

The Shield of Faith

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again this evening to Ephesians chapter 6 and we're going to spend a little time looking at verse 16. Ephesians 6 at verse 16.

In all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. That's Ephesians 6 and at verse 16.

In all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

Or you could say so that you may be able to extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. Again the apostle has in mind what he was obviously very much aware of as he looked at Roman soldiers and the various pieces of armor.

We've seen that already as we've looked at the previous bits of armor that he mentions. They're very much patterned upon what he would see the Roman soldiers wearing. And when he comes now to deal with the shield of faith he obviously again has in mind the shield that Roman soldiers had as part of their defense.

[1 : 16] The Lord could also be used in some ways for attack if they pushed with it or hit with it. And the Roman shield wasn't a small thing. It was a magnificent thing.

It didn't just cover a small part of the body. It was actually long enough. It was just virtually the size of a door. Pretty much.

Not a small door. But it covered really most of the body and could be looked out over so that the whole of the soldier's body was protected behind the shield.

And in addition to that not just its size it was shaped in a kind of not circular but a kind of arched or arced shape.

But it also had, we understand, on the inside it had a layer of metal. And on the outside a layer of hide. Animal hide.

[2 : 15] A cow hide or hide of that sort. Something like leather. But what they would do would be before they would go out to fight. They would want to dip it or soak it for some time in water.

So that the hide absorbed the water. And then when, as was very common in those days, they would be facing enemies that fired arrows at them.

The arrows would very often be dipped in pitch. They'd have a kind of cloth or something at the end. Dipped in pitch. Tarry kind of stuff. Ready to actually then light before they fired it.

And of course with it being a tarry substance the fire kept burning until it would actually land on the enemy. And the Roman soldier needed to be prepared for those fiery arrows.

And one of the ways that they were prepared was having this magnificent shield which both in its size and in its substance was so effective against these fiery darts. Because if the arrow came and stuck in the shield, the wet hide would actually help to extinguish the flame pretty quickly.

[3 : 27] And with all of that in mind, and the apostle obviously knew all of these details himself. With all of that in mind, he here actually tells us that in all circumstances we are to take up the shield of faith with which we can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

In other words, just like the Roman soldier used his shield for these literal fiery arrows, so the believer is able to use their faith in order to extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one.

Not to let the fiery darts through and take a hold in our lives. Now, you notice here it's saying, take up the shield of faith.

And there's a very interesting comparison between the first three items of armour and these following three. Because the previous ones, it says they stand there for having fastened on the belt of truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and having put on these shoes, this readiness given by the gospel of peace.

In other words, the picture you have is of the Roman soldier with the main parts of the armour already strapped on. And if the soldier went into the barracks or went in somewhere to take a rest, he wouldn't take these parts of the armour off.

[4 : 52] They stayed on, except of course when he had to sleep at night. Or something like that. Sometimes maybe they would even wear the armour at that time as well. But in any case, when he would go to take a break or when they were in the barracks or not in active conflict at that moment, they would take off the helmet and they would lay down the shield.

And sometimes the sword as well could be unstrapped and put by their side. But the other three items were left on. The breastplate and the skirt or the girdle and also the shoes that were on the feet.

And whenever they were called out quickly to combat, they could easily pick up these three pieces, the helmet and then the sword and the shield and out they went.

They were already clad with the other bits. You can actually see that, in fact, if you have film from the likes of the Second World War, especially of the pilots that were fighting in the Battle of Britain, you know that they were actually already suited up in the place where they, whatever airfield it would be, they would be already waiting for the call to come to take to the skies.

Now, they would lose a lot of time if they didn't have their pilot's gear on. And all they'd have to do was take up the smaller bits, the helmet and some of the other accoutrements they used, pick all these things up, dash out to the plane and off they go.

[6 : 20] And it's the same for the Roman soldier. All the main bits are already on and they just pick up these other bits when the call comes. Out they go and they're ready very quickly. That's the kind of picture that the Apostle has in mind there when he's telling us to take up the shield of faith and to take up the helmet of salvation and to take up or take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

The Christian is already wearing the other three parts. You're wearing your breastplate of righteousness. You're wearing the preparation of the Gospel as shoes for your feet.

You're wearing the belt of truth. These are fastened on. You don't lay them aside. But there are times then when you're wearing those, you have to go out and then use the things that God has given you, the other parts of the armour, beginning with this one, the shield of faith.

But let's look firstly at the fiery arrows or the fiery darts of the evil one. Because if you look at these and something of what that means for our Christian experience, then you're able to come back to think about the shield and how the shield is so well designed, the shield of our faith, well designed to extinguish these fiery darts, these fiery arrows.

What are these fiery darts? Well, you notice first of all the source they come from. And this is important, although we know already that he's mentioned about the wiles of the devil, that we're able to stand up against the schemes of the devil, for we don't wrestle against flesh and blood.

[7 : 57] What he's saying here is, take it up, this shield of faith, so that you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. That's a very good way of translating it, because that's what it actually means.

You see, a lot of people in the world believe in evil. They believe in the existence of evil or badness. They see things in the world that convince them that there's such a thing as evil.

People do evil things, but where does evil actually originate? Where does it exist? Where does it come from? Some people will say evil exists, but it's a power.

It's a kind of impersonal force, or something that exists in people themselves, that they can choose to exercise or not exercise, as they will.

It's not something that they see belongs to a personal enemy that stands against you. It is an impersonal thing. It's a force, it's a power. Something like electricity, or a power like that, that you cannot personalize, but it's there and it's dangerous, and it'll do you harm.

[9 : 04] That's what many, many people think of when they think of evil. Even when they know it's evil done by certain people that commit evil acts. Paul, however, experienced evil, as he tells us here, as an evil person, an evil being, a personal evil, an actual devil who exists above the agencies, and using the agencies that he uses, that are willing to be used by him.

The God of this world, the Prince of the Power of the Air, he calls him elsewhere. And one of the things that you and I must never give in to is the idea that there isn't actually a personal devil that we need to confront, and that is opposed to us vehemently, and that is utterly opposite to everything

that is good.

Paul is saying to us, take this shield of faith up, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

This personal enemy that exists, whose wiles and crafts are so powerful and so skillfully used, that one of the things that he persuades people about is that he doesn't exist at all.

And that evil is to be confined merely to human hearts, and is just an impersonal thing. But you don't believe in the devil or in a personal agent that exists out with ourselves.

[10:46] Paul does, and Paul here is giving the Ephesians the benefit of his knowledge. And this is God and his word telling us this evil being that's described in his word elsewhere and given different descriptions.

That's where the fiery darts come from. He's the one who engineers and manufactures them. It doesn't matter who he gets to actually throw them, but that's the origin of them. The fiery darts of the evil one.

How does he exercise? These fiery darts, what are they actually about? What are these flaming darts or these flaming arrows that come from Satan and come maybe through other agents?

Well, there are many ways in which you could answer that question. What are these fiery darts? But the one thing that Satan does use very skillfully and very successfully are the thought processes of our minds.

Our minds in many ways are... The mind in many ways is really the control room of the person.

[11:56] And whatever controls your mind controls you. Whatever controls your mind has governorship of your life. If it is sin that controls us, then it's the mind, as Paul puts it, the mind of the flesh.

If it's the Holy Spirit, then it's the mind of the spirit, the spiritual mind. The mind in which the Holy Spirit is the governor, the controller, the one who actually guides your life.

Well, obviously, that is something the devil has access to. And even in the Christian sense, though he's not in control of it, he still has access to it.

And he has access to the thought processes of your mind. Think, for example, just in some ways in which that's possible. Your memory. Sometimes Satan will use your memory to assault you.

To throw fiery darts in your direction. Because you have a memory of something from the past.

Maybe it's the recent past. Maybe it's long in the past. Something that you've done that you know was wrong.

[13:00] Something that wasn't as it should have been. Or something you really should have done and you feel so guilty that you didn't do it. Satan will have access to that.

And at times will really trouble you over that. Your memory of those things. Whether it's what you did or what you failed to do. And he will actually put all sorts of thoughts into your mind in relation to that.

I wish I had done it. Things would have been different if I had done it. I wish I hadn't done it. Things would have been so much better if I hadn't done that. If I hadn't spoken that way to that person.

If I hadn't acted in that way towards that person. There is, you see, your memory and Satan's access to it and he's stirring it up and he's taking all of these things and he's using them as fiery arrows aiming them at your heart.

Aiming them at your life. Aiming them at your conclusions and your thoughts. And you need the shield of faith we'll see in a minute to extinguish them. Or you could use for example the way that doubts come into our mind from time to time.

[14:10] Some people aren't all that troubled with doubts but others are filled with doubts. And it troubles them that they have doubts. And as Christians Satan will come and say to them you shouldn't have any doubts as a Christian.

And if you have these doubts then you can't really be a Christian after all. And then you have doubts of course and these are the ones that Satan particularly is concerned to maximize in your own life in your own mind the doubts that he will have you to explore about God.

Doubts that are very often accompanied with questions. Is God really fair in treating me this way in giving me this or that experience?

Is God really all powerful after all if the world is in the kind of state it's in? Is this Bible really the word of God after all?

Aren't parts of it very difficult really to see as actually the truth of God? isn't it rather fanciful in places?

[15 : 25] Shouldn't we really give some credence to the idea of unbelieving scholars that parts of the Bible have been proved not really to be reliable and therefore not strictly speaking true literally and therefore you should just detect them a different way to what seems to be the case on the surface or what actually was believed in generations past but now we've come ahead of that we've advanced and we see things better.

Is the Bible is it really true? And of course what he wants to conclude and that's why there's often along with the doubt and along with the question there's almost the answer just on the tail of it that he would really want you to come to the conclusion well no it can't be really because it's just so difficult to accept that never actually meet that fiery arrow without your shield ready to actually extinguish it the shield of faith we'll see how the word of God fits into the exercise of the shield of faith in a moment so Satan has access to your inward thoughts to your memory to your doubts and of course nowadays when you think of all that's available from the internet from downloading films and erotic images and pornography and all of these detestable things that are available so easily for young and for old it's not just young people old people too when you think of how in a world there are so many examples nowadays of people who have become embroiled in those detestable things that's a satanic access to people's minds where all of these images and all of these things feed the imagination and feed the sinful inclination of the human heart as it is naturally to be engaged in and involved and to multiply that and even to carry it to the excesses of child abuse and pedophilia and all of these things that is from the pit they belong to the fiery darts of the enemy and he'll fire them at you as well you've all got televisions you've all got access to the internet so have I you come across images that you know are not from the

Lord that don't belong to the kingdom and the values of the kingdom what do you do about them do you just let them into your heart or do you just immediately put up the shield of faith and say like Joseph did when he was tempted to commit an act of sin with Potiphar's wife how shall I do this great wickedness and sin against the Lord that was Joseph taking the shield of faith his trust in God his respect for God his valuing of the honor of God of the things that God himself was honored by and say no I can't I can't even think of doing that but the devil will throw the dart it's up to you whether you and I put up the shield of faith or just let it stick in your life because if you let it stick in your life it'll burn the flame will increase and it'll begin to take over that's what many people sadly as professing

Christians have actually found as well it's very soon these sort of things can take over a person's life so there's the it's from a personal animosity this malevolent actual being of Satan who throws the darts and uses others to throw them as well and has access to these inward thoughts and in many respects it's through these thoughts these thought process through our mind that we come to have the darts thrown at us but there's also the fiery darts also involve outward trials think of that great book in the bible book of Job it's not an easy book to go through the passages of it are pretty difficult you've got to sometimes take it in large chunks and even then it's difficult sometimes to know exactly what the meaning of certain passages is but if you take an overview of it it's all about a man of God an outstanding believer being tried outwardly all the things that happened in his life they all happened because

Satan was involved in the scheme by which Job was really and thoroughly tested but you notice in the book of Job the trials came first the things he lost went ahead of Satan then in his mind getting access to his thoughts and even using his wife to get access to his thoughts because she came very soon in his experience and said why do you just not curse God and die you're not surely going to go on trusting in the God you've been trusting in when he's let all of this into your life and you remember Job's response shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil he didn't mean that God was the author of evil but he did mean that God could allow or use evil to get into people's lives in a way that truly tested them well the outward trial became for Job a means by which

[21 : 19] Satan had access to his thoughts and access to tempting him him and access to him being experiencing these fiery darts thrown at him and it's very common as well for all of us when we come to follow the Lord when you come openly to follow the Lord when you come to confess that God is your God that Christ is your savior that you are indeed pleased to be his disciple to be his follower what then happens you're not very long concluding that and saying this is what I must

do when you're aware of other thoughts in your mind but saying well if you do that you're going to lose your friends you're going to lose your reputation you're going to lose perhaps your prospects and your career you're going to actually really suffer if you do this if you do it open you'd be far better keeping things under wraps just go along quietly don't tell too many people about it you can be a Christian you can be silently you can do all of these things without really telling anybody about it these are fiery darts these are fiery darts designed to actually let you designed to attack you so that you let your shield down and just let them stick in your mind and in your heart and you'll become an ineffective and virtually useless person in terms of your spiritual witness

God the Lord has given us the shield of faith against the fiery darts of the evil now these are just very briefly some examples of how we should think about these fiery darts and you can expand on that yourselves when you think of these inner thoughts the way the thought processes work the kind of thoughts that sometimes come to us and they can come to you at any time they've probably come to you even now as I've been preaching they come to you when you're reading your bible they're coming to you when you come to worship God in church they come to you when you bend your knees or when you're sitting or whatever standing and praying to God can any of us ever say that we were never subject to a fiery dart when we've been praying to God or reading our bibles we all know them they come to us the kind I've been mentioning already when you're reading a passage such as in early

Genesis and the thought comes to you do you think this is really true that's a fiery dart these are the things that God has given us the shield of faithful so let's look at the shield of faith by which we're able to extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one what is faith in this context what does he mean here by the shield of faith well faith of course as we know involves believing certain things to be true but it also involves putting your trust in God or in the Lord Jesus Christ as God's provided savior for us in other words faith is not just what you believe and the things that are believed it also includes putting your trust actually in the person of the savior but faith here as it's used the shield of faith is really about how you use that faith how you use what you believe how you use your trust in the Lord how you actually use that against the fiery of flaming darts of the evil one it's not just the fact that you have faith it's that you use it in certain ways you think of the

Roman soldier yes the shield was large enough to cover most of his body but he still had to use it he had to use it in turning it different ways whatever way the arrow was coming from he sometimes would have to lift it up sometimes it would have to be sideways he also might just have to look straight above because the arrows were often fired straight up and came down very steeply so he'd have to shield himself with the shield lifted up the way almost horizontally that's how your faith is as well your faith is a mobile thing your faith is something and your trust in the Lord is something that you move about depending on what it is you're confronting depending what kind of arrow it is that you're facing so you take it up you move it around you actually use it in order to face directly the arrow that's coming to you so if the arrow is a doubt then you go to certain promises of God for example you move your faith around to these promises of God and it's absolutely crucial that you see that that is in fact what we do because the great thing about faith

I mean we've read Hebrews chapter 11 that part of it this evening and one of the great things about faith is that when you use your faith you're not relying on yourself you're not relying on your natural skills you're not relying on the strength of your intellect you're not relying on anything that God has given you by way of natural gifts the great thing about your faith is that you're relying on someone other than yourself you're relying on God himself you're relying on Jesus Christ your savior you're relying on his word you're relying on his promises you are relying on his command you're relying on his revelation that it's a revelation that has taken account of absolutely all and each of your needs you're relying on what is outside of yourself your faith does not trust in itself faith doesn't rest upon faith that's where certain groups actually are very wrong and very misleading and actually lead to causing a lot of harm in those who belong to these groups because sometimes you'll find groups actually saying you know the reason your life as a Christian is not advancing is that your faith is not as strong as it should be or your faith is not exercised in the right way so it's always coming back to the faith itself always coming back to some deficiency about the faith itself or about the exercise of that faith

[27 : 58] Paul is doing the other thing he is actually saying you have that faith as a shield for your life but you use it in such a way that looks beyond itself you look to the person of the saviour on whom your faith rests you take your confidence from what you find in him not from what your

strength of faith is or the greatness or lack of your faith or how often you pray or how much you attend church or how many prayer meetings in the year you come to all of these things are important themselves but your faith doesn't rest in any of that and all you have to do is ask yourself the question when I come to the point at which I'm dying that moment when I'm going to leave this world what am I going to rest in what is my faith going to be connected to is it itself is it me is it my church is it my congregation is it my minister is it my church session is it my best

Christian friend no because to die as a Christian to die successfully if we may put it that way to die victoriously is the right word your faith rests on Christ so many of the great theologians of the past left a record of how they thought on their deathbed and you'll find many expressions used by them such as all my learning is of no use to me now when it comes to the basis of my hopes it's in Christ and Christ alone on Christ the solid rock I stand because everything else is thinking sand so that's why he's using faith here as we've seen in in

Hebrews 11 in other words when you're conscious of thoughts coming to you these things arising in your mind and especially when you know that they're against God and what you believe in God and is the word of God you go to the word of God you go to the promises of God's word you go to what God in his word tells you about himself you go to these great facts these are not speculations these are not things that have been invented by the church these are not things that in any way at all are other than God's word you go to the facts that God himself says are true about him especially his faithfulness his power his work in Jesus Christ his atoning work that has covered sin for his people forevermore his work in your heart by the Holy Spirit nothing of yourself in that and you lift the shield of faith when you go to these things that's really lifting the shield of faith and therefore meeting the fiery dart as it comes and as the devil comes to you and say well you've got all of these doubts and how can you be a

Christian what do you do you lift the shield of faith and you say this Bible tells me it's not about how good I am or that I'm perfect already in this life it's that Christ died for my sins you go with the thought to Romans 8 you extinguish the thought in Romans 8 and these great passages that say it is God who justifies who shall condemn it is Christ who died who is actually going to undo that justification who is going to take any of the great threads that have been woven into this garment of his righteousness and pull them out so that it's no longer intact take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one use the great facts that God has given us go outside yourself and lift up and lift up the shield of faith the truth of God whatever subject it is your faith as it is your trust in

God and in his faithfulness and in all that you find in him that's your shield of faith that's faith as you use it faith in its exercise faith that the hymn writer and there are many such hymns as there are also of course psalms but in the new psalms we often sing that tune even tide which is based on that great hymn abide with me and you know some of the verses from that hymn you probably know them all but if you think of it this is what it says I need thy presence every passing hour what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power who like thyself my guide and stay can be through cloud and sunshine Lord abide with me I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless ills have no weight and tears no bitterness

[33 : 51] I'm not quite sure about that actually is it really the case that ills have no weight and tears have no bitterness maybe not but we know what he's getting at where is death sting where grave thy victory I triumph still if thou abide with me take take up the shield of faith use your faith to extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one let's pray

Lord we pray that you would help us we know that we so often fail to lift our shield and to use it in a way that would thwart the evil one in his attempts we are very conscious oh Lord of some of his flaming arrows do find lodgment in our persons and our minds and even in our actions and we pray that you would help us to extinguish them by coming to your word and to the truth of your word to the verities that we find in it especially to all that we know is true of yourself as the unchanging God bless to us your word once again we pray and go with us now we pray for Jesus sake Amen