

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY ONE)

“THE SHIELD OF FAITH”

EPHESIANS 6:10-16

10 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.

The New English Translation renders verses 11-13 of our text as follows:

11 Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.

13 For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand.

The phrase “*the whole armour,*” in verses **11** and **13**, is a translation of the Greek word **panoplia**: (**pan-op-lee’-ah**), which means, “wholly armed, in full armor.” It refers to the complete set of instruments used in offensive and defensive warfare. The idea is of the full preparation of a foot soldier for offense and defense.

It is very important for us to understand that it is not **our** armour that we must clothe ourselves with, but **God’s** armour. We must not attempt to engage in battle with the enemy of our soul based on human ability, or by employing carnal weapons. **Spiritual** warfare requires **spiritual** armour, which can only be the “*whole armour of God.*”

Brothers and sisters, as believers we are engaged in **spiritual**, not **physical** warfare. In verse **12**, Paul informs us that our real war is not waged against human beings, but against the devil and his forces. Spiritual warfare is not a struggle **between** human beings. As **John Phillips** noted, “Our enemies are not people...Satan may use people to persecute us, lie to us, cheat us, hurt us, or even kill us. But our **real** enemy lurks in the shadows of the unseen world, moving people as pawns on the chessboard of time. As long as we see people as enemies and wrestle against them, we will spend our strength in vain.”

Why does Paul exhort believers to put on the whole armour of God? He does so because that is the only way that they will be “*able to stand*”

against the schemes of the devil” (verse 11), stand their ground “on the evil day,” and “having done everything, to stand” (verse 13).

In verses **14-17**, Paul itemizes the offensive and defensive instruments that believers are to employ in **spiritual** warfare. The instruments appear in the order in which a soldier would put them on before engaging in **physical** warfare.

In verse **16** Paul writes, *“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.”*

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“And in all of this, by taking up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”*

The words *“above all”* in the **King James Version**, do not necessarily mean that the shield of faith is the most important piece of equipment in the spiritual armour of the believer. The idea in the Greek is, that in addition to all the pieces of equipment mentioned in verses **14** and **15**, the Christian soldier should also include those mentioned in verses **16** and **17**. In addition to the **“Belt of Truth,”** the **“Breastplate of Righteousness,”** and the **“Shoes of the Gospel,”** the believer is to ensure that he or she takes up the **“Shield of Faith.”**

The Greek word translated *“taking up”* is in a construction which indicates that it is the responsibility of the believer to take up the shield of faith. He or she must make the choice to do so. God is our shield, but only as we lay hold of Him in faith does He become our protection against the fiery arrows of the enemy.

The Greek word translated *“shield”* is **thureos: (thoo-reh-os’)**. The **thureos** was a large, rectangular shield, four by two and a half feet, and sometimes curved on the inner side. This shield served as a portable wall, covering almost the entire person. It consisted of two layers of wood glued together, covered with linen and hide, with a leather covering on the outside. The **thureos** was large enough to cover all the

other armour and allowed the soldier to stand behind it fully protected. The soldier carried it in his left hand. His sword was carried in his right hand





The **New English Bible** has a footnote relative to the “*shield of faith,*” that provides the following information: “Before a battle in which flaming arrows might be shot at them, the soldiers wet the leather covering with water to extinguish the arrows. The Roman legionaries could close ranks with these shields, the first row holding theirs edge to edge in front, and the rows behind holding the shields above their heads. In this formation they were practically invulnerable to arrows, rocks, and even spears.”



In ancient warfare, flaming arrows were launched in great number at the beginning of an attack. The idea was not only to injure the enemy, but to create confusion and panic as well. The shield not only caught the flaming arrows but also extinguished them.

Brothers and sisters, the shield of the Christian soldier is “*faith*.” The Greek word translated “*faith*” is **pistis**. The word is synonymous with trust or belief, and refers to the conviction of the truth of anything. In the New Testament, the word speaks of a conviction or belief relative to the relationship of human beings to God and the things of God, with the general idea of trust and holy zeal.

As it relates to God, **pistis** is “the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider of eternal salvation through Christ.” In reference to Christ, it denotes “a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God”

The New Testament clearly indicates that Faith is **always** a gift from God. It is **received** from God, and is **never** generated by human beings. The following Scripture passages, all reflecting the rendering of the **New English Translation**, underscore this truth:

Romans 12:3

*“For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think with sober discernment, as **God has distributed** to each of you a measure of faith.”*

Galatians 5:22-23

*22 But **the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, **faithfulness**,*

23 gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Ephesians 2:8-9

*8 For by grace you are saved **through faith**, and this is not from yourselves, **it is the gift of God**;*

*9 **it is not from works**, so that no one can boast.*

In short, **pistis** (faith) is **God’s divine persuasion**. It is therefore distinct from human belief (self-confidence). God continuously generates faith

in the life of a believer who is deliberately and consistently yielding to the Holy Spirit. It is the responsibility of the believer however to act on the faith that is being generated in his or her heart.

In secular antiquity **pistis** referred to a guarantee. In Scripture, **faith** is God's guarantee, certifying that the revelations He has given in His Word will come to pass.

Commenting on this verse, **Warren Wiersbe** made the following remarks: "The 'faith' mentioned here is not saving faith, but rather living faith, a trust in the promises and the power of God. Faith is a defensive weapon which protects us from Satan's fiery darts...Satan shoots 'fiery darts' at our hearts and minds: lies, blasphemous thoughts, hateful thoughts about others, doubts, and burning desires for sin. If we do not by faith quench these darts, they will light a fire within and we will disobey God. We never know when Satan will shoot a dart at us, so we must always walk by faith and use the shield of faith."

The shield which the Christian soldier uses is a **present, active** faith in the Lord Jesus for victory over sin and the devil. The fiery arrows represent the temptations with which the devil assaults believers. The idea, then, is that a believer's resolute faith in the Lord can stop and extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one aimed at him or her. Faith offers complete protection to the believer and makes the enemy's advance impossible. A shield is a general fence for the whole body. The use of it is to avoid blows of all kinds. The "shield of faith" defends the whole man from all sorts of temptations cast against him by any of his spiritual enemies, the flesh, world, or devil. In the same way that the shield of the Roman soldier was large enough to cover all the other armour and allowed the soldier to stand behind it fully protected, the Word of God acts as a shield of faith to the Christian soldier allowing him or her to stand behind it fully protected.

Faith is believing what God has said in His Word, and for no other reason than that He has said it. Faith is taking God at His word. It is

accepting His teaching, obeying His commands, giving heed to His warnings and laying hold of His promises. Where faith is present, spiritual defeat is unknown. In the context of **Ephesians 6:16**, “*faith*” is inclusive of **what** we believe and **Who** we believe. The faith spoken of here is a confidence, a complete reliance in the **Person, Purposes, and Power** of God as outlined in His Word.

Faith is the believer’s expression of trust in God’s Word, and that expression of trust becomes a shield protecting him or her from the arrows of temptation. It is very important for us to understand that **obeying** God’s Word is the proof that we **believe** God’s Word.

In **Romans 1:5** Paul writes, “*Through him we have received grace and our apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of his name*” (**New English Translation**). Paul’s reference in this verse to, “*the obedience of faith,*” is not to be understood to mean that a person is saved as a result of their works. Paul is most likely referring here to “the obedience which **springs from** faith and is **produced by** faith,” or “the obedience which **characterizes** and **proceeds** from faith.” Obedience does not save anyone, but it is the beautiful **fruit** of faith, testifying to the genuineness of a person’s salvation. “Faith,” here is not the gospel which is to be believed, but the state of salvation in which believers stand by faith.

The Apostle James speaks about “*the obedience of faith*” in **James 1:22-25**:

22 But be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves.

23 For if someone merely listens to the message and does not live it out, he is like someone who gazes at his own face in a mirror.

24 For he gazes at himself and then goes out and immediately forgets what sort of person he was.

25 But the one who peers into the perfect law of liberty and fixes his attention there, and does not become a forgetful listener but one who lives it out—he will be blessed in what he does.

(New English Translation)

It is the believer who, “*peers into the perfect law of liberty and fixes his attention there, and does not become a forgetful listener but...lives it out,*” who is effectively employing the “shield of faith” to “*quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*”

We are deceiving ourselves if we think that we have taken up the shield of faith while deliberately disobeying the Word of God. What we have in reality done is throw away the **shield of faith** and hold up instead a shield of our own vain and foolish imagination. And then we wonder why we have been repeatedly hit with the fiery arrows of temptation, doubt, confusion discouragement, despair, fear and panic.

We will bring this evening’s Lesson to a close with a quote from **Jerry Bridges**:

“Faith involves both a renunciation and a reliance. First, we must renounce any trust in our own performance as the basis of our acceptance before God. We trust in our own performance when we believe we’ve earned God’s acceptance by our good works. But we also trust in our own performance when we believe we’ve lost God’s acceptance by our bad works—by our sin. So we must renounce any consideration of either our bad works or our good works as the means of relating to God. Second, we must place our reliance entirely on the perfect obedience and sin-bearing death of Christ as the sole basis of our standing before God—on our best days as well as our worst...

Because we have a natural tendency to look within ourselves for the basis of God’s approval or disapproval, we must make a conscious daily effort to look outside ourselves to the righteousness of Christ, then to stand in the present reality of our justification...

We have to first renounce all confidence in our own power and then rely entirely on the power of the Holy Spirit."