

Shield of Faith
Ephesians 5:16 May 19-20, 2018

Introduction

- Some of you are aware that my dad was an athlete, but you need to know that the real athlete in my family is my mom. While my dad was running around like a dog playing fetch with a pigskin ball, mom was performing amazing feats of agility and grace as an All-American gymnast.
- Well, mom used to take me to one of the gymnastics gym's where she taught after she retired and I was always the most impressed with the men and women who did the vault. **PP** They would sprint forward towards this solid beam, jump with full force off a spring board, quickly followed by an overhand press off of the vault beam, where they would perform some dizzying aerial acrobatics and then somehow land on their feet even though they really couldn't see where they were landing at all.
- As I've grown older, I've always had the imagery of vaulters in my mind as people who exercise a high degree of faith...faith in the spring board, in the vault, and in their coach's training to land on their feet.
- Today, **PP** as we continue our sermon series on the reality of spiritual warfare and how we are to put on the Armor of God, we turn our attention to the forth piece of the armor.
- We've studied the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of readiness given by the gospel of peace, and today we'll be studying the shield of faith.
- As you turn to **Ephesians 6:16**, I'm going to pray.
- As with last week, I want to briefly remind us of how the enemy of our souls operates.
 - Remember, that the devil is the Father of lies (**John 8:44**) **PP** and his primary weapon is deception. He uses deception to further a small number of schemes that pretty much every attack or temptation can fall into: doubt/disbelief, disunity, discouragement, despairing hopelessness, and defiance (forgot that one last week).
PP
 - These schemes are all calculated to either steal our peace, kill our joy, or destroy our testimony (**John 10:10**)
- But we know that our Lord has overcome **PP** the enemy through the power of His perfect life, his atoning death, and His glorious resurrection (**John 16:33**); that He sits at the right hand of God the father interceding (**Rom. 8:34**), mediating (**1 Tim. 2:5**), and advocating (**1 John 2:1**) for us and that as we put on the armor of light (**Rom 13:12-14**) which means to put on Jesus Christ – to walk in our identity as brothers and sisters of Jesus – by the power of the Holy Spirit and grace of our God, we too are overcomers. In fact, scripture says that we are more than overcomers...we are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ (**Romans 8:35-37**).

- So how do we go about putting on this armor of light and walking as more than conquerors in Christ? Well, scripture breaks it down for us on Ephesians 6 where Paul describes the individual pieces of the armor of light, or the armor of God. He shows us six critical aspects of walking in our identity as God's children.
- Today we focus on verse **16** of **Ephesians 6**, **PP** so let's read that together: "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one"
- Now we're going to break this down into two sections today: Knowing the Shield and Wielding the Shield

Knowing the Shield

- The first thing I want us to focus in on is that the verb Paul uses with regard to the specific piece of armor changes here.
 - For the first three pieces of armor in **verses 14 and 15** Paul uses the phrase "having put on" or "having fastened on". If I were you I would circle each of those three words and make a connection between them. This Greek tense of "having" indicates that the armor has been put on and remains on at all times. We're to always have on the belt of truth, have on the breastplate of righteousness, and have fastened on the shoes of readiness given by the gospel of peace.
 - Paul now switches verbs for the next three pieces of armor in **verses 16 and 17** and tells us to "take up" the shield, helmet, and sword as we go into battle. The others should always passively be in use...but the next three must be actively equipped as we face the enemy.
- "Taking up" (Gk. *analambano*) **PP** literally means to lift up or pick up. This is in the active voice, meaning it's something that must be intentionally done, it doesn't happen on its own.
- Now here's where we need to know a little something about the historical aspect of the Roman shields Paul is talking about.
 - "Shield" (GK *thureos*) **PP** was originally a large stone used to close an entrance and later came to mean a shield, not the small circular shield but the large, oblong, and four-cornered shield. These were scutum shields or tower shields.
 - Typically, the scutum shields measured 2.5 by 4 ft. and were made of two layers of solid wood, covered with canvas, and then with a leather covering or animal skins on the outside. It would be framed in iron, and often had an iron center (the boss) to help deflect blows.
 - The shield was designed to cover the entire body of the Roman soldier which is why they were so large. The soldier would usually keep the shield resting on the ground

since it was so large, it wasn't actively equipped for protection until the attack came.

- You see, **PP** in ancient warfare the beginning of a battle was almost always an exchange of arrows. The roman soldiers would get into formation and only when the arrows were loosed would they actively raise their shields to protect them from the attacks of the enemy.
- Now, this is a critical point of “taking up” the shield, the helmet, and the sword. **PP** Paul is saying for these pieces of armor that they're not going to passively protect and prepare us like the other pieces of armor; we must actively wield them when the attack comes, keeping a lookout for the attack so that we can raise the shield of faith to defend against all of the arrows of the attack.
- Paul says here that the shield of faith is specifically used to extinguish all of the flaming darts of the enemy. This is the only piece of the armor that we're specifically told what it does.
 - Now, again historically, we've got to know that when those arrows were shot at the roman legions they weren't shot with precision, no one was trying to be a sniper with their bow and arrow. **PP** These arrows were shot in large quantities that would rain down all around the Romans, and if they weren't fully covered by their shield they would take a hit.
 - The idea wasn't necessarily to kill the enemy, the arrows did their job if they merely wounded the soldiers or threw them into a confused panic. Because an injured or confused soldier was an ineffective soldier that could be killed later far more easily.
 - Now sometimes, their other pieces of armor could still withstand the blow of an arrow that past the shield, but the problem with the rest of the armor is that it didn't cover 100% of their body...this is why the shield was so important. The other armor isn't designed to deflect an attack, its only designed to protect from a killing blow. Only the shield can be used to actually deflect the attack so that the soldier can continue fighting unhindered.
 - This is why Paul says in the beginning of this verse, “in all circumstances” or in some translations “above all else”. The shield of faith is relevant against any and all attacks and is always the first line of defense when that mass of arrows is fired our way. **PP**
 - The shield of faith is something that we need to actively wield moment to moment, attack by attack, and it needs to be the first thing that's placed in the path of the oncoming arrows. And we know when those arrows have been shot at us don't we?

It's not like the arrows are stealthy and silent and unseen. We know exactly when the evil one has loosed a volley at us:

- It could be a flood of depression, panic, or anxiety;
 - It could be when a relatively insignificant thing gets blown way out of proportion;
 - It could be when things don't go as we expected them to;
 - It could be something overt like a lost job, a health problem, a relational breakdown;
 - It's any situation where the enemy deceives you in order to enflame your flesh, or exasperate life circumstances, so that those seeds of doubt/disbelief, disunity, discouragement, despairing hopelessness, and defiance can be planted and ultimately your peace is stolen, your joy is killed, or your testimony is destroyed.
- And it's critical to see that the arrow hasn't yet hit when we find ourselves in those circumstances. Here's a critical lie we need to disregard: **PP** the enemy hasn't won when we find ourselves under attack. When some trial or tribulation comes along – which, let me remind you Jesus tells us will happen (**John 16:33**) – the arrow hasn't yet found its mark.
- As followers of Jesus we need to recognize that simply going through the trial doesn't mean the enemy has hit us with his attack – because sometimes we can act like that; we can act like the enemy has shot us with an arrow just because we're going through a trial.
 - But that's not true – disciples of Jesus, we're in a war! Trials and tribulations are the definition of that warfare...when those things come along the enemy has simply let loose a volley. It's precisely in that moment when we come under fire, that we've got to raise the shield of faith to defend against that attack. We cannot fall to the lie that the enemy has already won simply because we've come under attack. No, this is why we take up the shield of faith above all else in all circumstances.
- **C. H. Spurgeon** said this, **PP** "Above all, as the most important, we are to see to it that our faith is right, that it be true faith, and that it covers all our virtues from attack. There is no respect in which faith is not useful to us... if you forget all besides, be careful above all that ye take the shield of faith."
- Satan sees our armor and knows the gaps in the armor through which the fiery darts may find their mark....the shield has no such gaps, it deflects all attacks that come against it whenever they come. We've simply got to be prepared to raise the shield in defense when those arrows come.

- Now, we also need to notice that these arrows or darts aren't just shot at us to try to kill us with the arrows alone, **PP** Paul refers to them as flaming darts.
 - In ancient warfare arrows were often dipped in pitch or tar and set ablaze. The hope was that the flaming arrow would set things on fire and cause further panic, destruction, and injury. Perhaps the soldier might even throw away his shield because it was set on fire and then he'd be open to all the rest of the attacks.
 - But the Roman shields didn't catch on fire. This is because the leather and animal skins they used were always dipped in water before the battle began so that as soon as a flaming arrow hit its fires would be put out.
 - And this is exactly what the shield of faith does, **PP** it not only protects us from the arrow itself, but it extinguishes the residual fiery effects of the arrow so that there can be no lingering damage.
 - One of the ploys of the enemy is to cause ongoing unrest and instability in the life of the believer. But the shield of faith is effective at extinguishing these flames too so that we can stay settled in our God.
- So by this point I hope you're wondering, well what is faith? How does that work exactly? If this shield is so important – and some argue that it's the most important piece of the armor, we better know exactly what faith is.
- "Faith" (Gk *pistis*) **PP** is synonymous with trust and is the confidence and conviction of the truth of something. It's kind of like a gymnast having trust and confidence in that spring board to propel her and that vault to hold firm as she boosts off it and that her coach's training will allow her to land on her feet even though she can't see the ground at all when she's spinning through the air.
 - In scripture, **PP** faith is the confidence and conviction of the truth of who God is, what He has done, and what He says. Critically, this trust is *always* evidenced by action in conformity to the thing trusted in. You know the gymnast has faith in those things, because she's sprint headlong toward the vault and fling herself off it. Her actions display her faith.
 - I like how **Tony Evans** puts it, **PP** "Faith is acting as if God is always telling the truth"
 - As we talked about last week, faith isn't merely knowing God's truth, faith is lived-out submission to God's absolute truth.
 - Faith is always directly tied to an action done in response to a revealed truth.
 - And here is where putting on the Lord Jesus Christ (**Rom. 13:12-14**) comes into play because faith is living out our identity as children of God...not just knowing our identity, but submitting to that identity, walking in that identity...owning that identity.

- **Galatians 2:20 PP** "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
- The identity of the believer is that of a disciple of Jesus Christ...following and emulating our elder brother in every way as we joyfully walk in His love for us.
- **Hebrews 12:2 PP** says that Jesus is "the founder and perfecter of our faith"
 - Because of what Jesus has already done for us in setting us free from sin and death through His victory on the cross and rising again to life and because of what He continues to do for us interceding, advocating and mediating, and because of the Holy Spirit He has given to us, we can confidently walk in our identity as God's children submitting to that truth and exercising faith in Him no matter what fiery arrows may come.
- We need to understand that we can put our faith in many things, not just God...in fact the enemies' lies are specifically designed to get us to put our faith in the things of this world and the lies swirling around us.
 - Faith is only as effective as the truth to which it's tied **PP**...and how deeply you've submitted to that truth. When we submit to the truth of scripture alone, our faith will be strong, but if the lies of the enemy are finding root within us, our faith will be diminished and we won't take up the shield, and therefore we're vulnerable to those fiery arrows that are coming our way.
 - Faith is obediently acting on the truth of God whether I feel it, fully understand it, agree with it, or like it. **PP** Faith is active submission to that truth no matter what the enemy may be telling me otherwise.
 - And faith must have an objective absolute standard or we'll not be able to fully submit to it...**PP** this is why true faith can only be rooted in the absolute truths that God has revealed to us. It's also why the enemy is constantly seeking to get people to turn away from the idea of an absolute truth
 - If the truth is relativized then it can turn into whatever we want it to turn into. This is what the entire post-modern way of thinking seeks to do, to deconstruct absolute truth and reinterpret everything.
 - But absolute truth is always true, regardless of what we think or feel. One of the greatest hindrances to wielding the shield of faith is that we know too much (or at least we think we do), or we allow our emotions to overcome us and we put more weight in what we think we know or what we feel than what God says.
 - When this happens we're not wielding the shield of faith...instead we've painted the target of self-reliance on all of the weak spots in our armor and you can be sure that an arrow will find its mark there.

- The good news of Jesus Christ is that He'll provide faith for us by His grace as we press more deeply into the Spirit of God who He has given us.
- Look back at our passage in **verse 16**, **PP** the phrase "you can" (GK. *dunamai*) means to have power by virtue of inherent ability. Its in the passive voice which means that this is an internal enablement provided by an external source.
 - The power to wield the shield of faith is already within us, given to us by the Holy Spirit...we don't need more faith, what we need is to relinquish control, let go of our prideful knowledge and our deceptive emotions, and submit to the full control of the Lord in our lives. The more we do that, the more the strength of God will fill us and the more handily we'll wield the shield of faith. **PP**
- **1 John 5:4 "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."**
 - Being born of God means that we aren't defined by this world...we walk as His children and rely on Him alone for our identity. As we do that, we'll be overcomers of this world just like our big brother Jesus through our faith.
- So how do we do this? Well, **PP** let's briefly look at 5 practical ways we can wield the shield of faith.

Wielding the Shield

- Number 1, we must actively pick up the shield.
 - **Habakkuk 2:4 "the righteous shall live by his faith."**
 - Remember, we are to take up the shield, this is an active exercise...and living by faith means in one word is obedience.
 - If we learn truth, submit to that truth by trusting in it alone – and here's the critical part – live our lives in obedience to that truth...any and all fiery darts directed our way will be quenched because there will be no room for temptation to affect us or sin to take root.
 - Now, I'm not saying this is a simple thing to do...the Lord knows how hard it is sometimes to do the right thing, but He has also given us the power to obey Him through the Holy Spirit if we would just submit to His control in our lives instead of our own.
 - We've got to actively pick up the shield in obedience.
- Number 2, **PP** we must place our faith in God alone.
 - **Genesis 15:1 "... the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.""**
 - People will let you down, you will let you down, God will never let you down...He will never leave us or forsake us. That doesn't mean that bad things won't happen, and it doesn't mean that when they do happen God is punishing us. What it means

is that He will meet us in those troubles and give us the strength to trust Him through those storms.

- But we have to see that God alone is worthy of our trust and submission.
- You're view of God will determine how much faith/trust/submission you place in Him.
- **A. W. Tozer said, PP "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."**
 - And the reason this is a wise statement is because how we view God determines whether we trust Him.
- Trusting in God alone necessarily means that we don't put our trust in ourselves. This requires that our self-reliance and pride be killed, for the greatest enemy to trusting God is trusting in ourselves.
 - Self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-reliance, self-assurance, and the like all battle faith in Jesus Christ and the power provided by the Holy Spirit.
- Number 3, **PP** we must seek to grow in His truth
 - **Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."**
 - The more conviction and assurance we have in the truth of God, the more we'll be able to exercise faith in it.
 - Study and meditate on the promises of God, doctrine and theology, be rooted in truth like Psalm 1 talks about.
 - The doubts of the enemy enter in when there is a lack of assurance and conviction; when there is room for questioning. The more we submit to the truth of scripture and rest in the certainty of His promises the less room there is for questioning and therefore the less room there are for the arrows to find their mark.
 - Seek to grow in his truth
- Number 4, **PP** we must walk in the grace of God
 - **Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."**
 - Faith is fueled by God's grace. We don't need more faith...faith the size of a mustard seed can move a mountain if that's what God calls you to do.
 - Instead of seeking more faith, we need to seek to understand and walk more fully in the grace of our God.
 - And the more we know the word of God and let the Spirit of God guide us, the more we'll understand and experience God's grace.

- We talked about how the Romans would dip their shields in water to quench the fiery darts. Well, in scripture water is almost always symbolic of either the Word of God or the Spirit of God.
 - The more our faith is watered by the word and the Spirit, the more the grace of our mighty God will snuff out the fires of the enemy.
- Finally, Number 5, **PP** we must fight together as one body
 - One more historical note of significance, the members of a roman legion never fought by themselves, they always fought together as one unit. And when those fiery arrows were shot at them they would take up formation and form an almost impenetrable column of shields that overlapped and protected every member of the legion. So that even if one of the members didn't quite get behind their shield properly, or was too injured to lift their shield against the fiery darts, the other members of the unit could still cover for them.
 - **Hebrews 10:24-25 PP** "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Conclusion

- And so we return to gymnastic vaulting and the image of exercising faith that is. Probably the most well-known story of vaulting occurred at the 1996 Olympics. For the first time ever, the American women had an opportunity to win the all-around team medal. The members of the Magnificent Seven **PP** sat in 2nd place behind the Russians with one final event to go, the vault.
- As the American women went, one by one they slightly faltered. The second to last to go missed badly on both of her attempts and so it came down to Kerri Strug a young lady who was known to wilt under pressure.
- On her first vault, Keri sprinted forward, hit the springboard and the vault but then under-rotated and landed awkwardly, falling to the ground and spraining her ankle in the process. The score was well below what the Americans needed to win.
- At this point, Keri would later say in the interview that she felt like giving up. She knew she couldn't make the last vault, she had failed her team, the Russians had won again.
- But then she heard the voice of her coach calling out to her. Kerri, you can do it. I believe in you. You can make this vault. You have trained. You can push through. Keri said she had no confidence in herself, but because she trusted her coach, she was willing to make one last attempt. **PP**
- Of course, you know the rest of the story. As her teammates cheered her on, Kerri nearly perfectly landed her final vault, and propelled the Americans to their first Olympic all-around gold medal in women's gymnastics history.

- Keri placed her trust in the truth that her coach spoke to her, she didn't listen to the lies and doubt going through her mind, she didn't succumb to the pressure of the situation, she listened to the truth and she responded to that truth by doing exactly what she was taught to do. And that's exactly how faith works with us. **PP**
- Our Heavenly Father constantly reminds us of the truth of our identity as His children. The key is that we receive that truth, submit to its power in our lives, and actively follow what it says...pushing aside the deceptions and schemes of the enemy.
 - We can do that by obediently trusting in our God, placing our faith in Jesus Christ alone, constantly seeking after the truth of scripture, growing in the grace of our God through the power of the Holy Spirit, and fighting together as one body.
 - As we do this, we'll be able to take up the shield of faith and extinguish all the fiery darts of the evil one.
 - Amen. Amen.