

“The Shield of Faith”

Ephesians 6:16

Introduction:

1. The fourth stanza of the hymn we have sung opens with the words, “When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie...” Is this not the common experience of every follower of Christ? Has the following ever happened to you? You have just woke up in the morning after a good nights sleep. Then suddenly, evil thoughts have come to you, perhaps even blasphemous or filthy thoughts. You were not thinking about such things. You just woke up, but there they are—horrible thoughts floating around in your mind! And then you might think, “How can I possibly be a Christian and think such things?”

2. My brother or sister in Christ, if that has ever happened to you, do not think it something strange or unusual. A flaming arrow of the evil one has hit you. But what should we do? How can you and I counter that kind of attack? How can we live in the face of such pitiless assaults? The Holy Spirit through the apostle presents us with his way of spiritual warfare. Let us listen to God’s word together.

Exposition:

I. The importance of faith in spiritual warfare

A. The shield of the ancient soldier

1. The word used for shield is not the one for the little shield that was also carried by the soldier, but for the large shield that the soldier could hide behind. When carried by many soldiers together, they could form a wall.

2. The shield was often put together in such a way as to make it resistant to attacks by flaming arrows, which were used to cause havoc and destruction on enemy forces, like later generations would use an artillery barrage or missile attacks.

B. Faith is the believer’s shield

1. Faith has three elements: *knowledge* of the truth, *assent* to the truth, and *trust* or dependence on the truth. Christ is the object of real saving faith. We do not have faith in faith, but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16). Like the other parts of the armor of God, genuine faith in Christ is a gift of God (Ac 13:48; 16:14; 18:27; Eph 2:8-9; Ph 1:29; 1 Tm 1:14).

2. Faith has a crucial place in the believer's life.

a. At the time of salvation, the Holy Spirit presents the ability and sufficiency of Christ as Savior and God's promises of eternal life to all who will believe and by the gift of faith we trust in the Lord, and entering into union with Christ, we are saved.

b. From that moment on, the Spirit of God strengthens our faith, enabling us to make use of Christ's fullness as our prophet, priest and king and to participate in every grace and blessing in Christ.

Comment: As faith unites us to the Savior, so faith receives from the Lord all that we need for our daily walk. We must actively depend on Christ to receive what we need to live for God's glory and to enjoy the Lord.

II. The challenge to faith from the flaming arrows of the evil one

A. Every Christian faces an evil opponent, who is totally given over to sin and attacks without any thought of mercy. He is called Satan or the devil.

1. We need to understand that evil or sin or rebellion against God is not something that just happens. It is committed by persons, whether angels or humans. The spiritual forces of evil, Satan and the demons, are evil personal beings that enjoy attacking and destroying humans. They especially hate God and his people. So when by grace we join God's side, the powers of evil go to war against us.

2. Our problem is not merely our own sin and the sins of other people. Alongside what humans may do, there are the powers of darkness—personal intelligent beings of spiritual ability that seek ways to ruin us. "We must get rid of the notion of abstract evil: there is no such thing." [Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier*, p. 300]

B. Satan and the other evil ones attack us with "flaming arrows". What are these flaming arrows? I think we can group them into five categories.

1. Horrible thoughts, such as ideas or imaginations about what is unholy, blasphemous, skeptical or malicious.

Example: The mark of a Christian is love (Jn 13:34-35). Yet have you ever become angry toward someone and then suddenly felt the urge, quite contrary toward your usual goodwill toward that person, to hurt him or her? You have been hit with a flaming arrow of malice.

Illustration: In Bunyan's *The Holy War*, he pictures the evil one attacking Mansoul with a handpicked army of doubters, with each division led by a cruel commander. [See pp.346-348.]

2. Pride and selfish ambition—how contrary both are to doing everything for the glory of God!

3. Discontent, lust and greed—to divert us from God. Cf. Mt 6:33

4. False guilt feelings—to disrupt our fellowship with God

5. Doubt and despair—the aim is to reduce us to inactivity and uselessness

Apply: We must be ready for these attacks, because they will come. And let us remember the enemy's objective—to keep us from declaring God's praises and enjoying life with him.

III. The victory of faith over these attacks

A. A great promise—"with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one"

1. What Paul says here through an illustration is stated directly by John (1 Jn 5:4) and by Peter (1 Pt 5:8-9).

2. The Lord is encouraging us to be confident in him. The Spirit does not **minimize** the problem, but he **maximizes** the all-sufficient resource that we have in Christ.

Point: Christian, you will be hit hard—very hard. But do not despair or run. Stand firm. The shield of faith is impenetrable when used properly.

B. How faith acts as our shield that extinguishes the flaming arrows

1. "The answer is that faith never points to itself, it always points to its object." [Lloyd-Jones, p. 305] The object of true faith is the Lord Jesus Christ (Rm 13:14). Satan has already tried his most desperate schemes on him and has met with complete failure. The all-powerful Lord easily overmatches the adversary at every point.

2. Here we must again stress strongly that true faith is never faith in one's faith, which is only self-confidence by another name. Instead, it is active reliance on the **Lord**.

Example: How did Abraham overcome in the face of impossibilities? He had faith in God (Rm 4:18-21). He relied on the promise of God that God was his shield and his very great reward (Gen 15:1).

Apply: You and I will go forward in that same spirit of faith (Rm 8:31-39)!