

The Shield of Faith

Ephesians 6:16

This week we remember the 70th anniversary of the invasion of the Allies on the beaches of Normandy. It was a massive invasion with 5,000 ships, 30,000 aircraft, and 160,000 troops landing in Normandy that day. Nine thousand suffered casualties. That battle changed the direction of the war and the history of Europe and the world for the next century. Paul says that we, likewise, are engaged in massive warfare with the evil one. In this warfare we must use every piece of equipment that God gives us. In our text today, Paul commands that we take up the shield of faith. In Roman warfare, the shield was a 4 x 2.5 foot wooden shield covered with leather soaked in water. This shield extinguished the arrows that were sent in great numbers at the Roman troops. These arrows were also dipped in pitch and set to fire so that whenever they would hit the troops they would destroy not only by puncturing, but by enflaming, the enemy. The water-soaked leather covering on the shield enabled the Romans to extinguish the fiery darts that were sent their way. In like manner, Paul says that we are able to extinguish all of the fiery darts sent our way by the evil one by the grace of faith. Let's note six things about our faith.

16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

1. The *author* of our faith is God Himself. Notice that all of the pieces of our armor are gifts from God. So it is also with faith (Look at Ephesians 2:8-9 and Philippians 1:29).
2. The *object* of our faith is Christ Himself. There is a generic use of the word "faith" which simply connotes our trusting in something or someone. We also use the word to speak of religion in general; for example, we speak of "the faith community." This is a legitimate use of the word "faith," but it is not what Paul means, specifically, faith in Jesus Christ. Generic religious faith will not extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one. Only faith in Christ, because our faith actually unites us to Christ, who Himself extinguishes the fiery darts on our behalf.
3. The *nature* of our faith is resting in Christ. Look at the Westminster short catechism, Question 86: What Is Faith In Jesus Christ? Answer: "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel."

You see here that our faith here is not simply assenting to the truth of the Gospel, but it is "receiving and resting upon" Jesus Christ. If we look at Romans 4, we see that Paul uses Abraham as a classic example of our saving faith, and Abraham believed God and obeyed God without wavering because of his faith. Saving faith is a very active faith.

4. The *community* of faith is the Church. One might wonder how we can protect ourselves on our flanks. In the case of Roman warfare, we would be marching side by side with other men who would be holding up their shields. So it is with the Church. We cannot protect ourselves if we alone are fighting the evil one. We must march together. For this reason, our participation in the Church is of vital significance to us and to our children.
5. Our *growth* in faith comes from the ordinary means of grace. Look at the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 14, and see how we grow: "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the

administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened” (14.1).

6. The *effects* of our faith is the salvation of our souls and the glory of God. In 2 Timothy 4:18, at the end of Paul’s life, he makes this wonderful summarizing statement: “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18a). Our shield of faith actually works on our behalf! But also we find that this shield of faith leads to the glory of God. As Paul continues to say in 2 Timothy 4, “to him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” When we trust in Christ rather than the deceits of Satan, it glorifies His name.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss an instance in which your faith shielded you from the attacks of the evil one.
2. What is the significance of Paul’s usage of the word “all” in verse 16? How does that encourage you?
3. What value does religious faith in general have in defending us against Satan’s attack? Why?
4. How can we grow our faith (strengthen our shield)?
5. How does our successful deployment of the shield of faith honor God?

Going Deeper

1. When have you failed to use the shield of faith to extinguish Satan’s fiery darts? How did it go for you?
2. What practical steps can you take to strengthen your faith?