

SHIELD OF FAITH

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Scripture: Ephesians 6

We're in the sixth chapter of Ephesians. We're looking at all the things that we need to put on, that is being offered to us as Christians. We've looked at truth. We've looked at righteousness. We've looked at the gospel of peace. And today, we're going to look at the shield of faith.

Paul writes, *"Take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."*

I'd like for us, at the very outset, to look at two questions that I think we need to answer, if we can understand what Paul is saying here.

- How can faith be used as a shield?
- What are the flaming arrows that faith is supposed to stop.

But before we delve into that, there's something else that we need to do – understand what faith is. Faith and trust sometimes almost synonymously go together. And while they are related, they are not really the same. They are like two sides of the same coin, though. Faith is the foundation, and trust is the action. Let me elaborate a little bit on that.

FAITH: Faith is believing in who God is and what He has revealed. It is the confidence that God exists, His word is true, and that His promises will come to pass.

Hebrews 11:1 says, *"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."* So faith is belief in the truth of God.

TRUST: Trust is acting on faith even when circumstances seem uncertain. That's the difference here. Trust acts on faith even when circumstances seem uncertain. It is the practical expression of faith. We're choosing to depend on God in real-life situations.

Proverbs says, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."* So, trust is relying on God based on faith.

So, key differences would be faith is the belief in God's truth and trust is the action that is associated with that belief. Imagine standing by a bridge. Faith says: I believe this bridge can hold me. Trust is actually walking across the bridge.

So, two sides of the same coin. Faith without trust is nothing but intellectual belief or just knowledge, which Proverbs tells us 'just puffs us up,' and is without action. Trust without faith has no foundation to stand on and will eventually fail. So faith and trust – they work together.

How faith and trust work together.

Hebrews 11:18 talks about Abraham. *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*

Faith – Abraham believed God's promise of a new land. Trust – he left his home and travelled to that land. Faith believes, trust obeys.

Take Peter walking on water. Matthew 14:29-30 *Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me."*

Faith – Peter believed that Jesus could make him walk on water. Trust – getting out of the boat and actually walking on the water towards Jesus. So faith gets you started, but trust keeps you going as long as you keep your eyes on Jesus, of course. Peter paid for that when he began to look at the storm rather than at Jesus.

I. HOW CAN FAITH BE USED AS A SHIELD?

What is Paul trying to tell us about this particular area? Faith acts as a shield by protecting us from spiritual attacks, doubts, temptations and fears.

A Roman soldier would lift his shield up to block the enemy's arrows. Those shields were huge. They were almost 4 feet high and about 18-24 inches wide, so they completely protected a soldier. He would put it up to ward off the arrows that would come against him.

What would be practical ways for us that we can use faith or trust as a shield?

1) Trust in God's promises over our feelings or our circumstances.

Faith is believing God's word over what we see or we feel. When trials come, instead of reacting with fear, faith declares: God is in control.

Remember Abraham when he was faced with an impossible situation. God was telling him all these things about how the nations would come from him and his descendants would be as numerous as grains of sand. He looks to God and says: But God, I don't even have a child. How is all of this going to happen? But he believed God's promise that God would do something even though he was not able to see the immediate results.

So, speak and meditate on God's word. Think about what God is saying. What are the promises that He has given to you and to me to help us through difficult times? And then, trust those promises. Remember, we walk by faith and not by sight.

2) Use faith to deflect the enemy's lies and doubts.

We know that the enemy comes to us with lies about ourselves, about our situations, or to create doubt in the things that we are doing or what we are facing. And Satan uses these things to try and shake our faith in God. But faith rejects those lies and replaces them with God's truth. A classic example of this is Jesus in the wilderness. He responded with scripture, standing firm in faith.

So we counter lies with the truth of God's word. What lies is he bringing against you today that is undermining your confidence or your trust in God? What are you believing about yourself that's not true? Maybe he says you don't have any worth. And the way to counter it is to say: Get a life Satan. I am God's masterpiece. I'm made in the image of God. That's who I am. I'm not going to believe what you say about me.

3) Stand firm in trials without fear.

Don't be frightened when you go through difficult situations. Life's challenges can shake us, but faith helps us stand firm, knowing God is working even in the midst of suffering.

The thing about suffering is that when we suffer, we begin to think that we are all alone. And when we take our eyes off of God, then we begin to get fearful. Always, when we take our eyes off God, fear envelops us, especially when we're going through pain or there's something that's going on which is quite terrible in our lives. We need to stand firm in the midst of trials without fear.

Remember the story of the three Hebrew lads in the fiery furnace – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were put right in the middle of the fire. But they tell Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, we believe that God can get us out of this place. But even if He doesn’t, we will not bow down and worship you.” No fear. Right there in the midst of a fire, there was no fear. They just knew and trusted God. Did God come through? He did. His word tells us, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. The fire, you will not be singed” That’s His promise.

4) Guard your mind against anxiety and fear.

The enemy attacks our thoughts, filling us with worry and fear. But faith shifts our focus from the problem to God’s power. Every time we look at our problems, it tells us how inadequate we are in facing a problem. That’s the nature of problems, to tell us that this is big, that this is going to require a lot of resources, that it’s going to take a lot of wisdom. But when we look at it through the grid of God’s lenses, then we also see God’s power that comes to bear on the problem. Peter walked on water until he looked at the storm. Faith in Jesus kept him afloat. Doubt made him sink.

So we continue to look at the situations that surround us or the thoughts that are filling us that might lead to worry, anxiety, or fear. And we say, “No. I will trust God. I will pray to Him. I will declare His peace over me.” Don’t be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

I wonder whether you’re here today with anxious thoughts, whether that’s the extra baggage that you’re carrying these days. Anxiety. Every time we carry extra baggage, it weighs heavily on us. It’s a weight that we have to live with. Maybe today, it’s time to say: I’m not going to be anxious. I trust God. I have faith that He will take me through this situation or circumstance.

5) Strengthen faith through prayer and fellowship.

The Roman soldiers locked their shields together for better defense. Similarly, faith is strengthened in community. It’s always good to bring somebody into your realm and say, “I need help.” It’s very difficult to stand and face things all alone. So be willing to share with somebody else that you’re going through a difficult time. Pride often keeps us from letting others know that we have an issue or that we are going through a difficult time.

When the early church was going through difficult times, they prayed together. The number of people who have told me how encouraged they are by our Friday prayers, just knowing that on Fridays, their request is being lifted up to the Lord by the entire church, by a community of faith. It’s good to join a community. Be part of a small group that is praying together. Carry each other’s burdens. And in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ.

As we look at faith as a shield, remember faith is like you read and trust God’s word. Faith is built on truth. Resist doubt and fear. Declare God’s promises. Stand firm in trials. God is working behind the scenes. Guard your mind. Replace anxious fearful thoughts. Pray in fellowship. Strengthen faith with others.

II. WHAT ARE THE FLAMING ARROWS THAT FAITH IS SUPPOSED TO STOP?

We’ve looked at faith and what it means, and how we’re supposed to use it. But against what do we use these? What are these flaming arrows that Paul is talking about?

Ephesians 6:16 says, *“Take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”*

These shields used to be made of leather and other binding materials. They would soak it in water and then hold it up so that even fire couldn’t catch the shield.

Paul says there are flaming arrows coming to you. They have the potential to harm you. And they represent the spiritual attacks from Satan that are aimed at weakening our faith, distracting us from God, and leading us into sin or despair. These attacks are sometimes often subtle and deceptive, designed to create doubt and fear, temptation, or even discouragement.

What are these flaming arrows?

1) Doubt.

An attack against God’s truth was Satan’s first tactic in the Garden of Eden. Did God really say? And that’s how he comes to you and me. Did God really say He’ll take care of you? Did you really think that God has the power to take you through this situation? And he comes in to create doubt.

And how does faith stop it? Faith declares God is faithful, even when I don’t understand it. There are many situations where we have limited understanding. But that’s what faith is all about, that we base our faith on things that have happened in the past that give us the confidence for the future. We know enough about God to know that He can carry me through, that His word is true. Did God really say? Yes. Because God is faithful. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. lean not on your own understanding.

2) Fear and anxiety.

It’s almost an attack on God’s protection. Fear makes us focus on problems instead of God’s power. We focus on the problem rather than who God is. Satan wants us to feel insecure, overwhelmed, and helpless. Because then he’s got us where he wants us.

But how does faith stop it? faith reminds us that God is sovereign and that He is always in control. God is never out of control. God is sovereign. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind, Paul tells Timothy in his second epistle, 1:7.

3) Temptation.

Satan tempts believers to sin, compromise, or to take shortcuts. And these arrows often appeal to our desires, our pride, or even our weaknesses.

How does faith stop it? Faith clings to God’s word, resisting sinful desires. It clings to God’s word. What does God’s word say about temptation? No temptation has overtaken you but that which is common to all people. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can handle. And with the temptation what will always be provided? A way of escape – God’s word. Nail that temptation any time it comes from Satan and say: You don’t know the word of God, I do.

4) Discouragement.

An attack on God’s plan, maybe. God’s plan for your life. The enemy may come and whisper: You’re not good enough. Your prayers don’t matter. You’ll never be able to fulfill this plan that God has for you. And you end up feeling hopeless and ineffective.

How does faith stop it? Faith says: God is working even when I can't see it. God is always working withing us. Do not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest, if we don't give up. Satan would love for us to throw in the towel and say, "I'm done. I can't carry on." But God says, "I'm not finished with you." I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. All things! So, when Satan comes to you and attacks God's plan for your life, don't listen to him. Tell him this truth. Tell him what God has said, that we can do all things because Christ strengthens.

5) **Accusation and guilt.**

Satan often attacks us on God's forgiveness. That is why he is called the accuser of the brethren. He reminds us of past sins, trying to make us feel unworthy. This is what you did. How can you even think about doing anything else? How can you think about doing this for God? Look at what you have done previously. You just can't do it. and then we begin to think: O my goodness! That's true.

Satan knows our history. He knows if you have fallen in some area. And very often he brings that as an attack to us and says, "You can't walk the Christian life. look at how you fell."

How does faith stop it? Faith rests on Christ's finished work on the cross. Therefore, now, there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. There's forgiveness of sins, and we believe that forgiveness. But there will never be any condemnation that comes from God.

6) **Division of conflict.**

He attacks unity within the church, within the community of believers through division and conflict. He sows division in families, in churches, in friendships, through unforgiveness, gossip, resentment. They are all powerful, fiery darts that come against people. Faith prevents that by offering forgiveness, dealing in love and looking forward to reconciliation rather than division.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

7) **Pride and self-reliance.**

It's an attack on God's authority. Satan tempts people to trust in their own strength instead of God's authority and plan and His purpose for us. He convinced Eve that she would be like God.

How does faith stop it? Faith humbles us to depend on God rather than on our sins. Remember, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Satan would like to come to us and puff us up and say, "You're the man/woman. You did this." And soon we begin to think: Yeah, I am. I'm so good. And the moment we start thinking that, we forget that it was God who lifted us up. It was God who empowered us to do things.

Pride will always lead to our fall. But we keep our eyes on Him and say, "I will not become proud, Satan. I will not. I'll acknowledge that everything and all that I am is because of who Gid is and how much He loves and cares for me. So faith extinguishes every flaming arrow that comes our way.

- God is true. Use that against doubt.

- God is in control. Use that against fear.
- God is enough. Use it against temptation.
- God is working. Use it against discouragement.
- God forgives. Use it against guilt.
- God unites. Use it against division.
- God is Lord. Always use it against pride.

1 John 5:4 *This is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.*

I don't know where you are, beloved, in terms of fiery darts that are coming your way. I don't know whether some have managed to hit you. Maybe some of them have taken its toll on you. And maybe today might be a good time to say: I want to get faith back as my shield. Maybe it's time to also say: Lord, these darts that have come against me, that have taken a root, would You pull them out? Bring healing Lord, to those areas. Would You inspire me to put that shield back in place so that faith can ward off those flaming arrows?

Let us pray.

Amen.