

The Shield of Faith

<i>Text</i>	Ephesians 6:16
<i>Readings</i>	1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Ephesians 6:10-18
<i>Theme</i>	The shield of faith in God will protect us against the attacks of Satan.
<i>Purpose</i>	To explain the nature of Satan's attacks and urge you to maintain a trust in God and his Word for your protection.
<i>Confession</i>	Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 21-23

This passage Scripture explains that we are engaged in a spiritual battle against Satan and his evil angels. Our enemy is vicious and cunning and we need to be strong in the Lord and in his strength.

We also need to put on the armour God supplies.

The first three items of armour listed are fastened to the body: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of the gospel of peace. So we are to be armed with truth, righteousness and peace.

The next piece is one that is carried – the shield of faith. Armies in ancient times used a variety of shields of different shapes and sizes. The Greek word for shield here is *thyreon*, which came from the word *thyra* meaning a door. That is a good description of the Roman shield as it was a large rectangle about 1.2m high and 0.75m wide. It was made out of two layers of wood that were curved and covered with leather, and bound with a piece of iron at the top and the bottom.

Soldiers often fought side by side with a complete wall of shields in front of them.

But the shield was large enough to offer protection for a soldier fighting on his own. After one siege a soldier named Sceva counted 220 darts that were stuck in his shield!

A soldier used his shield to defend himself against attack. We are going to consider:

1. The attack of the enemy, and then consider
2. Our shield of defence.

1. The attack comes from the flaming arrows of the evil one.

In ancient times **arrows and spears** were tipped with a rope fibre and then dipped in tar. These were then set alight and thrown or shot at the enemy. They were aimed at people, but also at the tents of the enemy, or ships, or defence structures or buildings. Octavius used arrows like this against Antony's fleet in the naval battle at Actium.

Paul used these missiles to describe the **attack of Satan** on the believer. Satan is described as "the evil one". We need to keep that in mind. He is evil through and through. He is the leader of "the powers of this dark world" and of "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (vs 12) He is cunning and devious and he is doing all he can to destroy believers.

The evil one aims his attack at individual Christians but also at church leaders, at the elders and the deacons and at the session of the church. He is out to destroy Christian schools, and mission organizations, and Christian radio and television stations, and the work of Bible in Schools. Wherever there is an effective Christian work going on you can be sure that Satan has his eye on it and is planning an attack.

Sometimes he will attack us directly.

This could come from *Satan himself*. Think of how Jesus told Peter; “Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you Simon that your faith may not fail.” (Luke 22:31)

Or Satan will use *his evil angels*. In the gospels we read of many people who were possessed by evil spirits. Satan launched an all-out attack on the Lord Jesus and his disciples during his earthly ministry.

An evil spirit cannot take control of a Christian, but Satan and his angels can still attack us. This can happen to us in various ways.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out that this can happen when you want to pray; you settle down to do that and suddenly a 1001 other matters crowd into your mind and distract you from prayer. That is an attack of Satan; he is filling your mind with other things.

Or this can happen when you are reading the Bible or when you are listening to a sermon – you want to concentrate but you find other thoughts and ideas coming in and your mind starts wandering. In such cases we must resist the devil, then he will flee from us.

Satan can attack us through **the world**.

This could come through the *false ideas* of the world – the philosophies of our present age. Paganism is on the rise with all its deviant sexuality and belief in gods and goddesses.

Or it could come through the *things* of the world – sport, adventure, cars, motorbikes, holidays, travel; our homes, our business. Any of these things can become an idol that becomes more important than God.

Satan can attack us through **our sinful nature**. He takes the sinful desires of our depraved hearts and turns those in on us.

Each of us is tempted more in one area than in another; we all have our weak points.

Watch out for the flaming arrows of pride, lust, or envy.

Guard against the attack of discouragement or self-pity.

Be careful that you don't get caught up in anger, rage, malice or bitterness.

Watch out for the attack of Satan and his evil angels. Remember that in warfare there are times of hard battle and there are lulls.

Sometimes the enemy will try to soften up the opposition with a continuous barrage of heavy fire and follow that up with a ground attack, as the Americans did in the war on Iraq. Or there can be a quiet time in the fighting followed by a surprise attack.

These variations also happen in our Christian warfare. You may go through times of severe assault, and after that the attack may quieten down. Then, just when you think there is nothing to worry about any more, suddenly Satan may launch another attack. So be on your guard.

An attack could also come after a high point, as it did with Elijah after his victory on Mt Carmel and Jezebel sent him a message threatening him with death. You might be attacked after going to a camp or a convention. During the camp you feel on a spiritual high and all enthusiastic, and then when you get home Satan attacks you with his fiery arrows.

Keep alert. Don't be caught sleeping on your watch. Keep your armour on to protect you against the attack of the enemy.

2. For your defence take up the shield of faith.

Each one of us needs **a good defence** against such a powerful enemy. Without this we would quit the battle and run for our lives. If it were not for the armour of God none of us would last for a moment.

The shield of faith will protect us from these fiery darts of the enemy. Faith will protect you from harm and will put out these flames so you won't get burnt. It will also prevent these flames from spreading and causing more destruction to other believers and to Christian organizations.

We should not press the details of this armour or put too much emphasis on the comparisons Paul makes. Here he described the shield of faith, but in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 he urged his readers to put on "faith and love as a breastplate." Faith can be a shield or a breastplate. The important matter is not the comparison but that you have faith!

What is this faith?

It is the knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true. (Heidelberg Catechism Question 21) Faith is to believe that the Bible is the Word of God and to rely on the promises God gives us in that Word.

Faith is also a deep-seated trust in the Lord Jesus – a trust that Jesus will watch over us and protect us in this battle.

Faith is something we exercise and do, but it has an object – by faith we look to the Lord Jesus and what he has done. Your act of faith by itself will not protect you; rather you are protected by Christ, through faith.

If you are active in the battle and are standing near our Captain you will be a target for the arrows of the evil one, but if you keep your trust in your Lord you will be protected. God “is a shield to those who take refuge in him.” (Proverbs 30:5)

The last verses of Psalm 84 read; “The Lord God is a Sun and a Shield... O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.” God will watch us in this battle. He is almighty and all-powerful. This is what we believe. This is the content of our faith.

Think of a little daughter who is out walking with her father. The little girl is ahead of her dad when suddenly a big dog comes up to the gate and barks fiercely at her. She runs back to her father who picks her up and they walk past the dog. She feels safe because her father is holding her tight.

In the same way when the enemy attacks you then you must run to your Father in heaven – he will protect you and keep you safe.

Proverbs 18:10, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”

To be protected when attacked you need to **use** this shield of faith.

The Roman soldiers had to do that. They had to hold their shield in front of them to protect themselves.

You need to do the same. Take up your shield. When you face temptation remind yourself of the resources of your faith, of the defence you have in the word of God.

Using this shield of faith means you have to apply your knowledge of God’s Word – use what you know – put it into practice.

The book of Proverbs is a good example of this. It takes the truth of the Scriptures and applies this to a whole range of situations in life.

To do this you need to know the Bible well. Before battle Romans soldiers would soak their shields in water. In the same way you need to soak your faith in the Word of God and in prayer.

If you use the shield of faith **it will protect you** from the attack of Satan.

Verse 16b: “...with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

This is a promise. The shield of faith will put out the fire of the enemy.

The Scriptures give us this assurance and confidence in many places.

The apostle John wrote; "...everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4)

Peter assured his readers that "through faith" they were "shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:5)

Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth; "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

He urged Timothy to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim 6:12), and Peter, after warning his readers about the power of Satan urged them to "Resist him, standing firm in the faith." (1 Peter 5:8) We need to do the same.

You are protected by the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness and the shoes of the gospel of peace.

"In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."

Amen