

“Spiritual Warfare 5: The Fire Extinguisher”

“Over 50 years ago our nation was embroiled in a World War that would ultimately cause millions of people their life. And in an effort to shorten the war and ultimately win the war on August 6, 1945 at 8:15 a.m. a B-29 flew over its target and dropped a bomb that they had called “Little Boy.” Initially, the pilot thought that the bomb was a dud. And then suddenly, a great flash enveloped the Enola Gay and its two backup planes as the bomb blew with an explosive blast of 12,500 tons of TNT. Tail-gunner, Bob Caren, was the only crew member to see the ball of fire and he was soon describing the scene to the others in the plane and he said, “It’s like bubbling molasses down there. The mushroom is spreading out. Fires are spreading out everywhere. It’s like a peek into hell.”

Now I tell that story tonight because just as there was a fireball that ended WWII, just as there was a fire that broke out from that, we’re engaged in a battle with the powers of darkness and while satan doesn’t use an atomic bomb in fighting us, he does use fire. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 6 that he uses fiery darts. He does attack and try to destroy us.

Text: Ephesians 6:10-14a

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*"

Notice in verse 16 Paul’s phrase, “In addition to all this ...” The next three pieces of armor that we’ll study are introduced differently. There are some other pieces that we need. If you look at verse 14, the Belt of Truth is already “buckled” and is in place. The Breastplate of Righteousness is also already in place and our feet are already “fitted.”

The idea there is that these three pieces of armor are to be permanent. We’re to wear them all the time. We are always to be ready; we are always to have a righteousness life; we are always to have confidence in God. It’s like a soldier in battle might take off his helmet, set his sword and shield down but he would never take his shoes or breastplate off. When the battle gets hot and he’s ready to go back into battle he’s going to put on his helmet and he’s going to pick up his sword and take up his shield.

We see the same thing in football today. Players will take their helmets off and their mouthguards out but they’re not going to take their shoes or their shoulder pads off. He leaves those things on. God wants you and I to be ready for battle.

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I. The Example

During the Roman Empire there were different kinds of shields used in battle. Primarily, there were two kinds used. The first kind was a small round shield kind of like a Frisbee and was curved on the edges. It was strapped to the forearm of the soldier. It was used to protect the soldier from the blows of the enemy in hand-to-hand combat.

This is NOT the kind of shield that Paul is talking about. It was a “*thyreon*.” It was 4 1/2 feet tall and 2 1/2 wide. People back then were much smaller. They were not as tall. *Thyreon* is derived from *thyra* (a door) and refers to the large oblong or oval *scutum* the Roman soldier held in front of him for protection. It consisted of two layers of wood glued together, covered with linen and hide, and bound with iron. Soldiers often fought side by side with a solid wall (*testudo*) of shields. But even a single-handed combatant found himself sufficiently protected. This shield covered most of the soldier’s body. It was made out of a very thick plank. It would be covered with metal or a very thick leather. As the Roman army would advance, soldiers carrying these shields would constitute the front line. Following them would be the hand-to-hand combat units, archers, spear throwers, etc.

The enemy would counter by taking arrows treated with cotton on the end and soaked with pitch and they would shoot them at the advancing troops. The idea was to get the pitch to splatter and land on the soldier’s clothing so that it would catch on fire. These fiery arrows would be all around the soldiers but most of the time they would bounce off of the metal shields. Also, the shields covered in the thick leather would be treated in such a way that when the arrows hit they would be immediately extinguished. After the siege of Dyrachium, Sceva counted no less than 220 darts sticking into his shield.

Only in this instance does Paul indicate the effect of a particular piece of armor. With such a shield the believer can extinguish all the incendiary devices flung by the devil (v.11). Herodotus described how cane darts tipped with tow were dipped in pitch and then ignited. Octavius used such arrows against Antony's fleet at Actium and they were not unknown in OT times. The reference is not, as some have surmised, to poisoned darts producing fever. The Christian's shield effectively counteracts the danger of such diabolical missiles not merely by arresting or deflecting them, but by actually quenching the flames to prevent them from spreading.

II. The Enemy

Remember, it’s not our job to figure out what the enemy is doing and when and where he’s going to attack.

In military strategy one must never underestimate the strength of the enemy. Paul is certainly not guilty of such fatal misjudgment but gives a realistic report of its potential. The "struggle" (literally, "wrestling," *pale*) is not merely against human foes but a war to the death against supernatural forces. "Flesh and blood" is actually "blood and flesh." The words appear in this order only here. Blood is perhaps mentioned first lest flesh be regarded as inherently evil, as those who anticipated the Gnostic heresy taught.

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Four aspects of corporate menace are presented here. The particular terms are in themselves morally neutral, though with Paul they invariably indicate sinister influences (Eph 1:21; 3:11).

"Rulers" (*archoi*) are "cosmic powers" (NEB). Until the end of the age these demonic forces, already defeated by Christ on the cross (4:9), exercise a certain limited authority (*exousia*; here in the plural: *exousias*, "authorities") in temporarily opposing the purposes of God. The title *kosmokrator* (power, potentate) occurs frequently in classical and rabbinical literature. It denotes one who aspires to world control. It was attached to savior gods in the ethnic religions and identified with the sun. So Paul may have implied by "powers" (*kosmokratoroi*) that what purported to be a cult of light is in fact the very opposite.

Some see in the expression "the spiritual forces of wickedness" (*ta pneumatika tes ponerias*) the language of contemporary astrology in which the heavenly bodies were regarded as the abode of demons who held human lives in their grip. Pagans had no option but to resign themselves to an unalterable destiny. But Christians can fight against such malign influences.

If "the heavenly realms" (*hoi epouranioi*) are assumed to be the habitat of these evil spirits, they correspond to the "air" of Ephesians 2:2. But there is no evidence to show that *hoi epouranioi* can mean earth's atmosphere and Paul certainly does not use the word like this elsewhere in Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:18). There may be a reference here to an inferior heaven as in 2 Enoch. Or again, *hoi epouranioi* could simply denote the unseen world in general, including both good and evil forces.

Question: What are the arrows that the enemy shoots at us?

Selfishness, pride, stubbornness, disappointment, discouragement, frustration, lust, greed, covetousness, gossip, anger, bitterness, jealousy, envy, strife, discord, adultery, lying, hatred, slander, malice, idolatry, materialism, laziness, apathy, busyness, alcohol, cigarettes, addictions. All are designed to plunge us into sin.

III. The Effectiveness

For the Christian this protective shield is faith (*pistis*). Most commentators regard it as faith in action rather than in its objective content. But believing cannot be divorced from what is believed, and no rigid line should be drawn between these two aspects.

The question becomes, "How does faith shield us?" There are basically two primary aspects to this ...

1) *The Shield of Faith causes us to believe God instead of the enemy.*

The essence of faith is believing what God has said. When we lift up the shield of faith what we're saying is "God, I believe You and Your Word and Lord, I'm going to trust You."

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Read: Hebrews 11:6

“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.”

Satan’s goal is to make us doubt God. He did it in the Garden of Eden to Eve. She quit believing the Word of the Lord and in that moment she disbelieved Him. The devil had the same plan for Jesus in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. He is a liar and the father of lies. He tells us lies like:

“It’s okay ... it won’t hurt anyone.”

“No one will know.”

“You deserve it. You’ve done this and that.”

“If it feels good it must be okay.”

“God just wants you to be happy.”

“Well, there’s no way out.”

“You’ll never make it through this trial or difficult situation.”

“God won’t heal you.”

“You’re wasting your time with religion.”

“God won’t answer your prayers.”

“You’ve got all the time in the world.”

When these lies and desires come our way we have a choice. We can believe God and His Word and lift of the Shield of Faith or we can hunker down and get shot up by the enemy. What will you say?

2) *The Shield of Faith works because God honors those who honor Him.*

When we honor God and believe Him, He begins to work on our behalf.

Read: Psalm 5:11

"... let all who **take refuge** in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you."

Read: Psalm 7:1

"O LORD my God, I **take refuge** in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me ..."

Read: Psalm 11:1

"In the LORD I **take refuge**. How then can you say to me: “Flee like a bird to your mountain."

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Read: Psalm 16:1

"Keep me safe, O God, for in you I **take refuge**."

Read: Psalm 17:7

"Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who **take refuge** in you from their foes."

Read: Psalm 18:2

"The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I **take refuge**. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

Read: Psalm 18:30

“As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who **take refuge** in him.”

Read: Psalm 37:40

"The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they **take refuge** in him."

Read: Psalm 64:10

"Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD and **take refuge** in him; let all the upright in heart praise him!"

Read: Psalm 94:22

"But the LORD has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I **take refuge**."

Read: Psalm 118:8

"It is better to **take refuge** in the LORD than to trust in man."

Read: Psalm 118:9

"It is better to **take refuge** in the LORD than to trust in princes."

Read: Psalm 141:8

"But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign LORD; in you I **take refuge** — do not give me over to death."

Read: Proverbs 30:5

“Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who **take refuge** in him.”

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Question: What does it mean to “take refuge” in the Lord?

To take refuge means that your dependence is upon the Lord alone. You allow Him to stand up to enemy for you and let His power flow through you to protect you from the fiery darts of the enemy. Taking refuge is a daily lifestyle issue. You don't take refuge one day and fight the next day on your own.

What is going on in your life tonight?

Are there any lies from the enemy that you've believed?

Read: Psalm 37:25

“I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.”

Read: Psalm 34:4

"I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."

What are you doing about the attack? Are you doing anything about it?

Our God delivers. Either He does or He doesn't. It's that simple. God is able to deliver you from any trouble you are experiencing. He is able to deliver you from the darkest and deepest pit. It's not something to take for granted. He is able to set your feet on high ground and He is able to help you face your mountain.

Do you want lift the shield of faith and be delivered tonight?

Next Week: The Helmet Of Salvation