrown into the fiery furnace that was heated up

seven times hotter than normal.

[9 : 49] In fact, it was so hot that the three guards who threw them in the fire died because of the intense heat. As the king is celebrating his tyrannical power, he looks in the fire, and he sees Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego just walking around unharmed.

Even sees a fourth man in there that looks, as he says, this is a lost man who knows nothing about the godly faith. He says it looks like the son of the gods.

Hmm. His way of describing what many scholars believe was Jesus protecting these men. Because when they could have acted in fear, they could have acted in panic, they chose faith in their God whose power dwarfed this wicked king.

So he calls them out of the fire. He sees them, and he calls them out. And so they stroll out unharmed. Not a hair singed on their body. Rogues weren't scorched.

They didn't even smell like fire. And everyone around them is freaking out. And then it says this in Daniel 3, verse 28. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who has sent his angel, that was his interpretation, and rescued his servants.

[11 : 05] They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own god. But let me take you back here to verses 10 through 12.

Or actually take you back 10 or 12 verses before that to Daniel 3, 16 through 18. Because this is where we see real faith over a real opportunity to be very fearful.

When the guys didn't know how this ordeal was going to turn out. When it was a real possibility that they're going to burn to death for their faith. Here's what it says in verse 16.

King Nebuchadnezzar, We do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we're thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it and he will deliver us from your majesty's hand.

But, and I love this part, even if he does not, we want you to know your majesty that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold that you have set up.

[12 : 07] Guys, that is faith. That's trust. But let's bring this closer to home. What are you fearful of if the tough exterior was removed and we could really see what keeps you up at night?

Is it your financial situation with too much month left at the end of your money? Is it your job security or even the fact that you're not doing what you were created and gifted to do?

Is it your house situation? For those with children at home, is it your kids and whether they follow Jesus? How about your adult kids and grandkids? For those with loved ones in the military, is it their safety?

Is it your marriage that may look okay on the outside to everyone else, but you know it's just hanging on by a thread? Is it some kind of drama that's going on that you feel like you have no control over?

Is it your own health, mental focus, or even discipline in life? Listen, you can take every antidepressant medication in the world. You can go to counseling six days a week.

[13 : 11] And listen, I'm not against those things. Within reason, I'm not against those things. We even have Christian counseling here at the church. And what we do is open up the Word of God and help people to heal because of what God's Word teaches.

But the problem that we have is too many believers are medicated to the nines, sitting before counselors, while ignoring the Holy Spirit, ignoring God living inside of you who wants to fill your cup.

We can so easily trust those things more than we trust God. Listen to how A.B. Simpson put this in his book way back in 1897. He said, Every fear is distrust, and trust is the remedy for fear.

You know, we talk a lot about the names for God the Father, the names for Jesus, and they are amazing, and they will help you to understand the character of our God. But think about some of these names in Scripture.

We don't talk about names of the Holy Spirit very often, the Holy Spirit that dwells inside of every believer. Here are some names. It's counselor, comforter, Spirit of Christ, Spirit of Yahweh, Spirit of knowledge, grace, truth, understanding, wisdom.

[14 : 27] Then you study the names of the Father and Jesus too, and you can step back, and you can say, God, why did I ever doubt you? Why do I choose to live and walk in fear of man?

I am a child of the King. I choose faith even when it doesn't make sense to them. But it makes sense because I belong to God.

And honestly, that leads us into the second choice I hope we'll make today, and that is to choose truth over lies. Choose truth over lies. Look with me one more time at Ephesians 6.16.

I want to focus your attention on the last part of this verse. It says, In addition to all of this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish, listen to this, you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Those flaming arrows, those fiery darts refer to how Satan comes at us to tempt us. And how does he tempt us? Always with lies, right? Like he did with Eve in the garden.

[15:30] Did God really say? And then he starts the manipulation with kind of half truths. Got enough truth in it to kind of get you twisted up, but it's really a large lie.

And he puts that shiny sin before you, and he promises it will fill you up to overflowing, when the reality is it will leave you empty, longing for the real deal.

See, in John 8.44, Jesus is having a contentious chat with the religious leaders who are conspiring against him. And listen to what he says to them in part of this conversation.

But more importantly, what he teaches us about Satan. He says, You guys belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. So now he describes Satan. He says he was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.

When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. So what does that look like? In our everyday lives. Everybody else has a nice car, right?

[16:32] Or a bigger house. You work hard. Why shouldn't you have that? Or you're right out of college. Why shouldn't you have it? And before we know it, we've shackled ourselves with so much debt, causing crazy stress, and keeping us from using our resources to impact lives for the kingdom of God.

That stress even impacts your marriage in some really ugly ways. Number one cause of divorce.

And I'll tell you, it's so easy to get caught up in this materialism trap of more, more, more.

Especially as an American, where it's shoved down our throats that he who dies with the most toys wins. But truth says in Matthew 16, 26, what good will it be for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their very soul?

Or what can you give in exchange for their soul? See, Satan loves to whisper in our ears, if we can just have that kind of car, if I can live in that kind of house, wear those kind of clothes, have this much money in the bank, have this much in retirement, go on vacation there, have that title in my company, lead that organization.

And yet, it never satisfies. And trust me, the father of lies will continue to make us think that those things will fill us up, that they will fill that God-shaped hole that you have in your heart.

[17:53] I just gotta have more, more, more, more. But let me make something very clear. It's not that having nice things is bad in and of itself. It's not. But it's when those nice things have you and they become the desire of our hearts.

Satan sits back and he smiles at the lies that we've bought into. Or what about when he takes relationships that are good, that are given to us by God?

Relationships that when done his way are a blessing. And what does Satan do? He just twists that truth where we're no longer operating within God's perfect boundaries designed to protect our hearts, to set us up for a godly relationship.

And here we are asking for God to bless something that we've done so differently than his word teaches. But think about all the lies that Satan pushes. It's okay.

You'll be married soon. You're practically married already. Might as well. Or love is love no matter who you marry. Or he's just a friend.

[18:57] I enjoy being around. Nothing's ever gonna happen. I'm a married woman, right? I mean, nothing's gonna happen. Famous last words. And church, we could go through scenario after scenario, topic after topic.

But here's what I want you to see. When you're serious about using the shield of faith, acting on truth, you are covering yourself in truth that can block Satan's lies that he's aiming right at your mind and right at your heart.

In John 8, 31 and 32, Jesus says, to the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth.

And what? The truth will set you free. Can I be a little extra bold with you here for a second? I'm gonna do it in love while also being convicted of this myself.

We have too many people walking around professing Christ as Lord who don't know the truth because they're not in the word. Therefore, we believe and walk in lies that keep us shackled when we were created to live in the life-changing freedom that Christ offers.

[20 : 01] Because here's what the word of God, the truth, can do in your life. 2 Timothy 3, starting in verse 16. All scripture is God-breathed.

And it's useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So God will use the word to teach you, to get rid of that ignorance so that you will be fully equipped in understanding what the truth is. He uses it to rebuke and correct us.

When we get off course and we think that our way is better God will give us that spiritual spank and he'll bring us back to keep our hearts in him and even to train us, to prepare us so that we can do everything he has designed for us to do for the kingdom of God.

Church, we believe, everything we believe must be laid before this God-breathed word. And if it matches the truth, then we proceed in God's blessings.

[21 : 04] If it doesn't, I'm wrong. My worldview has to change. Because as James says, my life is just a mist here for a short while and then it's gone. Who am I to choose truth?

But God is eternal. He's perfect. He's the only one who's worthy to decide. So immerse yourself in the word. Read it. Study it. Memorize it. Believe it. And let it be that shield that blocks Satan's lies from taking your life in a direction that you don't need to go.

And then let me share one last quick point with you here. Probably more of a sub-point, but I think this is a really cool picture. Choose community over isolation. There was an elderly lady who was so impressed with a young man in his early 20s who lived next door.

He would help her carry groceries in the car. He'd fix small things that broke in her house. Even made sure her yard was mowed and in the wintertime that he kept the snow shoveled off of her driveway.

And one day, she just looked at him and she said, Son, how'd you become such a fine young man? He said, honestly, when I was a boy, I had a drug problem. And the old lady was shocked to hear that.

[22 : 13] She said, no, that can't be true. Not you. And he said, oh, it is. My parents drug me to church on Sunday morning, drug me to youth group on Wednesday night and drug me anytime the doors were open.

Now, I'm just kind of having some fun with that story. And it's not just about being drug into a church building. It's about what can happen when you truly open up your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, but also to other believers in the church.

And you become that support system that acts as a shield. See, one thing Paul would have known about these Roman shields is that they were designed to link together with other soldiers to create a wall.

In fact, if you have enough guys with the enemy shooting hundreds of arrows in the sky that are designed to fall down right on top of you, they not only created this outside wall, these Roman soldiers, with their shields, but the guys in the middle could put their shields up over top, and they created a complete barrier from the enemy's attacks.

This was called the testudo or the tortoise or turtle formation. And they could even march toward the enemy. They had a slit there they could see out of.

[23 : 29] They could put their swords out of, their spears. They could even march toward the enemy while being protected by these shields. And what a beautiful picture of how you and I were created for community.

Because sometimes you need the faith of others to help shield you from the lies Satan's firing your way. Let me say that again. Sometimes you need the faith of others to help shield you from his lies. Sometimes you need other believers to give you a hug as you cry on their shoulder. As they lift you up when you feel like this battle has wounded you deeply. Sometimes you need them to smack you upside the head and say, dude, you're being a dummy.

Now our youth pastor, Mitch and I, we've been great friends for almost two decades now. Our kids call each other cousins, call us aunt and uncle. I mean, we're that close.

We're also accountability partners. We meet every week. We talk life. We hold each other accountable. We encourage each other. And just about two weeks ago, he looked at me and he said, dude, what are you doing?

[24 : 35] How long are you going to wallow in this pride? Is it worth it? And you know what? I'm thankful he did. That's a true friend. Hebrews 10, 24 and 25 put it like this.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. So we are here to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. He says, not giving up meeting together. So don't isolate yourself as some are in the habit of doing. Huh. First century, 20, 21st century here, we do the same thing. Okay. But encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Church, this is why we push things like family groups that are eight or ten people who meet in homes or Sunday school classes, which are small groups of people who really get to know each other by being together every week or coming to a study on Wednesday nights.

You were never meant to walk this faith journey on your own. And if you try, you're going to have a hard time standing up to the enemy's attacks. You were created for community.

[25 : 43] And as we close this message today, it comes down to this one word, faith. You could define it as trust, acting on the truth, because as you step out in faith, trusting our God who is perfect in every way, allowing the truth of his word to shield us from Satan's lies, even doing that alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ.

It's amazing how you and I will be able to stand firm and walk in the victory that Christ has already won. Church, we are called to be faithful.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we just thank you again for opening up your word to us and showing us this truth that sets us free.

Father, help us to be people of faith who trust you because you are worthy. You have proven yourself. You are perfect and you are holy in every way.

And we want to follow you faithfully as your children, even when it's not easy, even when we go against what the world would want us to do and maybe we have consequences because of it.

[26 : 53] Father, help us to stay on the straight and narrow, to stay true to you and to your word and to love the world around us just like you've called us to.

We love you, Jesus. We thank you for opening up your word to us today and we pray all of this in the precious name of our Lord and Savior and God's people said, amen and amen.

Hey, let me give you this quick invitation. If you are listening to this and maybe you want to talk about, hey, what does it mean to give my life to Jesus? What does that look like? What do I need to do?

If you want to talk about maybe some faith questions, maybe this just brought up some other questions for you. Listen, you can reach out to us. Other people have helped us in our lives and we would love to be that support system for you that we just talked about in this message.

And so here's a couple ways you can reach out. Our phone number, First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. Once again, my name is Ray. I'm the lead pastor. Our phone number is 812-663-8488.

[27 : 55] That's 812-663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at FCCgreensburg.com. Hey, God bless you. I hope you have a fantastic week.

Keep studying that word and growing in Jesus every day. Thank you.