

THE FAITH SHIELD

Ephesians 6:16

WebNotes

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

We're in Ephesians 6 where the apostle Paul is writing to Christ followers in Ephesus, which is in modern-day Turkey. He's writing from a prison cell, with Roman soldiers present. He's been put in prison because of his faith in Jesus Christ and because he wouldn't stop preaching and teaching and sharing the gospel. So they lock him up. But he's still able to get personal letters out to individuals and churches, and he sends one to the believers in Ephesus to encourage them in their faith walk.

And as he gets near the end of his letter, he decides to remind them about the enemy, the devil, who has been ultimately defeated yet who, in God's sovereign pleasure, has been allowed to continue to wage warfare against the people of God. He tells us not only about the enemy, but about God's fully adequate provision in the midst of life's battles with the enemy. He gives us a metaphor taken from his experience at the time, being in a prison, either chained to Roman soldiers or with soldiers present dressed in all their armor. And he decides to apply the idea of armor to the lives of God's people. And with each piece of armor, Paul is telling us that all of our sufficiency is found, not in anything outside of God, but in God alone, and specifically in his Son, Jesus the Christ. Armor is only as good as what it's made out of. Whether it's the soldier's belt, or the breastplate, or the shield or the sword of the helmet or the shoes. The armor is only as good as what it's made out of.

So here's the deal with all the armor that God gives us (and I don't know how else to say this) – it's made out of *God*. The armor of God is made out of God, or to be more precise, *the armor of God IS God*. The belt of truth is the truth about God. The breastplate of righteousness is the breastplate of Christ's righteousness. The shoes that come from the readiness of the gospel of peace are the shoes of peace with God. The helmet of salvation is the helmet of God's salvation. The sword of the Spirit is the sword of the word of God. And the shield of faith is the shield of faith in God.

You see, if we do not understand this, then the spiritual armor quickly and inevitably becomes something extraneous from God himself which would cause me to trust in something other than God which would be idolatry. But that was not Paul's intention. No, his purpose in telling us about the armor is to tell us how much we need God who himself is our belt, our breastplate, our shoes, our shield, our helmet and our sword.

Now, let's think about the shield. In v. 16, Paul writes,

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

Roman soldiers used several kinds of shields. Two were the most common. The first was a rather small round shield, about 2' in diameter that was fastened to the arm by two leather straps. Kind of like having a garbage can lid tied to your arm.

The second was the *thureos*, which Paul refers to here. It was about 2 ½' wide and 4' high, and its purpose was to protect the entire body of the soldier, who was considerably smaller than the average man today. So it was almost like carrying a small door, which is actually the Greek word (*thura*) from which the word for this shield (*thureos*) is derived. It was constructed out of either a solid piece of wood or two layers of laminated wood and was then covered with metal or heavy oiled leather, and then bound at the top and bottom with iron. The soldiers who carried these shields would be positioned in the front lines of battle, and normally stood side by side with their shields together, forming a huge phalanx extending as long as a mile or more, and I want you to remember that fact because we'll come back to it in a minute. The archers would then stand behind this protective wall of shields and shoot their arrows as they advanced against the enemy (another key idea that we'll address). The opponent would fire flaming arrows, arrows dipped in pitch and lit on fire, at their enemy, and some of the arrows would stick and burn, while others would be deflected. So this is the imagery that Paul is using here. Pretty cool stuff – if you're a guy!

In the Old Testament, with the people of Israel, God presented himself to his people as a shield. Twenty-four times in the OT is God referred to as Israel's shield:

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, **I am your shield**..." Genesis 15:1

Every word of God proves true; **he is a shield** to those who take refuge in him. Proverbs 30:5

But **you, O Lord, are a shield about me**, my glory, and the lifter of my head. Psalm 3:3

My shield is with God. Psalm 7:10

This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; **he is a shield** for all those who take refuge in him. Psalm 18:30

The Lord is my strength and **my shield**; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped. Psalm 28:7

You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and **their shield**. Psalm 115:11

And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said,

"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge, my savior. 2 Samuel 22:1-3

I hope you can see from all of these examples that the shield of faith is not something in and of itself apart from God; no, the shield of faith is faith in God, it means to trust God in all things, in all ways, at all times, in all circumstances.

So what are the flaming darts, the flaming arrows?

- Temptations
- Trials, tragedies, setbacks.
- Arrows that distract us from being missional and purposeful as followers of Christ
- False teaching

Now, I want to come back to a couple observations that I pointed out earlier with regard to how these soldiers would use their shields. I said that in battle they would be positioned in the front lines and would stand side by side with their shields overlapping each other, forming a huge phalanx extending sometimes as long as a mile or more. Wouldn't that be something to see? People, that's the way God wants for us, his people, to stand – side-by-side, declaring for each other to hear –

He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is
God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. Ps. 62:5-8

This is what our life groups are to become, communities of faith where week in and week out, whether gathered or apart, we stand side by side, shield to shield, reminding ourselves and each other of our faith in God, and telling stories of God's power, God's might, God's deliverance, of God's passion and his compassion, of God's greatness and his glory.

And as we do this – hear me on this – we are not preparing to hide and retreat behind our shields, but rather to advance. These soldiers did not stand side by side with their shields in the air as a means of retreating from the enemy, but rather to advance against the enemy.

The shield of faith is fundamentally me saying,

“I have God, and God is enough.”

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Conclusion: