

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

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY TWO)

“THE SHIELD OF FAITH” (PART 2)

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.

In verses **14-17**, the Apostle Paul itemizes the offensive and defensive pieces of armour that believers are to employ in **spiritual** warfare. The pieces of armour appear in the order in which a soldier would put them

on before engaging in **physical** warfare. In our previous Lesson we started to consider the fourth piece of armour that believers are to equip themselves with-“**Shield of Faith.**” We will continue to focus on this piece of equipment in this Lesson.

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 Greek word translated “*shield*” is **thureos: (thoo-reh-os)**, which was a large, rectangular shield, approximately 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 shield was carried in the soldier’s left hand, leaving his right hand free for his sword.

It is only in the case of the “*shield of faith*” that Paul speaks about the effect of a particular piece of armour. He informs us that this piece of equipment enables believers to, “*extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*” 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 Roman Soldier’s shield not only caught the flaming arrows but also extinguished them.

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 deliberate choice to do so. God is our shield, but it is only as we lay hold of Him in faith that He become our protection against the fiery arrows of the enemy.

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.

As it relates to God, **pistis** (faith), is “the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things and 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”

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.

The shield which the Christian soldier uses in **spiritual** warfare is a **present, active** faith in the Lord Jesus Christ 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. 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”** allowing the Christian soldier to stand behind it fully protected. 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 flaming arrows of temptation.

In **Proverbs 30:5** we read the following: **“Every word of God is purified; he is like a shield for those who take refuge in him”** (**New English Translation**). The word **“purified”** is a translation of the Greek word **tsaraph: (tsaw-raf)**, which means, “to smelt, refine, test.” The text here uses an implied comparison. It compares the perfection of

every word of God with some precious metal that has been refined, tested and purified. In **Psalm 12:6** David writes, *“The LORD’s words are absolutely reliable. They are as untainted as silver purified in a furnace on the ground, where it is thoroughly refined”* (**New English Translation**).

The point is that God’s word is absolutely trustworthy; it has no defects and flaws, nothing false or misleading. The second half of **Proverbs 30:5** explains the significance of this point: *“He is like a shield for those who take refuge in him.”* In other words, it is safe to trust in the LORD, because His Word is entirely trustworthy. Through the complete reliability of His Word, the Lord becomes a shield to those who *“take refuge,”* or place their trust in Him.

Commenting on **Proverbs 30:5**, **Henry A. “Harry” Ironside**, wrote the following: “There are two great facts enunciated in these verses. The first is the perfection of the Word of God and the second, the all-sufficiency of that Word. The Scriptures, as a whole, are called **the** Word of God. Any portion taken separately is **a** word, or saying, of God. All Scripture is God-breathed; every part of it is divinely inspired. It is therefore pure and perfect in itself...All who rest on it find its great Author is a shield from the enemy’s assaults and a refuge for their souls. He will be the protection of those who confide in Him; but no one who doubts or questions the integrity of His words really trusts Him.”

It is our faith in God’s Word that quenches the fiery arrows of the devil. The more we trust God and His Word, the more we share His victory. We must bear in mind that, *“faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the preached word of Christ”* (**Romans 10:17 New English Translation**). In order for our faith to develop we must therefore, *“pay closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away”* (**Hebrews 2:1 New English Translation**).

In **Mark 4:21-25**, our Lord highlighted the importance of treating the His Word with the utmost respect. The **New Living Translation** renders the passage in the following way:

21 Then Jesus asked them, “Would anyone light a lamp and then put it under a basket or under a bed? Of course not! A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light will shine.

22 For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light.

23 Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

24 Then he added, “Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more.

25 To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.”

For the believer, faith is taking God at His Word, remembering that every fiery dart that Satan shoots is a lie. If we believe his lies, we are not believing God. The source of our faith, is God’s Word of Truth. We may possess a knowledge of all the pieces of equipment that comprise the **panoplia**-the “*whole armour of God,*” and we may even possess all the pieces of armour themselves, but if we are not daily in His Word, letting His Spirit remind us of His faithfulness and renewing our mind to think like Christ rather than like the evil world system, then we are destined for defeat in our spiritual battles.

Brothers and sisters, we take the “*shield of faith*” by obeying God’s Word consistently. When we obey His Word, our obedience becomes like a Roman soldier’s shield. There is a sense therefore, in which it is the believer’s attitude of obedience that is his or her “*shield of faith.*” The faith of a believer is expressed by his or her willingness to obey

God's Word. **Faith and obedience cannot be separated.** What we believe we obey. We demonstrate what we believe, not necessarily by what we say, but by how we live.

The devil is constantly trying to lead us astray with wrong thinking-wrong thinking about God; wrong thinking about ourselves; wrong thinking about each other; wrong thinking about the **kosmos**-the ordered world system of which Satan is the head. As these flaming arrows of wrong thinking are hurled at us, we must make a conscious choice to adhere to the truth. When we do that we are able to recognize deception and error.

In **2 Corinthians 10:3-6**, Paul writes,

3 For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards,

4 for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments

5 and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.

6 We are also ready to punish every act of disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

(New English Translation)

Brothers and sisters, **we are in a war zone and that war zone is our mind!** Therefore, we have to learn to distinguish between truth and error. The enemy will throw flaming arrows of deceitful, lying thoughts at us at random, when we least expect them. A flaming missile that is allowed to lodge in our minds doesn't merely inflict a wound. It also burns up and destroys everything in the vicinity of where it landed.

In our recent Lessons we have been emphasizing that the pieces that make up the "*whole armour of God,*" appear in the order in which a soldier would put them on before engaging in **physical** warfare. Let us

look at what we have seen as a progression so far: **1. A commitment to truth** by, “fastening the belt of truth around [our] waist.” **2. A surrender to Jesus Christ and an adherence to His truth** by “putting on the breastplate of righteousness.” **3. A firm footing in the truth of the Gospel** by, “fitting [our] feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace.” **4. A willingness to believe and obey God’s truth** by, “taking up the shield of faith.”

As we have noted in previous Lessons, **the battle is not a power struggle. It is a truth struggle!** We live in a world which is controlled by the devil (**1 John 5:19**), and he is therefore capable of continually bombarding us with a wide variety of temptations through many forms, including radio and television, the internet, books and magazines, and even erroneous teaching in church. That is why we must continually take up the “shield of faith.”

In his book, “*The Strategy of Satan: How to Detect and Defeat Him,*” **Warren Wiersbe** made the following comments:

“What are the ‘fiery darts’ that Satan shoots at us? I take it that they are **thoughts** of one kind or another—doubts, fears, worries, and so on. I have sometimes been prayerfully meditating on the Word when suddenly a terrible thought would invade my mind. Of course, Satan wants us to think that we are to blame, because this kind of thinking would make us discouraged with our Christian walk. But he is to blame! I have had fiery darts thrown at me while I have been preaching the Word! If we do not quench these darts, they will ignite whatever they touch, and we will have a destructive fire to put out. I have found that trusting God’s promises and laying hold of his Word will quench these fiery darts. How important it is for the Christian soldier to know Bible doctrine! We do not quench the darts by faith in **ourselves**, faith in **faith**, or faith in some **creed**. It is faith in **Christ** and his **Word**. We cannot stop Satan from throwing the darts, but we can keep them from starting a fire...

The important thing is to quench that dart immediately. Instantly look to Christ by faith, recall some promise of the Word, and believe it. Otherwise the fire will start to spread, and if you add fuel to it, it will get beyond your control. Your feelings will get aroused and upset, and before long Satan will be in control. I can recall situations in which fiery darts made me impatient, and I was about to say and do things for which afterward I would have been sorry. I turned to the Lord in faith and believed him for the patience I needed. There came to me a sense of control and calm that quenched the fiery darts. The times I have not turned to him in faith, I have been burned—and so have others."

Brothers and sisters, it should be very clear to us by now that we have no intrinsic, natural ability to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. In fact, we have no intrinsic, natural ability to successfully accomplish anything in the spiritual realm. Our Lord clearly stated this in **John 15:5**: "*I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing*" (**New English translation**). It is for this reason that the Apostle commences this section with the words, "*Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power*" (Verse **10 New English Translation**).

As we stated in **Lesson 108**, "Believers are to allow the Lord to strengthen them and they are also to strengthen themselves in the Lord. The source of the strengthening in both cases is the same. The source is of course, the indwelling Holy Spirit. In **Ephesians 3:16** Paul prayed for the believers that God would grant them to be "*strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*" It is the Holy Spirit Who strengthens us with power in our inner being as we learn to surrender our will to His. The more the believer surrenders to the Spirit's influence, is the more he or she will be strengthened, and the more he or she will be enabled to strengthen himself or herself in the Lord."

It is as we make the conscious, deliberate, choice to take up the shield of faith, to believe what God says, to fully trust in His provision to engage in warfare against an unseen foe, that we will find ourselves able to deal effectively (extinguish), all of the enemy's flaming arrows. Therefore we must abandon attitudes such as **self**-confidence, **self**-sufficiency, **self**-reliance, and **self**-assurance. Instead we must rely on the divine empowerment God graciously makes available through His indwelling Spirit. The Holy Spirit provides the **power** to take up the shield of faith. Our responsibility is to make the decision to take it up and use it.