

# Stand Firm, Using the Shield of Faith

by Mark Jarvinen

This is message # 5 in the ongoing series about putting on the full armor of God, which enables us to stand firm against the devil and his forces. True believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. All the resources of heaven are ours to use as we seek to stand firm against our enemy.

In past weeks we've mentioned the "**belt of truth**," which we use to overcome Satan's attempts to **divide** us in our single-minded pursuit of integrity and obedience to the truth of God's Word. The **breastplate of righteousness** is the piece of armor we employ to fend off Satan's attempts to **denounce** us by reminding him of our right standing before God through faith in Christ who gives us His righteousness. Last week we discussed how Satan would love to **destroy** us, but can't when our feet are "**fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace**," and we cling to our justification in Christ. Today we'll consider how to snuff out Satan's fiery darts of **doubt** using the "**shield of faith**."

With these fiery darts, that Paul speaks of in **Ephesians 6:16**, Satan attacks the emotional life of the Christian. As emotional beings, we are vulnerable to the darts of Satan, those zingers that seem to come out of nowhere to produce within us responses of fear, anger, confusion, and self-

pity, which when lumped together, I'll call **doubt**.

Remember the westerns we watched as kids, in which the warring bands of Indians suddenly appeared out of nowhere, shooting their fiery arrows, igniting the white canvasses of the settlers' circled wagons, and striking terror into their hearts? In the same ill-timed manner an insensitive remark, an unexpected phone call, or news of a pandemic possibility called the corona-virus can suddenly grip us with fear. Before you know it, an uneventful day becomes a roller-coaster ride of panic and doubt. Satan loves to fire darts of **doubt** at us. This is not the intellectual doubt of the atheist concerning the basic tenets of the Christian faith. I'm talking about the sudden onslaught of doubt that blindsides a Christian who is honestly seeking to serve the Lord. I remember speaking to **a young man at a soccer game** some years ago, who shared with me how he had made a profession of faith and was cruising along nicely on the path of spiritual maturity, until one day, feeling confident and bold in his newfound faith, he opened his door to a group of Jehovah's Witnesses who were out calling in the neighborhood. As he spoke, his words began sounding uncertain and hollow in the face of their well-prepared rebuttal. A seed of doubt concerning the authority and interpretation of the Word was planted in his heart that day, which took him five years to overcome. He said, "**I should have never opened the door that day.**"

Consider another scenario. **A young couple meets at a Christian fellowship** and find that they share many common interests, especially their mutual love for the Lord and a strong desire to serve him, perhaps in the area full-time ministry or on the mission field. They seem perfect for each other,

and soon become engaged. But then, the young woman has a sudden **“inward prompting”** to break off the relationship. She can't say why exactly, but the impression seems overwhelming. Any outside observer can see the torment in the girl's heart and even more so in the young man, when she breaks the news to him that **“the Lord wants me to break off our engagement.”** Initially, she seems to be at peace with her decision, but it's mainly because she's finally able to sleep again at night. Things appear fine until a little later in her life, this inward voice is heard from again, issuing another irrational command demanding her obedience. That same persecuting, guilt-producing voice comes back again and again. The young woman assumes it's the Lord, but it's actually Satan, masquerading as an angel of light, wreaking doubt and confusion. This person confuses the grinding, guilt-producing voice of Satan, with the comforting, life-giving voice of God's Spirit. Know this! God is not the author of confusion. His voice is gentle, affirming, and reasonable.

Satan works hard to cause us to doubt **God**. We find ourselves dwelling on the thought, **"Does God really know what He's doing? Does He really understand my problems? Is His word true?"** Then he throws doubts at us regarding **other people**. This is how Satan comes against church unity - especially when good things are happening. We begin dwelling on questions like, **"Does she really like me? Is he really qualified for church leadership? Was the pastor condemning me in his sermon today?"** These are the kind of thoughts that Satan loves to fan into flames and use to destroy our relationships within the body and our effectiveness in mission.

Besides planting doubts in our mind about God and others, he loves to cause us to **doubt ourselves**. Scripture urges us to examine ourselves regularly to rid ourselves of sin. **Psalm 139:23** says, "**Search me O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me ....**" This is something that should be a part of regular devotional life, as well as our preparation for the Lord's Table. However, when soul-searching becomes a chronically grinding, gut-wrenching, guilt producing, introspection (**spiritual navel gazing**) where we dwell on the faults we find in ourselves and others, instead of the grace of God to forgive, then we're doing the devil's work for him.

**Does any of what I've mentioned so far seem like familiar terrain for you? What can we do to overcome Satan and his fiery darts of doubt and confusion?** Paul would say, "**Put on the shield of faith!**

The shield of the Roman soldier in Paul's day was not the small round shield you saw Kirk Douglas wield in his role as **Spartacus** years ago. The shield of the Roman soldier was **quite large (almost like a door), usually four feet high by two feet wide**. It was made of wood and covered with leather and cloth. Sometimes the soldier would soak it in water just before battle so that the fire tipped arrows of the enemy would be extinguished when they stuck in the shield. The shield was especially useful just before the battle reached the walls of the enemy fortress, when the archers were most likely to strike. Any Christian in front line duty, who puts his or her faith on the line, needs their shield in place. Whenever an individual or a congregation is moving against enemy strongholds in the cause of Christ - Satan's attacks will

be most ferocious and the need for a shield will be obvious.

With this picture of a shield in mind, Paul calls this piece of the armor of God, the "**shield of faith.**" **What is this shield of faith?** Certainly it includes the faith expressed in the historical creeds of the church as **orthodox doctrine.** And certainly it includes "**saving faith,**" as we read in **I John 5:5 – “And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”** But I also believe that Paul is speaking of the daily faith walk that he refers to in **II Corinthians 5:7**, where he admonishes the Corinthians to "**walk by faith and not by sight.**" I like to call this daily walk of faith, "**total dependence on God,**" in which we trust God for our victory instead of depending on our own wisdom or strength. In this walk of total dependence upon God, we base our decisions and experiences in life on the fact that He cares for us and will be true to His Word.

**II Chronicles 20**, a story from the history of Israel, beautifully illustrates the use of the shield of faith. Enemy forces are marching toward Jerusalem. **King Jehoshaphat**, in a state of alarm, calls for a national day prayer and fasting. As the people gather, a prophet utters this word,

**"You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you,... Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out and face the enemy tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you." (v.17)**

The end result was a great victory for Israel. Notice they needed to take their positions, but God fought the battle. **Verse 29** closes this episode by saying,

**"The fear of God came upon all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard how the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel."**

I'd say, on that day, Israel had used the shield of faith rather well, by depending on God for their victory.

In Scripture, we see the shield of faith used in **three** ways:

**1) Trust in God's PERSON.** This means that we not only believe God exists, but also that He is actively involved in our lives. **Hebrews 11:6** says,

**"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."**

In other words, **God is there, and God is good** – two bedrock convictions that must be held if we are to walk by faith. King David's life demonstrates this in **Psalm 3**, in which he laments over the number of his enemies who were taunting him and causing him doubt, saying that God would not deliver him.

But notice David's heart cry to God. In **vv.3-4** he says,

**"But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill."**

To use the shield of faith, we must believe that he is there, ready, willing, and able, to get involved in the battle on your behalf. And so we trust in God's person, but we also ...

**2) Trust in God's PROMISES.** **Romans 10:17** says, **"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."** The Word of God contains His precious promises to us and contains answers for the problems we face. It provides a framework or grid for a new reality, a perspective on life or a **"worldview"** that includes God rather than excludes Him. **Satan's fiery darts**

are designed to cause doubt, but we should remember that from the eternal perspective of God's Word, fire is also a picture of refining or purifying. What Satan does in order to consume faith, God can use to purify faith and make it stronger. Jesus once said, in the face of Satanic attack in the wilderness, "**Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God**" (Matthew 4:4). We need to live in the reality of the old chorus sung by many Christians over the years: "**Every promise in the book is mine, every chapter, every verse, every line....**" And lastly, ...

### **3) Trust in God's PROVIDENCE.**

This is the kind of faith that says "**We know that all things work together for good to them that love God**" (Romans 8:28). This means that no matter what the nature of our battle, God is always in control and will protect His faithful soldiers. With this shield of faith in place, we can quench all the fiery darts of the evil one.

**One final word, today.** Not only does the shield of faith protect the soldier himself, but it unites the soldiers in the army. How could it do that? Apparently the edges of the big 2'x4' shields were beveled to allow them to lock together. A row of Roman soldiers could put their shields together to form a solid wall. As they moved forward, swords and arrows couldn't penetrate.

This is a beautiful picture of what our common faith can do. Because of our common bond in Christ, we can love each other, walk together, stand together, and fight together against our enemy. But the sad truth is that too often we spend all our energy fighting with, or competing with, each other. We

have no energy left to fight our true enemy. How sad it is when churches spend their time and energy polishing and bragging about their shields, instead of using them in the battle against Satan. Too many of us are trying to fight our own battle and do it our own way. We need each other. With our shields locked together, we can overcome. **“... this is the victory that overcomes the world – our faith” (I John 5:4) A-men.**