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**Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to  
quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.**

**(Ephesians 6:16)**

## Introduction

The aged apostle John wrote to believers in what is now Turkey, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4b). This is an encouraging motto for the believer, and its context makes it even more encouraging. In short, we are promised that everyone who is born of God is an overcomer (vv. 4b-5). If we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are promised victory. And how relevant this is for those Christians living in *modern-day* Turkey!

The apostle Paul said the same thing when he used the metaphor of a Roman soldier's shield. In Ephesians 6:16, Paul tells us that, though we have put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the soldier's shoes prepared by the gospel, yet we still have another essential piece of armour to take up: the shield of faith.

In this study we will examine *what* this is, *why* we need it, and *how* we are to use it. But first, let's pause to get a feel for where we are in this passage.

In this epistle, Paul delivers a burden of the word of the Lord regarding the centrality of the local church. He is helping the Ephesian believers and, by extension, *us* to appreciate the glorious purpose of the church. He wants us to prioritise her and therefore to protect her (4:1-16). He does so by reminding us over and over again about her glorious price: the blood of Christ.

Paul knows the grievous perils facing the church. She will be under attack precisely because she is precious to God – and hence, 6:10-20.

Paul has told us in 3:9-10 that God has chosen the church to display his glory in this world to the watching rulers and authorities in the heavens. Note that these are the very same beings that Paul warns us about in this closing paragraph in chapter 6. Don't miss this: Our warfare is with those before whom God desires to display his glorious wisdom. He, as it were, wants to put it in the face of the devil and his devils. This is the reason we need to stand. And God has given us everything we need to stand. We need to put on God's gospel armour and put each piece on with prayer.

Having looked at three pieces of this armour, we now note a slight change in the grammar as we begin to look at the final three pieces.

The first three pieces are described as us "having put on," but with the fourth the language switches to an exhortation for us to "take up." It is a slight but significant shift. It seems that the emphasis shifts to us being more actively engaged for the battle.

One can put on the belt and breastplate and tie on the boots and yet not be in the battle. We can easily picture a soldier in his barracks so clothed. But it would be strange for a soldier to be in these same barracks sitting with his helmet on, sword drawn and covering himself with his shield. What I am saying is that, with v. 16, the picture changes to that of readying us for actual *engagement* with the enemy.

There is a time for passive *preparation*. We need to equip ourselves with the gospel and with the whole counsel of God. There is a place for study, but this is to ready us for the battlefield. Sunday is to prepare us for Monday. Early morning is to prepare us for the rest of the day. Bible studies with believers are to prepare us for engagement with unbelievers.

But there is also a time for *action*. And the shield of faith speaks to this. There comes a time when we face the foe prepared to be attacked.

Christian, you will be attacked. You will be attacked by the devil, whose goal is to do as much damage both to you and to others. He will aim his fiery arrows with the goal of a forest fire of failure. It is for this reason that we must "take up the shield of faith."

## What It Is

The word "shield" is, literally, "door." There were two kinds of Roman shields. The first was a small shield that was attached to the forearm for hand-to-hand combat. The second was a larger one, some 1200 cm x 700 cm. It is this second shield that is referenced here.

The larger shield was shaped like a door, and hence was given the name *thureos*, from *thura* (door). It comprised two pieces of wood secured together by a metal band. It was covered in linen and then with leather. It was often soaked in water in preparation for battle. By this, the fiery arrows would be extinguished.

This door-like shield offered covering to the individual soldier. It was such covering that it offered comprehensive protection. Though the ESV gets it wrong with "In every circumstance" at the beginning of the verse, nevertheless this truth is alluded to later in the verse where it says, "with which you will be able to quench [extinguish] all the fiery darts of the wicked one."

Further, as we will see, this shield was both large enough and designed in such a way that it also provided corporate protection for the battalion. In short, used properly, in relation

with others, the shield was a means towards conquest. Faith's victory is dependent upon us taking up this shield.

Before delving further into faith's victory, there is something that we must not miss. This kind of shield implies that one is actively *engaged* on the battlefield.

Strictly speaking, the shield is primarily a defensive piece of equipment for the protection of the soldier. Nevertheless, its use implies that one has not run from the enemy. The shielded individual is on the battlefield facing the foe. And the foe, in this case, is not some theoretical, vague wickedness, but "the wicked one."

We face a very real devil and his very real demons. If you don't believe in him, then he has already defeated you. If you don't believe in him, then you will never take up your shield of faith. Sadly, many don't take it up, and so, many do not successfully face him.

Those who *do* believe must not withdraw but must rather engage. A part of faith's victory is staying put. Jay Adams writes, "Faith is the means by which the believer is kept from apostasy." Christian, don't run from the enemy. Rather, confront the enemy, covered by faith in God. This is the point of the shield of faith. Peter encouraged his readers in his first epistle to suffer faithfully by staying put faithfully – as Jesus himself did (3:18-22).

The plethora of flaming arrows must not drive us away. We must not allow them to succeed in driving us to withdrawal, to fleeing the frontlines, to defeat. Stay in the fight, but do so covered with faith: with the shield – the door – of faith. The Scriptures are clear that we will face attacks (John 16:33). We must be prepared to face them.

At this point, it may prove helpful to define faith. Fundamentally, faith is trust in God in Christ. It is not faith in faith, or some vague optimism. It is faith in the living, triune God who is our Father, our Saviour, and our Comforter. It is acting upon God's Word because of confidence in his character. It implies understanding, agreement, and trust.

We can summarise by saying that the shield of faith is saving faith (see Matthew 1:21). Some argue that this is *not* referring to saving faith. They claim that this would be out of place, since the assumption is that the individual has already exercised justifying faith. What is needed for the battle, they say, is a daily *fighting* or *sanctifying* faith. I understand where they are coming from, but I think they miss a couple of very important points.

Each of these pieces of armour, as we have seen, comes from outside of ourselves. Each is a gift of God. And these gifts are especially connected to the gospel. In other words, justifying faith is inseparable from sanctifying faith (see Isaiah 59:15b-17).

Further, all the faith that we have is rooted in the original justifying faith that God has granted to us (Ephesians 2:8-9; etc.). In other words, *saving* faith is the same as *sanctifying*

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faith because it is all of a one as concerning its *object*. The one in whom we trusted for our salvation is the one we trust for our ongoing sanctification. Or, in the words of Matthew 1:21, his name will be called "JESUS because he will save his people from their sins."

Hodge insightfully comments,

The faith here intended is that by which we are justified, and reconciled to God through the blood of Christ. It is that faith of which Christ is the object, which receives him as the Son of God and the Savior of men. It is the faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen; which at once apprehends or discerns, and receives the things of the Spirit. It overcomes the world.

We can summarise by saying that the shield that quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one is reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ in all situations in the face of all satanic attacks. This means that there is a personal element to this faith. It is not an ethereal, ephemeral belief but is rather trust in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This means that this faith is inseparable from the gospel and so, once again, the key to overcoming is found in being grounded in the gospel. Yes, the gospel is what we need. In fact, when it comes to standing against the wiles of the devil, it is *all* that we need.

## Why We Need It

We need the shield of faith because the attacks of the "the wicked one" are *numerous, ubiquitous* and *dangerous*.

### Numerous

We face temptations of all sorts—including, but not limited to, lust, materialism, discouragement, covetousness, dishonesty, sinful compromise, anxiety, insecurity, and unbelief. But perhaps we could categorise these as doubt and fear. We fear gods instead of God and doubt God instead of gods. As MacArthur notes, "Every temptation, directly or indirectly, is the temptation to doubt and distrust God." We are tempted to doubt his character, control and care. We are tempted to worship lesser gods in the place of the Lord God. When this happens, we give into doubt, and when we doubt, we are like wave: tossed and driven about by the wind (James 1:2-8). Peter's experience in the storm illustrates this well.

You will remember that the disciples one night saw Jesus walking to them on the water in the middle of a terrible storm. When one of the disciples recognised Jesus, Peter immediately asked to be allowed to walk on water too. Jesus told him to get out the boat and walk to him. At first things went swimmingly. But then he took his eyes off Jesus and looked around him.

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But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out. Saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got in the boat, the wind ceased.

(Matthew 14:30-32)

When the wind and waves became his focus, he began to doubt and then things went horribly wrong.

## Ubiquitous

In some ways, Satan's darts are inescapable until death or until Jesus returns. Living in a sinful world means that we are always up against a satanic world system whose aim is our destruction.

Regardless of where you go or what you do, the devil aims his darts and he will be sure to assail you – even if you live like a hermit. Perhaps especially if you live like a hermit! You will soon find out that isolation does not insulate you from the devil's attacks. He walks and roars all over the place. We must have this shield with us, always and everywhere.

## Dangerous

Arrows by themselves are dangerous, but *flaming* arrows are especially destructive. And they must be quenched. As Hodge notes, "They stick like burning arrows, and fill the soul with agony."

Satan desires to do more than merely sideline Christian soldiers. He desires to completely destroy us. He dips his arrows into the flames of hell in order to wreak as much temporal and eternal damage as he can.

He does this by tempting us to doubt and discouragement. It is from doubt that fears arise, and fear is a killer in the fight for godliness. Faith is our armour against the assault of fear. He tempts us to discouragement and despair, despair and depression, depression and disillusionment. This can lead to death. It can lead to defection. The shield of faith guards us against apostasy.

We need to quench these arrows before they pierce our hearts. Otherwise, not only are we at risk, but the collateral damage can be horrific. Just as the Roman *phalanx* would stand shield-to-shield to protect the unit, so too must the church. If we do not do our part in the battle to quench the fiery darts, harm will spread like wildfire. We will experience marital failures and the fallout in the family. We will see sinful behaviour and the spread of the consequences to the church. We will experience bitterness and unforgiveness spread cancerously in the church. We will see unbelief and its effects on others (see Hebrews 12:15).

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We will experience murmuring and its ill effects (see Numbers 21), immorality and a careless attitude (see 1 Corinthians 5). We will see compromise spread cancerously. In Korea in the early 1900s, shrine worship crept into the church as many rationalised the acceptance of idolatry. In our own day, the same is happening as churches cave to unbiblical views of sexuality and gender. A constant diet of uncertainty will certainly have a demoralising effect on others.

## How to Use It

It is vital that we understand how to properly use the shield of faith. Here are some suggestions.

### Get Under and Behind It

First, by the gospel, you must get under and behind the shield of faith. You must be regenerate if this shield will be available to you. God only equips his own – those who are on the right side of the fight. Without the new birth, there can be no shield.

This is the reason counselling an unbeliever is so frustratingly difficult. A renewed heart is the only kind that can resist the wiles of the devil. Have you experienced this saving faith? Too many trying to live the Christian life without Christ, forgetting that, without Christ, they can do nothing (John 15:5)!

### Stay Under and Behind It

Second, we need to stay under and behind the shield of faith. The connection between “shield” and “door” is significant when we remember that Jesus is the door (John 10:7).

We need faith in God's person, remembering that he is good. Bryan Chapell writes, “Satan has not changed his strategies. *His approach is always to insinuate that God is not good, and that he is not for us.*” Scripture frequently presents God as our shield. He is a shield that we need.

We need to grow in our knowledge of God because the issue is not the size of our faith. Mustard seed volume is large enough. At issue is the *object* of our faith. And ultimately, the object of our faith is the Lord Jesus Christ who shows us the Father. When you are fearful of the present, remember God as your Father.

We need faith in God's promises, acknowledging that he is gracious. “He is a shield to those who put their trust in him” (Proverbs 30:5). Acknowledging God's graciousness, we can sing with Jeremiah: “Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is

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my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I hope in him!'" (Lamentations 3:22–24). When you are fearful of the future, remember the promised future.

We need faith in God's providence – that he has a goal. Jay Adams notes, "Fear in place of faith is a protest against God's providential working." Be careful. When we do this, the fire of unbelief will spread. How often have you caught yourself saying something like, "I don't need this right now." I understand the sentiment, but, in fact, if God has allowed it, you *do* need it right now! We can destroy ourselves with second-guessing and complaints and comparisons. We would do well to remember God's absolute providence. What people mean for evil, God often means for good (cf. Genesis 50:20). That is why Job, in the most severe trial of his life, could confidently assert that the Lord had given and the Lord had taken away, and still bless the name of the Lord (Job 1:20–21). It is why Jesus could pray, "Not my will, but yours be done." Peter and John made it clear in their preaching that everything that happened to Christ was according to God's foreordained purpose.

When you are tempted to fear the political instability, remember who is ultimately in control. When you are fearful of situations, remember the sovereignty of God.

We need faith in God's purpose – his glory. "True biblical faith," says Adams, "focuses on upon the promise, not upon the fulfilment." That is why Abraham could cling to God's promise in faith, not wavering, and giving glory to God (Romans 4:20).

When you begin to doubt that God is for you. grab the gospel and put it before your mind and heart. When all hell is breaking loose in your life, in your family, even in your church, believe God's promises. When your marriage seems completely hopeless, run to God's promises and persevere and do right anyway. When you are suffering financially and you are facing the choice that may help you yet will hurt your family, that will hurt you spiritually, cling to Christ and his promises.

## Soak it

Roman shields were often soaked in water that they might be able to quench fiery darts shot at them. We must likewise soak our shield of faith in order to adequately extinguish the fiery darts of the wicked one.

We can do this by reading. We must soak our shield of faith with the water of the Word. Our lives must be saturated with the truth of Scripture. Apart from this we will not be able to withstand the flaming arrows of doubt and discouragement and despair and defection (see Romans 10:17; Proverbs 2:1–7).

We do this by remembering. We remember what we have read and learned. This is where scripture memorisation and theological memorisation come in. Even as he approached the end of his race, Peter was careful to remind his dear friends of the truth of Scripture,

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realising how desperately they needed it (cf. 2 Peter 1:12–21). Gathering together is a vital way of being reminded (see Hebrews 10:23–25).

We soak our shield by relating. We need to connect with one another in a meaningful way *to be* helped and *to* help one another. When you refuse to do so, there is a gap in the *phalanx* and someone is going to get hurt – perhaps seriously, and perhaps eternally so.

This highlights the importance of meaningful church membership. Membership is more than casual gathering, but is rather about being congregationally connected for gospel growth. This is what discipleship looks like. This is what congregational care is about.

Keep in mind that sometimes a wounded soldier will need help to hold up her shield of faith. This is where meaningful, covenantal, biblically purposeful relationships help. As Paul and Silas encouraged one another even in prison, so we need others to encourage us, and we need to encourage others. After all,

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

(Ecclesiastes 4:9–12)

In prison, you may not be so blessed to have a companion. But you do have a choice today. Will you connect in order to deflect the arrows of the evil one? Will you connect in order to deflect the arrows aimed at your sister in Christ? Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica in order to strengthen the faith of the believers there (1 Thessalonians 3:1–8). May God use us to strengthen the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## Who this Points To

Like the Roman shield, our faith needs to be large and it needs to be able to withstand the most intense of assaults. The only faith able to meet these requirements is one that is rooted and grounded in God almighty. Maclaren was right:

My faith is a shield only because it grasps the God who is the shield. My faith will quench, as nothing else will, these sudden impulses of fiery desires, because my faith brings me into the conscious presence of God, and of the unseen realities where he dwells.... No temptation continues to flame when we see God.

The Scripture encourage us time and again to look to God as our shield. Here are a few samples.

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Genesis 15:1 – After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

Deuteronomy 33:29 – Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty!

2 Samuel 22:3, 31 – The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; the God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; as for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; he is a shield to all who trust in him.

Psalm 3:1-4 – LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, “There is no help for him in God. Selah. But you, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the one who lifts up my head.

Psalm 5:12 – For you, O LORD, will bless the righteous; with favour you will surround him as with a shield.

Psalm 84:11-12 – For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who *trusts* in you!

Psalm 115:9-11 – O Israel, trust in the LORD; he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; he is their help and their shield. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.

Proverbs 30:5 – Every word of God is pure; he is a shield to those who put their trust in him.

God, in Christ, is the believer's shield and therefore the victory is ours. “In this world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Again, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5).

So, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ who is faithful. Let him be your eternal shield. Find eternal shelter behind this shield, who really is the door (John 10:9).

AMEN