

“Our Weapons: “Shield Of Faith”
Ephesians 6:16

March 18, 2018

SI: We’re looking in depth at a few verses at the end of Ephesians, chapter 6. Paul says context of the Christian life is spiritual warfare against supernatural evil.

But God has not left us defenseless.

He has given us his armor—Jesus Christ and all his benefits.

Each piece of armor is a different facet of the Gospel.

Let’s just read verse 16.

INTRO: What was the purpose of flaming arrows in ancient warfare?

Regular arrows are better in terms of accuracy, simplicity, speed of shooting.

Hunters don’t use flaming arrows to shoot game animals.

Flaming arrows weren’t just a practical weapon, they were a psychological weapon.

They were designed to strike terror and despair in the hearts of opponents.

If the man beside you gets struck with a regular arrow, that’s bad enough—

but if he gets struck and then goes up in flames, that tends to hurt morale.

The Germans invented the flamethrower in WWI. The first time they used it they killed a large number of British troops—but not with the fire.

The British soldiers were so unnerved by this new weapon,

they jumped out of the safety of their trenches and were cut down

with German machine guns.

Whether it’s flamethrowers, napalm, or flaming arrows—

fire is a weapon used to terrify and demoralize.

So what are the flaming arrows of the evil one that Paul mentions here?

Before I answer that, let’s notice one other interesting detail in this verse.

When Paul mentions the first three pieces of armor he says:

Stand therefore,

having girded up your loins with the truth,

having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

having your feet shod with the readiness of the gospel of peace.

But then notice the subtle change in what he says next:

In addition to all this

take up the shield of faith,

and take the helmet of salvation,

and the sword of the Spirit.

What many of the old commentators and preachers say is the first three pieces of

armor or equipment symbolize benefits of Christ and the Gospel that Christians put on and keep on.

These are what you are dressed in and walk around in every day.

Every day I understand my life and world in terms of the big picture truth of the Christian faith—creation, fall, and redemption through Christ.

Every day I affirm that God sees me in the righteousness of Christ.

Every day I know I'm at peace with God through Jesus Christ.

But the next three pieces of armor, Paul says, in addition, take up.

And many of the commentators say these are for use in crisis.

You take up the shield, helmet, and sword when you hear the enemy coming, or when he's actually attacking you.

If that's right, then it helps us understand the flaming arrows of the evil one.

These are not your every day struggles in the Christian life.

These are not your run-of-the-mill temptations and accusations.

These are the rare occasions in your life when the Devil tries to strike you with terror and despair. These are the things he does to rock your foundations.

The phone rings in the middle of the night and voice says—I have some bad news.

Your doctor says—It's malignant.

Your spouse says—I'm leaving.

Your unmarried daughter says—I'm pregnant.

Your boss says—You're fired.

You can add your own to the list.

In the course of every life there are some surprising tragedies and devastating occurrences that threaten to plunge you into fear and despair.

That's when you need the shield of faith.

Let's look at this under two points:

1. The flaming arrows from two perspectives: the Devil's and God's
2. The shield of faith: How you raise it to defend yourself.

MP#1 The flaming arrows

In the Bible fire often represents destruction. Fire consumes.

From the Devil's perspective, he wants to use these sudden, overwhelming, negative events to destroy spiritual progress in your life.

He can't rob you of your salvation and crown,

but he does all he can to make you ineffective and unproductive as a Christian.

He wants to stop your progress. Stop your success as a believer.

So sometimes this is the strategy he uses. Something very bad.

When the Roman legions would storm a city to try to take it,

when they were right up close to the walls, getting their siege machines in place, that's when they mostly faced fire as a weapon against them.

The defenders of the city would use fiery arrows and burning oil to drive them away and keep the city from being taken.

I think there's a spiritual parallel.

When you are trying to serve Jesus Christ, and when you are making an effort

to be a more faithful in some particular area—you're striving to be

a better spouse or parent or church member—and you're making progress.

Or maybe a new door for ministry has opened. Someone in your life who needs

Jesus and there are opportunities to serve this person, know and talk to them.

Or God has opened a door of opportunity in your work, and you see a chance to

used your talents and grow the things you love for his glory.

Or maybe there's a sinful habit you are seriously gaining ground in overcoming—

In other words—when you're trying to scale a wall and take a city.

Sometimes the Devil tries to arrest or destroy your progress through a sudden, violent, demoralizing attack.

I've seen it, Christians who are active and useful and public in their faith—

then something happens—and they retreat and become withdrawn and negative.

I've known a few gifted ministers who got so demoralized by church fights they left

the pastoral ministry. Gifted church members, family tragedy, pulled away.

It takes them a long time to get back to where they were.

Sometimes this happens to a church body corporately.

During a growing season of church life, or when there is some new work,

the Devil shoots flaming arrows hoping to demoralize or stir up dissension.

Sometimes it goes farther than that.

There are people who actually renounce the Christian faith.

When my child died of cancer I quit believing in God—that sort of thing.

We don't have time to explore that theologically, how the Bible categorizes people who abandon the faith.

But what's the immediate effects for the rest of us.

When you hear about that happening, it's sad and demoralizing.

I hate hearing those stories.

If the Devil can use flaming arrows to harm believers—
make us fearful and demoralized, then he will do it.

But there's another image of fire in the Bible—it purifies and refines.

It doesn't destroy, it makes more useful. This is God's perspective.

The enemy shoots fiery arrows to harm you, but God has bigger purposes,
and he uses that fire to refine.

The Devil doesn't have free reign.

At just the right moment God tells the Devil—that's enough, and he has to stop.

Two famous examples from Scripture—one OT and one NT.

Job had faith in God and he was blessed with family and wealth.

God said to Satan: Have you considered my servant Job, none like him

Satan: Job doesn't have faith in you, he has faith in his stuff and he's using you.

Let me take away his possessions and he will curse you.

God said: Test him but don't lay a hand on his body.

Satan set out to destroy Job's faith.

Job got those devastating phone calls, one after another.

Lightning has killed your flocks. Raiders have carried off herds.

Tornado stuck son's home, all children there, all dead.

“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Satan came back to God and said: He still has his health.

God said: Ok, but you may not kill him.

So Satan struck Job with boils, pain added to his grief.

Job had some very dark moments. He questioned God but never lost his faith.

In the end, he was refined.

God, I used to think I knew what was best, how you ought to run things

but now I know, you are in control, you do what you please, it is good

Even in this great and faithful man, the impurities are burned away

Satan not only fails to destroy, trials refine Job

The other example is Peter, Jesus' most outspoken disciple.

At the Last Supper Jesus said: Tonight all of you will desert me.

Peter replied: Even if all fall away, I never will. I'm dedicated than all of them.
Jesus said: Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail. When you return, strengthen your brothers.

It's the same pattern as with Job

Satan said to the Lord, this leading disciple of yours.

He only follows you because he is expecting an earthly kingdom and power.

Let me sift him and I'll prove his faith is false.

So Satan has his way with Peter and it's the most traumatic night of his life.

You know the story, he denied knowing Jesus.

I swear to you, I do not know the man.

Then the rooster crowed, as Jesus predicted, and Peter stumbled away weeping bitterly. But he was not destroyed. God didn't let Satan destroy him.

He was refined.

This is a hard doctrine accept,

that God sometimes allows the Devil to shoot fiery arrows into your life,

he actually allows someone to attack you with evil intent,

knowing that the fight you face can refine your faith.

But that's what the Bible teaches.

Here's how Peter himself described it in his first letter.

“For a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

This is the biblical perspective—

On the one hand flaming arrows are an attempt by Satan to terrify and demoralize, to harm your faith, to stop your progress.

But Satan is on a chain. God only allows him to harm you to a point.

Because God knows that the fiery battle will refine your faith.

For that to happen, God expects you to do something—

he expects you to take up the shield of faith.

MP#2 Taking up the shield of faith

In this whole business of fiery trials, Lord does not leave you defenseless.
take up the shield of faith

Roman shield was not a little round thing for sword fighting.

It was rectangular, 4 feet high, 2 ½ feet wide, wood covered with metal.

Think of a small, fire-proof door and have a good idea.

If you've seen *The Gladiator*, when Roman legions fighting barbarians—
that's the shield Paul wants you to envision.

Soldiers would overlap shields, duck behind them.

These shields didn't just give them physical protection from the flaming arrows—
but when they felt the heat and smelled the smoke and when every natural
instinct said—Run!—they were able to stay calm and not panic.

Faith is that shield—if you properly use it, enable you to face worst news,
worst tragedy, and not fall into a pit of fear and confusion.

So what is faith? What does the Bible mean when it talks about faith?

Faith is not a force. Faith is not positive thinking.

Faith in the Bible is always means trust in God's Anointed Savior Jesus Christ.

The power of faith is not your faith. Faith in and of itself is meaningless.

The power of faith is who you are trusting, who you have faith in.

So whether your faith is weak or strong, big or small, as long as it's in Christ—
then it is a shield you can hide behind.

Keep that in mind and let's look at one more Bible story.

Luke 8. Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Fire is not the only force that symbolizes both destruction and purification—
water does too.

Remember Isaiah 43. When you pass through the waters I will be with you—
when you walk through the fire you will not be burned. So here we have water.

As the storm became more and more violent, the disciples were fearful, confused.

They woke Jesus up: Lord, don't you care, we're going to drown

What did Jesus ask them? This is the key. "Where is your faith?"

Jesus knows that they have faith.

Where is it? Get it out. Put it to use.

The reason you are in such a state of pure panic is you don't have faith out.

Faith not something passive like a thermostat you set then ignore.

Faith is an activity that has to be exercised

Three steps to taking up the shield of faith in those crisis times—

when the bad news has come like a fiery arrow
when the waves are swamping the ship
By three steps, I don't think this is mechanical or a checklist.
Just the way you can think of using your faith in Christ.

1. Refuse to panic.

In Martyn Lloyd-Jones' famous sermon on Luke 8.

He says: Faith is refusing to panic.

It's refusing to allow yourself to be controlled by the situation.

Disciples in boat, water coming in, couldn't bale fast enough

looked like going to sink, allowed themselves to be controlled by situation.

Should have applied faith and taken charge—not going to panic

spiral of fear and confusion, exactly where devil wanted them

Panic is really unbelief—opposite of faith.

One preacher describing it as holding a rattlesnake under shoe.

You can feel it wiggling, panic makes you want to lift foot.

But faith means bearing down, holding down the panic.

I am not going to be controlled by these circumstances.

That doesn't sound very spiritual.

If you stop there—"I'm not going to panic"—

don't have faith, fatalism—but a necessary first step.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones. If that's not spiritual enough for you—

Faith is refusing to panic because God is in control.

2. Remind yourself of what you believe and what you know.

God is in control. Jesus Christ has died to save me.

I have a home in heaven.

This present suffering is not worthy to be compared to the glory.

All things work together for good to those who love God.

While we were sinners Christ died for us.

He who began a good work will carry it on to completion.

Remind yourself of who your God is and his great and precious promises.

Compare disciples with Sadrach, Meshach, Abendnego—fiery furnace

King—not going to bow to your image, know God can save us,

even if he chooses not to save us, still not going to bow down

our God saves—in this life and in the life to come

3. Apply what you know to your particular situation.

Imagine for a minute if the disciples had said

This is a terrible storm, bailing for all we are worth BUT

Is it really possible that we are going to drown with the Son of God in boat?

Is there anything He cannot do? Seen miracles, water into wine, healing, dead

Is it likely that He is going to allow us and Him to drown?

And even if he does. We are with him.

That is the way faith reasons

I see the waves and the storm, BUT—and it always adds that but.

Faith holds on to the truth and reasons from what you know is fact.

These men did not do that and they became agitated and panic-stricken

and you will become panic-stricken too when trials come

unless you say—yes, this situation is bad, BUT

When fiery trial comes, don't panic—you have the shield of faith.

But let me add a final point for all of you who, like me, have panicked.

The wonderful consolation in this story

There is value in the weakest faith

After the disciples had had their panic attack, spiral of fear and confusion

however weak their faith was—it was enough, in the end to do the right thing

They went to Jesus

Worn themselves out with panic and alarm, when exhausted went to Jesus

because they had some feeling that He could do something about it.

Don't you care that we are going to drown?

Weak faith doesn't matter as long as it's faith in Jesus Christ.

Because the power is not your faith. It's him.

So even faith as small as a mustard seed if it pushes you to him,

he will answer you. He might rebuke you a little bit.

He might ask you: Where is your faith? Why didn't you get it out sooner.

Remember that next time.

But he won't push you away.

If you find yourself facing a fiery trial

take it as a wonderful opportunity to raise shield of faith, exercise it, prove it.

But if you fail, fall into pit of panic, fear, and confusion when Devil attacks,

as soon as you think of it, fly to Jesus at once—

and he will receive you and bless you and deliver you

Jacqueline said she was allowed to visit her father at his Izmir prison last August. "It was hard to see him so broken, so thin, so desperate," she told the UNHRC assembly. She then read a note Brunson had written just a week ago.

“Let it be clear. I am in prison not for anything I have done wrong, but because of who I am—a Christian pastor. I desperately miss my wife and children. Yet I believe this to be true: it is an honor to suffer for Jesus Christ, as many have before me. My deepest thanks for all those around the world who are standing with and praying for me.”

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply,
The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design,
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.