

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, July 21, 2019

## **The Shield of Faith Quenches the Fiery Darts of the Wicked**

The letter that Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus is a wonderful discussion of doctrinal and practical truths, filled with great encouragement. Among other things, Paul discusses the human condition of sin and depravity; the nature of God; the work of Christ in Salvation; the gift of Faith; the nature and purpose of the church; the works of the flesh, and the world around us; the war that we must fight against the flesh and the world, wherein we must bring forth good works, as the fruit of our faith (practical and specific instruction for men, women, husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, servants, etc.). Paul recognized that we will necessarily struggle as we strive to do those things that he instructed. We will necessarily hit hard and thorny paths. We will necessarily be buffeted by Satan and the world. If we are going to profess Christ, and strive to obey him in our daily, practical walk, then it will necessarily be all out war. Paul acknowledges this sober fact, and therefore closes his letter with the following instruction:

***Ephesians 6:10-20*** “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: 18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; 19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

We have had several sermons over the years that speak to some element of this wonderful passage. Today I would like to freshly encourage us all to lay hold on these beautiful and sufficient remedies, with a particular focus on the shield of faith that quenches the fiery darts of the wicked. In order to do that, we will consider the following:

- Our Lord and the power of His might
- Our adversary and his fiery darts

- The shield of faith that our Lord has provided

### **Our Lord and the power of His might**

Again, Paul is reminding us here that if we will serve God, then we will necessarily spend our days on this earth engaged in a perpetual, spiritual war. War with Satan and his angels; war with the children of disobedience who are energized by the lies of their father the Devil, and war with our own vile flesh. Given that fact, we are encouraged to utilize the armor and weaponry that God has provided for us:

*“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might ... put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand ... to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand ... Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”*

The key to our ability to stand – to overcome, and to gain the victory – in this bloody war, is the power of God’s might! My friends, the victory will not come from armaments that we craft with our own wisdom. Part of this war is recognizing, and fighting against the prideful part of our flesh that wants to give in to the deceptive, flattering mischief of our adversary the Devil; mortifying the fearful part of our flesh that is easily ensnared by Satan’s perpetual, furious roaring. *“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.” (Proverbs 29:25)* In those prideful and fearful moments, we are most prone to turn aside from the all-sufficient helps that our God has provided us. How much sorrow do we cause ourselves when we look to our own devices, instead of seeking and finding strength in the power of God’s might? How much damage do we cause ourselves and others when we give service to our own pride, rather than bow in trembling reverence before our glorious Creator?

Remember, friends, that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are not made with minds and hands of flesh, and they are not made for physical warfare. However, they are MIGHTY! Our merciful Father has looked upon us vile worms with love, and therefore provided us with Faith, Truth, Righteousness, Salvation, the Gospel of Peace, and the Spirit and Word of God! What more could we desire? What more do we need?

**2Corinthians 10:3-5** *“3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”*

They are mighty because they are of God, from God, and for God’s glory! He has crafted this armor, and He has supplied it to us, and He energizes it to make it effective. This

armor has nothing to do with our beauty or wealth; it has nothing to do with our intelligence, or eloquence; it has nothing to do with our standing among men. In fact, those things – with Satan’s encouragement - often turn us away from the perfect sufficiency and simplicity of Christ! We must seek him early and often to help us to bring our thoughts into captivity – to cast down the lofty thoughts of our minds, and remember above all else that we are dealing with God Almighty!

**Daniel 4:34, 35, 37** *“34 And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: 35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? ... 37 Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”*

If that is the power of our God, then who can stand against us? If that is the nature of the God that forged our armor, then what weapon made by a creature can prosper against us? (**Isaiah 54:17**) Be strengthened, be encouraged, be refreshed, be renewed in the power of His might!

**Matthew Henry:** *“They must see that they be stout-hearted. This is prescribed here: Be strong in the Lord. Those who have so many battles to fight, and who, in their way to heaven, must dispute every pass, with dint of sword, have need of a great deal of courage. Be strong therefore, strong for service, strong for suffering, strong for fighting. Let a soldier be ever so well armed without, if he have not within a good heart, his armour will stand him in little stead. Note, spiritual strength and courage are very necessary for our spiritual warfare. Be strong in the Lord, either in his cause and for his sake or rather in his strength. We have no sufficient strength of our own. Our natural courage is as perfect cowardice, and our natural strength as perfect weakness; but all our sufficiency is of God. In his strength we must go forth and go on. By the actings of faith, we must fetch in grace and help from heaven to enable us to do that which of ourselves we cannot do, in our Christian work and warfare. We should stir up ourselves to resist temptations in a reliance upon God’s all-sufficiency and the omnipotence of his might.”*

### **Our adversary and his fiery darts**

*“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”*

We certainly wrestle against flesh and blood (including our own), and yet that is not the primary war that we are waging. This war is a spiritual war, that is being waged by spiritual creatures, and in spiritual places that are beyond the confines and limitations of this physical world of dust and flesh. At this hour, Satan sits enthroned as the ruler of this earth and all of her inhabitants: *“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:”*. (**Ephesians 2:2**) Aside from the elect of God, the whole created world lies in his lap, and serves his pleasure. (**1John 5:19**) Satan is a usurper; Christ – the Anointed King – will soon come and take that throne for himself. Satan full well knows that fact, and is feverishly trying to thwart the purpose of God in the earth. Seeing that he cannot attack God directly, his attention is fully focused on God’s people in the earth. Consider some of Satan’s characteristics:

- He is powerful beyond our understanding, and yet his power is precisely limited by the hand of God. (**Job 1:8-12**)
- He is a murderer that desires nothing less than the physical death and spiritual damnation of every human. (**John 8:44**)
- He is a liar and deceiver; the truth is not in him. (**John 8:44**)
- He is subtil – crafty and calculating. (**Genesis 3:1**)
- He is a tempter. (**Matthew 4:3**)
- He knows the scriptures better than we ever could, and deceitfully twists them to his own purposes. (**Genesis 3:1-5**)
- He masquerades as an angel of light, hoping to deceive the very elect of God into following after him. (**2Corinthians 11:14,15**)
- He is restless and relentless – walking about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. (**1Peter 5:8**)
- He is the accuser of the brethren; he accuses us before God, before men, and before our own tender conscience. (**Revelation 12:10**)
- He is the father of the children of disobedience, and he vigorously teaches them to behave as he does. (**John 8:44, Ephesians 2:2**)

Beloved, we are dealing with a ferocious and determined enemy! This is the face of the wicked one who shoots fiery darts at us and energizes his children to do the same. Consider the nature of these fiery darts:

- Why are these arrows called “fiery”?
  - They are tipped with poison – even a glancing blow can prove fatal, because the toxin will enter the body, and travel to the heart.

- They are flaming with fire. When you have a walled city that cannot be breached, you can shoot flaming arrows over the walls, hoping to hit just the right spot that will start a raging inferno which will either kill the inhabitants, or cause them to throw open the city gates and surrender.



- Similarly, the fiery darts of the wicked are liable to bring about great pain and harm by the slightest blow. Each one is intricately calculated to enflame the passions of the heart, and consume the mind. Each arrow is designed to ignite the pride, lust, and fear of a person, or an entire church! If our enemy can get one arrow to land, then our flesh will take over and spread the damage.

- These arrows are flying at us CONSTANTLY, and from every direction.

- Even if the arrows don't find their mark, they are designed to make us so afraid that we won't come out from behind our shield to engage the battle. That's part of Satan's "roaring" - he wants to paralyze us with fear so we will turn aside from the commission that we are executing for our Lord.



- Here are some examples of the poisons that Satan seeks to deliver with these fiery darts:

- **Lust** - He bombards our senses in order to tempt us into lust, covetousness, and idolatry. Satan has more ways than ever before to *constantly* put words and images before each of us; things and thoughts to desire and seek after. Flesh to lust after, things to covet, anything and everything to be idolized and turn you away from Christ. The depraved human heart has an insatiable hunger, and Satan will all too gladly feed it.

- **1John 2:15-17** *“15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”*
- **Pride –**
  - Having tempted us with things to lust after, Satan tells us that we deserve those things. He shows us others who have the things that we want, which in turn fuels envy, malice, and hatred.
  - He flatters us with notions of grandeur. He provokes us to measure up the people around us and assess why they are lesser than we are - “If I was them – if I had what they have - then I would do it better”. That analysis leads to us believing that we ARE better than the next guy, and that therefore we DESERVE more than the next guy. We deserve the things we lust after. We deserve the positions of authority. Our thoughts deserve to be the first ones to be spoken, and the ones that are weighed the most heavily. We know the best way to do things, and therefore don’t have anything to learn from the next guy. Satan whispers: “You’re so smart”, “You’re so holy”, “If it weren’t for you, then blah blah blah”.
    - When we don’t get everything that we want – when we aren’t treated like the smartest and most worthy person in the room – then we tend to be envious, hateful, and malicious. We cloak those deeds of the flesh with justifying, self-righteous words about our holy motivation, and the unworthiness of others. Alternatively, we hang our head in self-pity. Since I didn’t get the thing I wanted, or get to do the thing I wanted to do, or get to be seen doing the thing I wanted to do, then nobody wants me, or likes me, or needs me, or even cares if I’m here. It’s all pride! Poisonous, contagious, deadly pride.
    - **Proverbs 16:18** *“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”*
  - He puts past events and words before our eyes so that we will be stirred up in prideful anger at others. He loves to sow discord among brethren.
  - He appeals to the pride of our intellect, by telling us that we are too smart to believe in this fairy tale called Faith. His desire is to drag us into an endless loop of fruitless intellectual analysis and

argumentation that edifies no one, and only brings strife and confusion.

○ **Fear** –

- Having roused our passions with all that the world has to offer, and all that our pride believes that we deserve, he then engages our fear by threatening that if we obey and follow after Christ, then we will most certainly lose those things that we currently have, or anything that we may seek to have in the future. (family, jobs, wealth, health, freedom, etc) “If you do what Christ says, then you will lose your children ... you will never be promoted ... you won’t reach your potential, etc.” Here’s the kicker – you might not think that you are overtly deciding to forsake Christ, but if you let these fears turn you away from doing what Christ has commanded, then you are not following him – you are following Satan.
- He accuses us of our past sin, and therefore tries to convince us that we have no hope, and that our faith is a vain thing. By this device he hopes to either cause us to walk away from Christ, or to be brought to silent despair. “Your sins are too great ... you’ve behaved hypocritically ... you cannot possibly be one of God’s elect ... you’ve backslidden and now it is too late to repent ... etc.”
  - **Spurgeon:** *“It is no use for you to pray. You know that you have been praying for a long time, but you have got no comfort from it, so give it up, for it is an utterly useless exercise! It is no use for you to believe. There was a man the other day who said that he believed, but he was just as great a sinner afterward, so what good is it for you to believe?”*

Beloved – we know what manner of enemy is shooting these deadly arrows, and we know that this is his game. He is the accuser, the tempter, the liar, the murderer. When our minds begin to stir – to ruminate - in response to these assaults, [we know darn well what’s happening – we can’t be willingly ignorant of his devices] we must resist the Devil that he will flee from us! We must step away from the double minded turmoil of our worldly thoughts, and lay hold on the shield of faith! His assaults may distress and rend our flesh, but our souls are vouched safe in the Lord! Regardless of the power that Satan wields at *this moment*, we know the power of God’s might *and* we know the end that God has appointed for our adversary!

**The shield of faith that our Lord has provided**

*“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.”*

How can we meditate upon the power of God’s might in the face of Satan’s assaults? **FAITH!** We believe that God *IS*, because of faith; because the Holy Spirit has given us that free gift – He has borne witness within our heart. He has testified to God’s power and love. He has convinced us of the covenant that He witnessed before the world was formed, wherein we may take refuge in Jesus Christ, our hope of eternal life! While the father of lies assaults us with his fiery darts, we have the Spirit of Truth dwelling within us, and we must lay hold upon Him as if our lives depend upon it. This faith is the substance of our hope – it is the earnest of our inheritance. This gift is reserved for the people of God – it is judicially withheld and hidden from all others. The very fact that we have faith ought to stir us up to action!

**2Corinthians 4:3,4,6** *“3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. ... 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

We believe that God exists; we believe His power; we believe His word; we believe His love for us; we believe that He has given us a savior; we believe that He has cast our sins behind Him; we believe that Christ sits at the right hand of God making intercession for us; We believe that He is preparing our inheritance; we believe that we cannot be plucked out of His hand; we believe that He will return in power and glory, and that we will forever dwell with Him. Be clear, my friends, I am not talking about a mere head knowledge of these things, I am talking about saving faith, whereby we are able to take refuge in Christ, and have boldness to take up his cause in the earth.

Some other thoughts about this shield of faith:

- This shield is said to be “above all”, because:
  - 1) It is literally over all – it fully protects and covers us, and
  - 2) It is of preeminent importance – without faith, we have nothing.
- Our faith “quenches” the fiery darts; it takes away their deadly flame and poison. That does not mean that Satan’s assaults will not wound and grieve us, but they will not be able to destroy us – praise God! The more completely that we turn to God in faith, the less ability Satan will have to discomfort and distress us.
- We can never lay this shield down – we must hold fast. The war is always raging, and our faith is the victory that overcomes this world (**1John 5:4**). Hold your ground, and don’t give up the fight! For the vast majority of God’s people

throughout history, this is literally a fight to the death. The question is not “will we die?”; the question is “when we die, will we die in faith?”. Will we still be holding our shield at our last breath?

- The shield is most certainly for our own protection, but it also lends strength to our brothers and sisters. The exercising of our faith is of great encouragement to those around us. Turning aside to our flesh – abandoning our post – leaves a hole in the shield wall, which discourages and exposes our fellow soldiers.



Only God’s people are able to lay hold on this shield, but it will be of no true value to us if we don’t exercise it! We have to put away our endless mental processes, rely on the power of God’s might, and charge the hill! We cannot crouch behind our shield forever – we must engage the battle! We are supposed to build upon our faith, and put it into action. (**2Peter 1:5-7**) Faith without action – without good works – is not faith at all; it is dead! (**James 2:18-26**) Remember, we are supposed to be equipped with all of the armor - If we only crouch behind our shield, then we will never boldly employ the sword of the Spirit. If you find yourself turned aside from the fight, wrestling in your heart with lust, pride or fear, STOP – pick up your shield, resist the Devil, and get to the work that your Lord has conscripted you to do! Here are a few practical thoughts about what to do when you find yourself in that spot:

- **Pray:** Readily. Continually. Pray for more faith. Pray for right eyes on God, and on your circumstance. Pray for a spirit of power and love and a sound mind. Friends, the truth is that we are selfish creatures, and we really must look beyond ourselves; prayer for our own needs, and deliverance from our own troubles is good, useful, and needful – prayer for the good of others, and the glory of Christ is better, and is pleasing to God. We must pray for the ministry of Christ; we must pray for our brethren; we must pray for our neighbors and enemies in the world. Ask yourself: What should I be praying for that has nothing to do with me?
- **Minister:** Mortify the desires that are turning your heart aside, and consider the NEEDS of others. Body and soul, there are needs all around you. Ask yourself: Who can I help?

- **Preach:** We have a finite number of days to be useful to our neighbors in this world – to ACTUALLY be salt and light in this earth by preaching the Gospel of our Lord. Ask yourself: What am I doing to preach the Gospel today?

**1Corinthians 16:13,14** “13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. 14 Let all your things be done with charity.”

I love you all. Amen.

**Hebrews 11:1-40** “1 ¶ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

4 ¶ By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

15 *And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.*

16 *But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

17 *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,*

18 *Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:*

19 *Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

20 *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*

21 *By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*

22 *By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.*

23 *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.*

24 *By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;*

25 *Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;*

26 *Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*

27 *By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*

28 *Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.*

29 *By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.*

30 *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*

31 *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*

32 ¶ *And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:*

33 *Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,*

34 *Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.*

35 *Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:*

*36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:*

*37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;*

*38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

*39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:*

*40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”*