

Christian Warfare

The Shield Of Faith

Ephesians 6:12-17

12 . . . we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:12-17 (NASB))

Each time that we read these words that exhort us to put on the “full armor of God”, we need always to remind ourselves of the reasons why God wants us to do it. He loves us with a father’s love, and He wants you and me to be safe each day as we step out onto the battlefield of this world, and as we engage the enemy of our soul in a battle that we really don’t know how to fight, but that our enemy does.

What do I mean? Simply this! The devil has been doing his evil work for a long, long time, and he is far better at doing his evil work than we are at trying to figure out how to keep him from it. That is why God tells us that our best and only real protection is His armor, verse 13.

13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. (Ephesians 6:13)

And in verse 16,

16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. (Ephesians 6:16)

A question that we have addressed on several occasions as we have studied through these words is, “Who are the “evil ones” spoken about here? Are they our neighbors, our co-workers, our government, even our family members? The answer is no! That while yes, it is their faces that we see and it is their personal criticisms and ideas and agendas that give us difficulties, behind those faces and behind the scenes of their

misbehavior, and most often completely unknown to them, lurk these ones spoken about here in verse 12. Listen!

12 . . . we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

These evil ones all live within the mysterious darkness spoken about here, in the invisible realms that swirl all around us.

And no, they are not as Hollywood would have us to believe. They are not ghosts or the spirits of dead people. These are real demonic beings, fallen angels who follow after the ways of satan. And if we are not carefully protected by the “armor of God” they can inflict real suffering upon us.

But listen, they themselves seldom, if ever, touch us. They instead use the hands and the hearts and minds and the tongues of the people around us, influencing and provoking them to do their evil deeds for them. And the saddest reality is, some of those people really are our own family members, and our neighbors, and our co-workers and our government.

I recognize that most of the folks who hear these words get very uneasy thinking about demons and about demonic influence and such things. And so do I! But listen, on the authority of this word of God, I must declare to us that all of this is very real and that we must do everything that God tells us here to protect ourselves.

And again, as we have said often, it is somewhat easier for us to imagine demons when we look into the faces of those ISIS Arab terrorists and at the awful cruelty they inflict. And demons surely are the controlling influence within those terrorists.

But again! God is telling us here that the “demons” you and I need to recognize and protect ourselves from the most are the ones much closer to us, sometimes within our own homes. Domestic violence is rampant in our world today. And many who are the worst at mistreating their families are those who claim to love them the most.

And then also, mistreatment comes from our neighbors, and from those in our workplaces, and more and more often from our government, and again, often without those people even knowing that they are being used by the evil ones to do their evil work.

Do the people who are unkind and mistreat others have an excuse for their misbehavior, perhaps as Eve tried to do as she blamed satan and claimed that she was a “victim” who was enticed. No! There are no excuses allowed. Each person is personally accountable for the things they do.

And as God, our Father, watches over us, He wants to help us through these struggles and difficulties. He does not want you and me to always be getting caught up in reducing the difficult circumstances of daily life to just personal “cuss fights”, but rather for us to instead know who the real enemy is so that we can respond to the ones who are mistreating us with the kindness of Christ.

So then, looking back at our scripture text for today, we are told here that yes, we really do have enemies, very evil ones, enemies who hide within their invisible realms, but reach across into ours to attack us with “flaming arrows” at any opportunity they see open to them. And God is exhorting us to put on the protection that He provides so that we can resist those attacks. Verse 16 again!

16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. (Ephesians 6:16)

The “in addition to all” that is mentioned here are “all” the other pieces of the armor, and we must put on all of those pieces. In recent messages, we have spoken about “girding our loins with the precious truth of Christ”. And we have put on the breastplate of Christ’s imputed righteousness. And we have shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. And now today, we are told to take up the” shield of faith with which we will be able to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one”.

Here in these words, the weapons used against us are described as being “flaming arrows”, or as some translations have it, “fiery darts of the wicked one”.

What exactly are those “fiery darts of the wicked one”? What do they look like to us? Our minds go first to real darts that can injure us physically, and they can be that. But most often the “fiery darts” and “flaming arrows” spoken about in these scriptures are the “words” that come out of people’s mouths, “disputes”, “lies”, “accusations”, “deceitful arguments”, “gossip” and all such things as that. In Jeremiah 9, we read

8 . . . Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks with deceit. Jeremiah 9:8a (NIV)

And in Romans 3, we read,

13 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; 14 "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." (Romans 3:13-14 (NKJV))

Again, yes the words do come through people, but their source is the evil one, the devil. And that is exactly what Jesus has told us about the devil. He said of the devil . . .

44 . . . He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44b (NIV)

What are some of the familiar lies that the devil whispers into people's ears? In an article that I read recently, the writer listed some of the devil's most favorite lies. The devil says,

1. You can't trust God, where was He when you were suffering so much.
2. You need to make more money and quit just living from paycheck to paycheck.
3. Your worth is based on your looks and on the things you are able to achieve.
4. You need to control your own destiny.
5. Why should you forgive that person for the things they have done?
6. God won't forgive you after what you have done.
7. What is your purpose in living?
8. You have cancer and for that kind of cancer there is no hope.

And that list of "lies" went on and on.

Imagine the harm that even one of those "fiery darts" can do if it firmly embeds itself into you or into a loved one. Those lies have the potential of causing untold damage, to rob us of peace and often throw us into depression. Wounds like these can change the whole course of a person's life.

And consider also that if the devil is whispering these lies into your ears, he is also whispering much the same lies into the ears of everyone you know, your neighbor, your co-worker, your friends and your family members. And the next response that comes out from your mouth to them or from their mouth to you is often, these things that God here calls "fiery darts".

Consider this for a moment! What is your average day like? Most of us have each of these folks mentioned here all around us to one extent or another. We have neighbors and co-workers and friends and family. And each of them is suffering through the many difficulties of their daily life. And to add to that, these "evil ones" are whispering things into their ears about you that cause them to have bad feelings towards you, anger, frustration, distrust. They may even despise you.

And it seems to you that most everything that comes out from their mouth is a painful “fiery dart”. And in your rush to get your life going this morning, you did not spend time with the Lord, reading His word, praying for yourself and for others. And by not doing that, you did not put on the “armor of God”. And without that armor, you are completely exposed and vulnerable to all of the painful “fiery darts” that are launched against you, hurting words, accusing words, distrusting words. And before you know what is taking place, you are either believing the things they are saying to you, or else you are “up in arms” and ready to fight.

“Fiery darts” give the picture of a painful attack. From descriptions I have read about “darts”, some of them are made with “barbs” along the tines to hold them in place once they have pierced their target. And so it is with the “fiery darts” that are flung at us by others, and again some of those from people we love and genuinely care about. Unfortunately, those darts can stick into our hearts and remain there for a long, long time.

But thanks be to God, He has provided us the perfect remedy and protection against those “fiery darts”, the “shield of faith”. Here again, God is generous in giving us a visual image to help with our understanding, a “shield”. The shield spoken about here most likely had an oblong, door-like shape, about 4' x 2', curved to the shape of the soldier's body. When joined together, those large shields could form a wall behind which a number of soldiers could hide themselves from the rain of the enemy's arrows. That kind of shield was most often made of wood and covered on the outside with thick leather, which not only deadened the shock of the arrows, but also, in some way helped protect from the flames and then also to extinguish it.

A metal shield would not have worked as well, often deflecting the arrows off onto fellow soldiers injuring them.

This image of a “shield of faith” is an excellent illustration. “Faith” is the first essential element of our relationship with Christ. He is our protector and our shield. And while we are able to receive personal protection through our faith, when joined together with others in the “body of Christ”, our united faith also becomes a provision for others around us.

Imagine for a moment, as you walk through the hallways of your workplace and one of your co-workers gives you that “barbed” look, or makes a “barbed” comment to you. Instead of that “dart” sticking into your heart and staying there, bringing pain and frustration all the day, it instead sticks into your “shield of faith”. Yes, it hangs there but it is quickly extinguished by your faith and you are able to move on from that incident.

Or as takes place so often within the home, there are many on-going arguments taking place just below the surface between a husband and wife. And every moment seems to provide a perfect opportunity for one or both to fling a “fiery dart” at the other. And without the shield of faith, the dart just hangs there bringing more and more pain, pain added to yesterday’s pain.

But with the “shield of Faith” held solidly in place, those fiery darts are extinguished. And also, like the wooden shield, the “shield of faith” does not deflect the arrows, perhaps over to our children or to others near us causing them to suffer. The fiery dart is taken care of and extinguished right there by the “shield of faith”.

But how do we “put on” this “shield of faith”? We do it first by receiving Christ as our Savior and Lord, no exception, no other way. We must believe in Christ and we must receive Him into our souls as Savior and Lord. Then and then only can He provide a “shield of faith” to protect us from those fiery darts.

What is the “shield of faith” made of? In Hebrews 11, we read . . .

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is the mysterious ability to believe in someone (Christ) and something (His ways) that you cannot see or perceive with any of your natural sense. But yet it is all very real. Faith is the substance of all that you and I hope for and the evidence of things not seen. By that is meant that through faith in Christ, those things that are “not” in existence actually can come into existence. Just as God spoke and all of our world came into existence, so also will the things that you hope for through faith in Christ.

But how does faith work as a “shield” that will protect us from the “fiery darts” flung at us by others? Faith in Christ provides you and me with a whole different perspective about that person who is flinging the darts. Faith tells us to not “return evil for evil”. Faith tells us that that other person is simply responding to “fiery darts” that have been flung at them and they are hurting. Faith tells us that a “soft answer turns away wrath”. Faith encourages us to reach out and help that other person rather than fling “fiery darts” back at them

And verse 6 of Hebrews 11 tells us that

6 . . .without faith it is impossible to please (God) Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11: 6 (NKJV))

These words tell us that after we have surrendered our lives to Christ, we must diligently continue to pursue after Him every moment of every day, and then He Himself will become our defender and our “shield”, no other way, no other remedy. Listen as we close . . .

16 . . . in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. (Ephesians 6:16)