

The Armor of God: Shield of Faith – Ephesians 6:16

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I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Well, as we continue on in our journey today of learning how to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, I have a special guest speaking to us remotely, whom we'll call Paul. He's going to share with us the key things we need to know to be able to do this.

My friends, if you want to learn how to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, this is what you need to do: **11 Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. 12 For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. 14 Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. 15 For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. 16 In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. 17 Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.** [New Living Translation]

Thank you, Paul! Those are certainly some powerful truths we need to understand and put into practice in our lives.

And my friends, that's what we've been working on for these past few weeks, trying to come to a deeper understanding of how we can be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might by putting on the full armor of God. There's nothing else that can provide the power and protection we need for the spiritual hand-to-hand combat that's coming against us every day.

So how goes the battle for each of you? Have you been targeted by any sharp daggers or flaming arrows in your walk with the Lord this week? These daggers and arrows are so common in our lives that many times we may not even realize that's what they are...missiles sent by Satan to tempt us, create anger and bitterness, draw us into ungodly behavior, and shake our faith in God. I can guarantee that there've been some of these sent your way during the past week, whether you've realized it or not. This is why we need to put on the full armor of God.

So far in our study, we've looked closely at the first 3 pieces of armor that need to be firmly in place before we're ready to put our helmet on, pick up our sword and shield, and head into active warfare. With the belt of truth we saw that in order to buckle our pants on and be ready for undistracted, active warfare, we need to reject the world's definition of truth and come to know, instead, that in the Bible we have the only completely reliable source of unchanging, absolute truth, written by God himself and preserved for us to use as the perfect guidebook for living in the universe he designed and created.

Then, with the breastplate of righteousness, we saw that the perfect righteousness we receive from God when we turn from our sin and trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, provides the ultimate protection from Satan's swords and daggers with which he's aggressively trying to take out our heart and vital organs. When we trust in Christ as our Savior and Lord, God credits his righteousness to our account and Satan's attempts to shake our faith and point out our unworthiness lose all their power, because our salvation and acceptance to God is not based on our perfect performance, but on Christ and his perfect work on the cross.

Then, last week, we looked at the boots of peace. We learned that we put on the boots of peace as we come to a heart understanding and practical belief that we now have permanent peace with God through Christ and relate to the Father as his own beloved children, rather than enemies under his constant wrath and disapproval. And in this new secure identity as God's forever children, with him fighting for us, we're finally ready to pick up our sword and charge into battle with quietness and confidence forever.

And finally, we ended last week by noticing that each of these 3 pieces of armor also provide us with a roadmap to our growth in Christ and increased effectiveness in battle: 1) knowing and immersing ourselves in the truth of God's Word; 2) growing in practical righteous living as we draw near to God and allow his Word and his Spirit to change us from the inside out; and 3) learning to walk in peace in our relationships with others in the body of Christ, working together in unity and cooperation to accomplish God's purposes. These pieces of armor provide us with both perfect protection and also perfect direction as to where God is leading us in our walk with him as he begins to change us from the inside out, making us stronger and stronger in him.

II. THE SHIELD OF FAITH

A. Ephesians 6:16 Analysis

So the verse we'll be zeroing in on today is Ephesians 6, verse 16, which says:

16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

I'd like to start by dissecting this verse a little and identifying all the key truths Paul is communicating to us here relating to the shield of faith.

1. The shield of faith is not to be taken up by itself.

First of all, notice that Paul begins this verse with that little phrase, "in addition to all." He's just finished sharing with us the 3 pieces of armor we need to have firmly in place before we enter active warfare, and then he says, "in addition to these, take up the shield of faith." The indication here is that we shouldn't just take up the shield of faith, while neglecting to put on the other pieces of armor. The shield is to be taken up in addition to the other pieces.

And if you think about this, it makes perfect sense. Faith by itself is not what we need. Is the important thing that we just need something to believe in? If that's the case, there are lots of things you could choose to believe in in life. You could have faith in yourself, faith that people are basically good, faith in your favorite movie star, faith in a politician, faith in Buddha, faith that your good works will

outweigh your bad, faith in your spouse, faith in your favorite TV evangelist... you get the idea! Our faith can be placed in just about anything, and it could even be the most sincere faith possible on a human level. But faith is only as good as the object it's placed in, and every one of those items I just listed is subject to failure and will eventually prove themselves unworthy of faith. Some of them even amount to placing faith in something that's a complete lie.

Clearly, just believing in something is not what will provide us the shield we need. To be protected in the spiritual battle, our faith needs to be based on something completely trustworthy. And Paul has just provided us with the perfect focus and foundation of our faith in the previous 3 pieces of armor. He's given us the truth we can absolutely trust in the Word of God, the Bible. He's given us the ultimate object of our faith in Jesus Christ our Savior and his righteousness. And he's given us the life-giving truth that we now have permanent peace with God, adopted as his very own children with him fighting for us, protecting us and transforming us to become more like Christ every day. This is the basis and focus for our faith, and if we just take up faith as a shield without it being founded on these truths, we'll be just like the world, thinking that simply believing in something...anything really...is what we need in life.

2. The shield needs to be picked up.

Secondly in verse 14, notice that the shield is to be taken up. The shield needs to be picked up and put into action. This tells us that we have a choice here and something we each need to do. We can choose to leave faith on the ground, or we can choose to pick it up. Faith is a choice we make. Did you know that you're constantly making subconscious faith choices in your everyday lives? As you get out of bed in the morning, you have faith that your legs are going to work and allow you to stand up and walk. As you get in your car and turn the key, you have faith that everything's working well enough in your engine to prevent it from exploding. When you take a vacation, well, most of you have faith that the airplane isn't going to crash and end your life. When you marry someone, you have faith that your spouse is going to be faithful to you and stick with you through the ups and downs of life.

Obviously, some of these faith choices are better than others, but we're constantly making them every moment of our lives, whether we know it or not.

And in thinking about the shield of faith, we need to realize that picking it up really means making a simple choice to trust God and his Word. You decide to trust in various things every day, and God's telling us here in Ephesians that to pick up the shield he's provided to us, we need to simply choose to trust him.

3. We need a shield because of the flaming arrows.

So why do we need a shield anyway? Well, Ephesians 6:16 and many other passages of Scripture answer this question very vividly and clearly for us. The reason we need a shield is because Satan is aggressively and continually shooting flaming arrows at each of us. And as we already mentioned, many of them may not even be recognized as such.

Probably the most vivid description in Scripture of Satan's evil intent to spiritually destroy each of us found in 1 Peter 5, verse 8:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

The devil wants to kill us spiritually with his flaming arrows and then eat us for dinner. He's not just playing games and teasing us and trying to poke at us a little bit. He wants to kill us and eat us. He wants to utterly destroy our faith in God and cause us to bring disrepute to the name and reputation of the perfect and holy God of the universe, who alone is worthy of praise and honor. And he uses a wide variety of methods to do this.

There's an interesting passage in Luke chapter 22 where Jesus is telling Simon Peter ahead of time about the fact that he will soon deny him. And Jesus says this to Peter: ***"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."*** Satan wants to sift each of us like wheat, just like he was wanting to sift Peter. In sifting wheat, vigorous shaking is necessary to separate out the wheat kernels. Have you ever felt like vigorous shaking could describe your experience in life? Well, in sifting Peter and in sifting each of us, Satan wants to bring severe trauma, struggles and difficult challenges into our lives in the hopes that we'll deny God, walking into sin and

falling away from our faith in God in the process. He wants to shoot arrows that not only pierce our heart, but also send us up in flames.

Now these flaming arrows can be a wide variety of challenges, but the goal of them all is to destroy our trust in God and turn us against him and against our brothers in Christ. Job, of course, is the classic example of a person who experienced an intense barrage of flaming arrows, losing just about everything he loved in his life. And whether we like it or not, we will all eventually face some incredible pain and loss at some point in our lives, and at these times you can know that Satan will be extremely active in whispering lies to turn us away from God. And the last thing he wants us to do is pick up the shield of faith, because he knows his arrows will not be successful when we make that choice to continue trusting in God.

Interestingly the references in Scripture to arrows often speak of the tongue and the way people talk and offend each other. Satan commonly uses tragedies to shake our faith, but as we're all well aware, he's also very good at using harsh words and lies to accomplish similar things. His flaming arrows sometimes take the form of words that hurt us and divide us and cause us to dishonor God's name by the way we respond and deal with them.

Think about it: how many times has Satan used the poor behavior and words of Christians to cause people to walk away from the church or never even consider entering the doors in the first place? I'm sure we can all think of people we know personally who have given up on church because of the way Christians have treated them or others. And here again is another area where we need to pick up our shield, remembering that our faith is in God and not in other people. Even the strongest believers sometimes make mistakes and don't handle things perfectly or say everything in love. But when we pick up the shield of faith in these situations we can continue on secure in our identity and value to God, no matter what people may say about us or do to us. We can also avoid walking away from the body of Christ when experiencing divisive and hurtful situations, knowing that our faith is in God and not in imperfect people who don't always walk according to God's will.

Another flaming arrow that Satan is aggressively using these days is his efforts to discredit the Bible and cause people to view it as an old, outdated religious fairy

tale that has no relevance to life in the modern world. We talked about this quite a bit recently in my message on the belt of truth. Fortunately God has given us an overwhelming amount of evidence to support the historical accuracy and trustworthiness of the Bible, but still we need to take up the shield of faith to extinguish this flaming arrow because we'll never be able to find enough pieces of evidence to prove in a court of law that everything in the Bible really is true and historically accurate. If we could, faith wouldn't be necessary.

Flaming arrows come in all shapes and sizes. But the bottom line in all this is: we need a shield to protect us in the battle because Satan is constantly shooting these arrows at us, and he's very creative in his methods. The arrows will continue coming no matter what. But the one thing that will protect us and extinguish them all is the shield of faith. Notice in verse 16 that the shield of faith will enable you to extinguish ALL the flaming arrows of the evil one. No matter what tactic or method he uses, the shield of faith will protect you from them all. Faith is the shield we need. It won't stop the arrows from being shot at us, but it will perfectly protect us from being pierced by them and going up in flames.

4. Ultimately, God himself is our shield as we choose to trust him.

Now this faith that is our shield is not faith in ourselves, but rather in God himself. Ultimately, God himself is our shield as we choose to have faith in him. He himself blocks and extinguishes the flaming arrows. There are many beautiful and comforting passages in Scripture about God being our shield. I want to share a few of them with you right now and I want you to notice that in each one, God is our shield when we choose to trust him. Trust, often expressed through calling on him, is what activates the shield. Listen closely as I read a few of these for you:

2 Sam 22:3-4

My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, You save me from violence. 4 "I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies.

2 Sam 22:31-37

31 "As for God, His way is blameless; The word of the Lord is tested; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him. 32 "For who is God, besides the Lord?

And who is a rock, besides our God? 33 "God is my strong fortress; And He sets the blameless in His way. 34 "He makes my feet like hinds' feet, And sets me on my high places. 35 "He trains my hands for battle, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. 36 "You have also given me the shield of Your salvation, And Your help makes me great. 37 "You enlarge my steps under me, And my feet have not slipped.

Ps 3:3-6

*3 But You, O Lord, are a shield about me,
My glory, and the One who lifts my head.*

*4 I was crying to the Lord with my voice,
And He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah.*

5 I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustains me.

*6 I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people
Who have set themselves against me round about.*

Ps 18:2-3

*2 The Lord 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.

*3 I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
And I am saved from my enemies.*

Ps 28:7

7 The Lord is my strength and my shield;

My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped;

Therefore my heart exults,

And with my song I shall thank Him.

Ps 84:11-12

1 For the Lord God is a sun and shield;

The Lord gives grace and glory;

No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

12 O Lord of hosts,

How blessed is the man who trusts in You!

Can you see the way God is a perfect shield when we choose to trust him, calling on him, seeking him and finding our refuge in him? Faith is what activates the shield.

B. A Biblical Definition of Faith

So what is faith, according to Scripture? I'm not interested in the world's definition of faith, but rather what God tells us it is. The world often defines faith as blind. They think we're just taking a blind leap of faith by trusting in the Bible, and that we have no real basis for that faith. But that's not biblical faith. Biblical faith is based on an astounding amount of evidence God has given us in the world around us, in ourselves, and in the Bible itself...evidence that the world is actively suppressing. But the fact remains: we've been provided with more than enough evidence to give us confidence in trusting that what God tells us in the Bible is true.

Biblical faith is clearly defined for us in what's known as the "Hall of Faith" in Scripture: Hebrews, chapter 11. Here we find both a definition of faith, and also many practical examples of faith lived out in people's lives. Hebrews 11, verse 1 says this: ***Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*** Biblical faith is taking the evidence of a Creator and Designer that we have in the world around us and the only realistic, well-supported and consistent explanation of who he is found in the Bible, and choosing to trust in its promises and in the reality of a God we can't see with our eyes, but whom we know is there because of the abundant evidence that's all around us.

Now sometimes it helps in understanding the true meaning of a word to understand what its opposite is. And in this case the opposite of faith is doubt. Doubt is defined as hesitating to accept something as true; holding something as uncertain; or disbelieving. Doubt can be a good thing in some cases. Doubting Satan's lies is a really good thing! But doubt is also what Satan is most trying to create within us. That's what he created in Adam and Eve and that's what he's still trying to create in each of us...doubt in God's goodness...doubt in the truth of his Word...doubt in his kind intentions toward us...doubt that we're really secure in our salvation...doubt that we can actually live life the way God calls us to live by the power of his Spirit.

James gives us a very descriptive picture of how doubt, or NOT taking up the shield of faith, affects us in our walk with God. He says that... ***“the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”*** When we choose not to trust God and his Word, we are tossed around in life like a tiny boat on the ocean during a raging storm...we are unstable in all our ways...we are unprotected from the flaming arrows by God’s shield of faith.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen, and when we choose faith instead of doubt, we find refuge and safety in God. And this simple trust we are called to is not just wishful thinking with no basis in reality. It’s supported by the evidence in the world around us, by the perfect Word of God given to us in the Bible, and by the daily miracles God provides for each of us each day.

In my next message, Lord willing, we’re going to dive a little deeper into the importance of belief, trust and faith in Scripture and we’ll also look at some of the examples of practical faith lived out provided for us in Hebrews, chapter 11. And one thing we’re going to notice is that each of these faith warriors had a strong basis for their faith. They weren’t just choosing some random thing to believe in and then taking a blind leap of faith. Instead, each of them had a personal encounter with God in person or through his Word and they chose to trust and obey. And in picking up the shield of faith, they were protected and empowered by God to accomplish great and miraculous things, experiencing his presence and power and joy! This same opportunity is available to each of us as we pick up the shield of faith in our daily lives.

1 Peter 1, verses 5 through 9, tell us that we, through faith, we are protected by the power of God and are able rejoice and experience joy inexpressible even in the middle of various trials.

Listen to this:

6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by

fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

III. CONCLUSION

My brothers and sister in Christ, this is the joy inexpressible and the power and the rock solid foundation each of us can have in any circumstance when we choose to pick up the shield of faith, simply believing in our good God and trusting in his wisdom and kind intentions toward us. Satan is always trying to discredit him, tell lies about him, and create doubts in your mind. Life is full of difficulties, uncertainties, pain, and unexplainable mysteries. Our world is under a curse, if you haven't noticed...a curse caused by our sin and rebellion against God...and things are made all the worse because our enemy is prowling around trying to shoot us with flaming arrows and eat us for dinner.

The only way to confidently navigate your way through this battlefield and the tough times and questions of life is to constantly and persistently trust in God and his Word at all costs. And if you're really struggling in this area right now, or if you just want stronger faith, call out to God. He gives faith as a gift and he will give it to you as you seek him, meditate on his Word and call out to him in prayer.

I want to leave you today with a profound description of the benefits of picking up the shield of faith, from Psalm 91, verses 2 to 6. Let these words soak into your mind as you go today:

***2 I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress,
My God, in whom I trust!"***

***3 For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper
And from the deadly pestilence.***

***4 He will cover you with His pinions,
And under His wings you may seek refuge;
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.***

***5 You will not be afraid of the terror by night,
Or of the arrow that flies by day;
6 Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.***

May God be our perfect shield, protecting us and banishing fear in our lives as we choose to trust in him!