

Ephesians #05: Ephesians 6:16

Ephesians

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Bible Text: Ephesians 6:16
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Our text words this afternoon are Ephesians 6:16.

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

With God's help we wish to consider with you the Christian soldier's shield of faith and in discussing this fourth piece of Christian armor in our series of messages on the Christian soldier's outfit, we wish to consider, first, what faith shields; second, how faith shields; finally, why faith shields. That's the Christian soldier's shield of faith: what, how and why faith shields.

So far, dear congregation, we have considered in these messages three major pieces of Christian armor in assisting the believer to do battle against a triple-headed enemy. We have seen the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and now in addition to these three which were mentioned in one breath, Paul, as it were, now puts on a capstone and he says, "Above all," or more accurately in the original, "In addition to all this, take the shield of faith." By saying "above all" Paul is not saying that this is more important than the other forms of Christian armor but he is saying that the other three without this will make the believer very ineffectual, thus in addition to the other three, the Christian soldier needs, desperately needs the shield of faith.

Now the apostle compares faith to a shield. Faith is compared in Scripture to many things but here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we have faith in the picture, a very beautiful picture of a shield and we all know what a shield is. A shield is a protective device which soldiers used to ward off bullets or arrows or to firing ammunition at the enemy. Shields come in different sizes and shapes. Paul, you recall, is speaking here especially of the Roman soldier in his natural outfit and comparing it to the spiritual outfitting of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, thus we must think naturally, first of all, of a Roman shield. Roman shields were very large, 4 to 4 ½ feet in length, and 2 to 2 ½ feet wide, large enough, therefore, to cover the bulk of the body of a soldier. But the most important thing about a Roman shield is that this oblong shield had a fireproof metal lining, and thus by holding up the shield with its fireproof covering, the soldier

would not only stop flaming arrows but also extinguish them, extinguish fiery darts, as the apostle calls them.

The Romans at that time as well as their enemies, were noted for dipping arrows in pitch or some other flammable substance and these were set on fire just prior to being discharged from their bows. So you see, the apostle says, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench," not only stop but extinguish, "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Now who is the wicked here? We may see the wicked in a very general sense to be our own evil hearts, to be the influence of the world, to be all the forms of wickedness that impinge themselves upon the soul of the believer, but in the original language the word used is "the" wicked. It's in a singular tense. It means literally the evil one, that's especially Satan himself. It's the one who throws these fiery darts. Satan is the one with whom the believer is waging warfare here and Satan knows how to use his fiery darts and these fiery darts are so dangerous precisely because the corruption and the enmity of our own natural hearts and have to receive grace of the old man within the heart of the believer, is so prone to be filled with flammable material so that if the fiery dart can escape the shield and pierce our hearts, Satan will find much flammable matter than can cause our hearts to explode in corruption, in sin, and in tragedy.

So you see, the apostle is painting a very vivid picture here. He says we need the shield of faith to shield the believer from Satan directly, but also to seal him from his own evil heart, to shield him from the enticements of the world, to shield the believer from the very graces within him by which he lives and which Satan aims to destroy. That's the shield of faith being held out at arm's length to catch the fiery darts of the wicked, plays a great role in the believer's daily walk of life.

And now, my friends, Satan is very clever with his fiery darts. It was said that in Bible times soldiers of various armies began to know their enemies and where to shoot their fiery darts. Well, so we may say of Satan, that he knows the natural constitution, education, habits of thought, and other circumstances in which one individual believer may differ from another. If one individual believer may have a strong reasoning mind, Satan will come with his reasoning power to try to get him to have unbelieving fiery dart thoughts against the Lord. If another believer has a very emotional character which may be easily prone to take a desponding turn of mind, he may fill that believer with his fiery darts with gloomy, with melancholy feelings to bring him to nearly despair of salvation. If another believer is more readily prone to backsliding or more prone, for example, to very worrisome thoughts, Satan knows how to dip his arrows into the fiery pool of feckleness and to rage up awful rebellion, almost self-pity or hard thoughts against God. He knows, you see, our exact constitutions. He knows where he sees a weak point and it is there that he shoots these fiery darts, and so Paul says only when we have the shield of faith shall we gain protection against Satan and all his fiery attempts to explode the flammable material that resides within the believer.

Satan works especially here, I believe, in the way of thinking. Satan knows, as Scripture says, that as a man thinks, so is he. Martin Luther said if you would really want to know who a man is, you must find out what he thinks about and how he thinks when he is

alone. Our thoughts determine our behavior and Satan knows if he can reach behind the shield of faith and can pierce our hearts and can change our thinking patterns, and to cause us to think along the lines of unbelief or despair or doubt or along the lines of worldliness, sin and lust, he can do much damage to the true believer and he can fatally wound the unbeliever and keep him under his satanic control. And one favorite method Satan has of doing this is to try to plant with his fiery darts evil thoughts, blasphemous thoughts, sinful thoughts, lustful thoughts in the heart of the Christian soldier, and Satan can come with these thoughts at the most unexpected times.

You know, child of God, how many times when you bowed your knees and attempted to approach unto the God you love, how much of confusion may have filled your mind, how many contrary thoughts may have run to and fro in your souls, and you have had some sense deep inside that Satan is at work to keep you from prayer, but you have been so confused you have arisen from your knees and sometimes you have cried out, "Lord, what's the use to pray?" That's Satan shooting his fiery darts to bring you to confusion, to persuade you that those wicked and evil thoughts are thoughts coming from within you and not thoughts which he has stirred by his evil fiery darts that you have failed to shield with the shield of faith.

And right behind that when you get off your knees, what does Satan say to you but he whispers in your heart, "If you have such a hard time praying and if you have such awful thoughts when you come to God in prayer, surely you can't be a child of God." And so a feeling of hopelessness comes over you and you recall with fondness and with a certain sense of almost bitter irony those former days when you used to eagerly go to secret places to pour out your heart before the Lord, and you wonder where the former days have gone and you almost dread that next night when you must bow your knees again because you fear the same episode will reappear, the same wandering thoughts, the same senselessness in prayer, the same confusion of mind, and so you begin not to covet but to dread the secret place of aloneness with God, and all the while you are not aware, you see, of the fiery darts of the wicked one, the evil one, and you blame yourself, you blame your own sinful heart for what Satan is doing. And you see, he is reaching then his goal, his goal to separate, always to separate, to always to make a cleavage between the believer and his God.

But now faith, you see, faith is a shield which when held up teaches the believer many lessons. It teaches him, for one thing with respect to evil thoughts, that these evil thoughts come from without and are the goal of Satan to pierce the heart within. Now the natural unregenerate man, of course, will have these evil thoughts and so will the believer in his old nature but there is a difference, my friends. When the Lord begins in our lives we receive a new nature, and that new nature, although it doesn't control perfectly the new life, it does lead a good desire for control in the believer's heart, and the believer may say with all his heart that he wishes to be free from evil thoughts and from the confusion of mind when he approaches before the Lord, but it is exactly that, you see, that longing to be free from such evil thoughts combined with the struggle of evil thoughts that causes confusion, causes struggle, constitutes the battle between flesh and spirit within.

Sometimes a believer wrestles and he doesn't know where these thoughts come from. Do they come from Satan? Do they come from themselves? How may he know? But when he stands exposed to Satan without the shield of faith, my friends, he will come to the conclusion that these thoughts are solely his responsibility and they will bring him into great darkness and near despair and much unbelief. How can he be a child of God and have such thoughts? But if he holds up the shield of faith and begins to see things differently, he begins to recognize as John Bunyan said that when Satan comes to stand on the doorstep of the house of his heart and he opens the door and sees the evil Satan is attempting to bring into the house of his heart, but closes the door, he has not sinned against his God. It is only when he lets the evil into his heart and lets the evil dwell in the house of his heart and entertains the evil and see the evil and treats the evil as a guest of honor, it is only then that this evil becomes his sin and his backsliding.

And I believe, my friends, that faith teaches the child of God these kinds of lessons. Oh, how many children of God have had trouble with evil and blasphemous thoughts. John Bunyan himself was so distracted by evil thoughts that he was brought to his wit's end until one day by faith he saw that Satan was throwing his darts into his mind and all he had to do was hold up the fiery shield of faith and show the Lord that he didn't want those thoughts there and the Lord would not hold them to his charge. My friend, it is such a difference between opening the door and seeing sin and inviting sin into our hearts.

The shield of faith keeps us from allowing sin to enter into our souls and thus there is much to learn, this is just one example I have been trying to carve out for you. We could think of many many examples in many areas, yes, in every area of the Christian life, but this will teach you and teach us that there are many directions that we need, instructions we need to teach us how to hold the shield of faith, and there are seven such directions that we wish to provide you this afternoon with God's help. Seven directions in how to hold the shield of faith, and for all seven of these we must see from the very outset, of course, that we need the guidance and enabling strength of the Holy Spirit to put them into practice. We cannot do these things in our own strength but the Spirit is willing to do them in the life of the believer.

The first direction is this: when faith is active, when the shield of faith is rightly held, faith enables the believer to see things as they really are. Faith enables the believer to see things as they really are. Take that example of evil thoughts I just mentioned. Faith enables the believer to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things. I don't desire those evil thoughts. Thou knowest that I don't entertain them and long to be free from them." Faith enables the believer therefore by that very reasoning to rise above those very thoughts and to be persuaded that the devil is seeking to take sin and implant it in our minds. And so faith, you see, begins to learn, begins to learn the times or the places or the circumstances under which those evil thoughts are planted there by Satan, and it learns to see sin coming before sin comes out in the open, and it learns to avoid sin because it sees sin as it truly is.

William Gurnall in his famous book "The Christian in Complete Armour" makes a very beautiful statement in this regard. He says faith looks behind the curtain of sins and sees

sin before it is dressed up for the stage. Sin without its costume of camouflage is ugly and hellish to the eye of faith. And so when the eye of faith may see sin before the eye of sense sees sin, when the eye of faith may see sin on its way, it may flee sin or it may fight sin but when the shield of faith has been actively held up against sin, the fiery darts of evil thoughts or of evil words or of evil actions may then be extinguished by faith.

The second way in which faith may be held to withstand the fiery darts of Satan is to be held in the recognition of divine faithfulness. Divine faithfulness. God is true and faithful to his people and when the shield of faith is rightly held, it is held in the strength of the recognition of that faithfulness. You see, if we have to rely, my friends, on our own faithfulness we will despair and the shield of faith will often be limp at our sides, but the believer receives fresh courage to raise up the shield of faith because he knows that the God he loves cannot lie, the God he loves cannot change, the God he loves is ever faithful. "I am the Lord who hath delivered thee from Egypt, who hath brought thee out of the house of bondage. I the God of yesterdays will thee strength, will give thee faithfulness to be faithful in the light of my faithfulness." So the shield of faith is held in the strength of the faithfulness of God himself.

Thirdly, faith in divine justice and holiness enables the believer to hold the shield of temptation against all forms of presumption. The believer not only holds the shield with strength in the light of God's faithfulness but also he holds the shield against self-presumption, against rough and careless and presumptive living by remembering the divine justice and holiness of God. And that's the shield of faith is only rightly held when all the attributes of God together are at work in the life of faith in the believer, and how does that work in a practical way? Well, it works like this: the believer who is filled with a deep impression of God's holiness will fear to offend the Lord he loves, and as he fears to offend the holy God he loves, he will recognize in his own heart, remember faith sees things as they really are, he will recognize in his own heart his own proneness to weakness, his own proneness to stumble, his own proneness to offend the Lord, and thus with fear and trembling he will seek God's strength and God's grace to hold the shield of faith. He will not presume that he is strong enough to hold it himself.

You see, the soldier will extinguish his many fiery darts, will have a great danger in his life to presume that the next fiery darts coming his way, that he will have the ability in himself to deflect, twist his shield or to handle his shield to pet the fiery darts, and as soon as he grows over-confident, he is just as in great danger as when he is brought to despair. That's the believer as Bunyan often implies in his books, in his writings not only in "Pilgrim's Progress" but in his many writings. The believer is always walking between two pits, between the pit of presumption on one side and the pit of unbelief and despair on the other, and it is the shield of faith that enables him to walk down the narrow precipice between unbelief and presumption, and faith enables him to do that in light, I say, of the attributes of God. God's faithfulness keeps him from despair and unbelief. God's holiness and justice keeps him from presumption.

Fourthly, true saving faith is the seal which manages well the promises of God. The devil in his attacks and his fiery darts is aiming to destroy the word and the promises of God in

the life of the believer to be used, again, under the Spirit's blessing the promises of God to expand the fiery darts of the wicked. Satan comes this way, in times when a believer has stumbled or sinned he says, "You shall be deserted by God." "No," says the believer, "behold the seal of faith. He has promised, he has said I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "Yes, but," says Satan, "you will surely fall by the hand of the enemy if not tomorrow certainly some day in the future." "No," says the shield of faith, "I am relying on the promises of God, for I am persuaded that he who has begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." "Well, if you will not destroy yourself, then," says Satan, "certainly the slander of the enemy will ruin you." "No," says the shield of faith, "I lean on the promise of God and God says I will make the wrath of man to praise thee, the remainder of wrath I shall restrain." "Yes, but," says Satan, "look how weak this will all make you as you seek to fight all these battles against yourself and against the slander of others and the opposition of the world, you shall grow weaker and weaker and you shall perish." "No," says faith, "though I am weak in myself, my strength lies outside myself. My strength God has promised is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities as the power of Christ may rest upon me." "Yes, but," says Satan, "your infirmities are very great and your sin is to the very heavens." "Yes," but says faith as it handles the promise, "but he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him." "But," says the enemy, dipping his arrow once more in the fiery, destructive, satanic influence, "God will cast thee off in the end. Thou shalt never make it unto glory." "No," says faith, "he has promised I hate putting away. The Lord does not cast off his people neither does he forsake his heritage." "But I shall have thee after all," says Satan. "No," says faith, "for he has said I give unto my sheep eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them, neither shall you, Satan, out of his hand."

This is what we may call handling the shield of faith with the promises of God and the Lord enables the believer to do that, and the believer must see grace to do that because as long as we try to handle the shield of faith to our own word or through our own strength or through our own past experiences, we will stumble and fall, but only as we have the word of God will we handle the shield of faith rightly. And of course, you know I trust we have no better example in this regard than Jesus himself. Jesus had all power in himself to destroy all the temptations of Satan but what did he do when Satan tempted him? He set an example, how the believer is to respond to the fiery darts of Satan. All three times in the wilderness Jesus responded, "It is written. Thus saith the Lord." He handled Satan with the word and promises of God. He handled Satan with the shield of faith.

Then fifthly, when the shield of faith is rightly handled, it handles to its own benefit also the doctrines of God. The doctrines of God. Say Satan comes and he says, "But believer, you are so prayerless, you are so thankless." Say he puts those evil thoughts there, that confusion of mind, and he comes behind it and says, "Look how prayerless and thankless you are. Surely you can never remain a child of God. Even if you are now, you are going downhill and you shall end in perdition." Oh, then you see the believer handles the doctrines of the word of God and he says, "But the doctrine of Scripture tells me that there is a Savior who ever liveth to make intercession for prayerless and thankless

creatures who bring all their prayerlessness and thanklessness to him, and the doctrine of Scripture tells me that there is a doctrine called the perseverance of the saints because Jesus perseveres at the right hand of the Father for his people, and thus in the perseverance of Christ, Satan, your reasoning shall perish." "Yes," but Satan says, "you are poor and afflicted and weak and needy." Well, the believer answers handling the doctrines of the word of God, he has come for the lost, he has promised to remain to have a poor and afflicted people remain in the midst of the church of God. He has said, "It is not to the wise but to the foolish of the world that he will come with his salvation. He has chosen the base things of this world. Satan, I use these very words and these very doctrines to show you that your reasoning is false." There is not a single doctrine which faith does not seek to use when faith is active, and were to God faith would be much more often active but there is not a single doctrine which may not be used by faith in this way, to minister to the believer's defense against the fiery darts of the evil one.

All the doctrines of God are interconnected, and you remember a few weeks ago we talked about Theodore Beza and how the believer may tug at one of the golden links of the chain of salvation and he may feel a pull on the whole thing, so wherever the believer goes, whatever doctrine he uses, when he tugs at the golden chain of the doctrines of God, there may be a pull on all the rest, there may be comfort to withstand with any doctrine the fiery dart of the wicked.

And then sixthly, when faith holds its shield well, it uses its shield experientially. It looks back and says, "Satan, you may cast all the fiery darts you want. As I walk this earthly pilgrimage, as I walk the valley of humiliation, as I walk in the land of the Hermonites and from the hill Mizar, I return to the days of old with the Psalmist and I say, Lord, thou hast brought me hitherto." When I look at the most distressing present-day circumstances, when I look at the most anxious future unknown, then I say on an experiential basis, I have experience and taste of it, then I say when I wove the pure faith, "When I hold it and when I use it rightly, why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God for I shall praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God. Satan, the God who has brought me through fire and water, will not enable me to perish by your fiery darts nor by the drowning waters of your temptations. I know on the basis of what he has done in the past, I know on the basis of experience that this great God is my sun and shield and I know, Satan, too from experience that thou art a liar from the beginning and, you see, then faith uses its shield to withstand the fiery darts on the basis of experiential living in the past."

And finally, seventhly, more than anything else faith uses the shield of the divine mediator to be its most successful channel to withstand the insinuations and charges of the evil one. Satan, my dear friends, is the accuser of the brethren both to God and to their own conscience. Satan wishes to darken their minds with counsel without knowledge. Satan fills them with slavish fear. His goal is to overwhelm them with despair and there is no power the believer has so great as the power of Christ when the Spirit may enable him to yield the shield of faith in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But when Satan comes and exposes all the weaknesses and infirmities of the believer, faith says, "Satan, though all these things may be true but the Lord Jesus Christ is the object of all

my faith and thus the Lord Jesus Christ is the shield itself. His blood is the fireproof lining. His person is the very shield which is the object of my faith. He is the all in all. He is the only source of my salvation."

So technically this shield is called the shield of faith because faith alone takes hold of Christ but the very essence of the shield is Christ himself and through Christ the Triune God because, my dear friends, faith has only one object and that object is Jesus Christ and through Christ God Triune. And so God comes to Abraham and he says, "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." And so my friends, the believer, you see, when he holds the shield of faith, he is holding not just the promises of God, not just the doctrines of God, not just the experience of religion in his heart from God, not just the faithfulness and justice and holiness of God, but he is holding God himself in the arms of faith. God cannot be separated from his promises and his attributes from his doctrines, from his heart work experience. God is the strength of the believer and as God is stronger than Satan, so the believer's shield is stronger than the fiery darts of the evil one and this is the happiness of Israel, the true Israel. This is the strength of the true Israel of God that he is their shield. "Happy art thou, O Israel," Deuteronomy 33:29, "who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency!" Oh, the shield of thy help is God himself.

Oh, my friend, do you not think that melts the heart of the believer that God not only stoops and gives him his promises and his doctrines to be a shield but that God comes so low that he is willing to be the shield of his people? Do you see how that the Lord hears through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and becomes, as it were, less any man, as a worm and no man, and becomes the very shield of his children? Well, we have a great leader. We shield that leader, don't we? We see when President Reagan who on that day that he was shot, there were others who were shot as well, but they had to get through the shield to reach him. But just think now the Lord turns and rolls around, an insignificant worms of the dust, unworthy creatures that deserve hell and condemnation, the Lord himself is willing to become the shield of his unworthy child, and this is amazing gospel message that God was the shield on Calvary's cross when he sent his arrows as holy judge against the sins of his people, the Lord Jesus Christ became that very shield, that very fireproof lining with his shed blood, with his poured out body, with his broken sigh, with his full satisfaction, with his perfect obedience to the law. The Lord Jesus Christ, my friend, is the shield of his people.

So the Psalmist exalts and praises him. He says, "The LORD God," Psalm 84, "is a sun and a shield." God puts his own Son between Satan and the believer and that is the sword of faith, that shield of faith. That is the trust of the believer. His trust is in the promises of God because they cannot be separated from God. His trust is in the doctrine of God because they can't be separated from God. His trust ultimately, you see, is in God himself. "I am thy shield." Oh, faith, faith has the best grounds in all the world and faith has the only fireproof grounds in all the world because there's only one who has a clear victory over Satan at all times and that is God himself. Satan is mighty, God is Almighty. The shield in the believer's hand, the shield of faith is greater than all the fiery darts of Satan and the great trouble of the believer, you see, is now to realize that, to believe that,

to exercise that, to see his need for that, and not to grow careless and let down the shield, but to walk in dependence upon his God, to walk prayerfully dependently holding the shield, being watchful and ready.

That's the believer's calling. The shield is sufficient. There's nothing wrong with the shield, the problem that God's people are so often struck by the enemy is that they let the shield fall either out of unbelief on one side, or presumption on the other side. How do you handle the shield rightly? By turning to the Lord for strength and guidance in handling it and realizing that there be more for us than against us when the Lord Jesus Christ is our shield of faith.

Let us sing first before we go further from Psalter 92, stanzas 1 and 3. "Be Thou my helper in the strife, O Lord, my strong defender be. Thy mighty shield protect my life, thy spear confront the enemy." 92, 1 and 3.

"Be Thou my helper in the strife,
O Lord, my strong defender be;
Thy mighty shield protect my life,
Thy spear confront the enemy.
Amid the conflict, O my Lord,
Thy precious promise let me hear,
The faithful, reassuring word:
I am thy Saviour, do not fear.

My soul is joyful in the Lord,
In His salvation I rejoice;
To Him my heart will praise accord
And bless His Name with thankful voice.
For who, O Lord, is like to Thee,
Defender of the poor and meek?
The needy Thy salvation see
When mighty foes their ruin seek."

What faith shields, how faith shields, but why, why does faith shield? Well, in the first place, my friends, because faith always points to that great object in which it finds its life, the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, dear child of God, when you may hide behind him, the blows of Satan shall not destroy you. You may feel as you hold the shield of faith in front of you, you may feel the brunt of the blows, they may shake you but they shall not destroy you. You may feel the intensity of the power of Satan with the force with which his fiery darts hit your shield but you shall not fall in the day of battle when you hold the shield of faith. And why not? Because Christ is greater than the noise of many waters and the power of many fiery darts. And why not? Because as one of our missionaries saw a few years ago when in Nigeria a sign painted on a billboard, "God plus one equals majority." God plus one. God and the believer is more mighty than all the fiery hosts round about them. If God takes the side, in other words, of his child, my friends, who shall rise up

against him? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again and in him there is an almighty power to defeat the enemy.

This is the first great why reason, because faith has Christ the Almighty as its object and shield. The second reason why faith shields is because Jesus was once tempted himself. He has merited shielding power and graces. There is not one temptation, there is not one affliction, there is not one trial that you, child of God, shall ever meet in your life that Christ has not met, that the arrows of Satan's fiery darts has not pierced, has not been shot at the Savior. Jesus Christ has gone face-to-face with Satan, he has taken all the blows of the archenemy and Satan has used against Christ all the fiery powers of hell he can muster because he knew if he got Christ to fall, get the crown Prince to fall, but all Satan's tactics the Lord turns inside out and what Satan means to use against his people, the Lord means to use it for his people and that's the beauty of God's supremacy over Satan. But here too, you see, Satan used every tactic to get Jesus' sacred humanity under his satanic control and what purpose did it serve? Well, it served this purpose, that there was not one fiery dart that Satan can ever shoot at a believer that he has not first shot at Christ, and since Christ did not yield to any temptation, there is in the fireproof lining of the blood of Christ there is protection from every single temptation, trial and affliction that can ever beset the child of God.

I hope you follow what I'm saying. Let me repeat it. Christ has borne every temptation, has received every possible manner and type and size and shape of every possible fiery dart of Satan and has borne it all and merited perfect obedience against all those fiery darts. Therefore in the blood which has formed the fireproof power of his shield, there is not one fiery dart Satan can send the believer that that blood does not cover. He was tempted. Hebrews 4:15, in all points like as we are yet without sin. The power of Christ is sufficient to ward off every blow but also the merits of Christ do ward off every blow. A child of God shall lose some skirmishes, a child of God shall stumble more than once but the child of God shall never perish for Jesus Christ could not have a subject which would perish.

And thirdly, why does faith shield? My friends, it is the sovereign, wonderful, eternal, free, unconditional, one-sided grace of God that keeps the feet of his saints and sovereign grace dictates all their comings and goings, so at the very moments when their shield is hanging low out of unbelief, God knows how to protect them in his providence, or when it is hanging low out of presumption, God knows how to ward off Satan as long as is necessary. God, you see, not only merits the fiery shield but God also watches over his people with his very particular providence and he sees to it that though there may be blows that may go off the shield and may touch or may slightly wound the believer, he may be nibbled at his heels Scripture tells us in Genesis 3:15, there is nothing that shall not be blunted in its power by that shield before it touches the believer himself.

You know, sometimes a parent looks in amazement at a child that has fallen so many times and has scrapes and bruises and that parent wonders when that child maybe gets married at 20-25 years of age, how is it possible that the Lord has spared this child all these years in all those dangers? That's God's providence. Well, the believer has that

providence in a very particular way, that the Lord will preserve him spiritually through many scrapes and bruises, through many droppings of his shield of faith, through many times of unbelief and many times of presumption, and many backslidings. The Lord watches over him and the day will come when the believer will stand on the shores of eternity and will look back upon his life and say, "O God, how is it possible that thou hast spared me all those years spiritually? That I did not perish at the hands of Saul? That I did not perish at the fiery darts of the wicked one?" And the answer shall ring loud and clear throughout the gates of celestial bliss, "It is free sovereign grace alone." Then the believer shall take his crown and cast it to the feet of Jesus and say, "Not unto us, O Lord, but unto thee for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake dost thou deserve all honor, glory and dominion."

These are the reasons why faith shields me, and now, my dear friends, may I ask you do you know what it means that faith shields? And I want to ask you that question in reference to your everyday living. I know, child of God, you get scrapes and bruises but you also know times, don't you, where by grace you may hold the shield of faith where you may use these seven things I have mentioned, be it the promise of God one time, be it a doctrine of God another time, be it Christ himself in his person another time, you know what it means, don't you, when you feel the fiery darts of Satan, when you feel the doubts creep in, don't you know what it means to say, "But Lord, thou canst forget the work of thy own hands." And don't you know times where that gives you courage to go on and you feel the power of Satan has been blunted for one more hour, for one more day? You see the fiery dart dwindle as it bumps up against the bloody merits of the Lord Jesus Christ which you hold up by faith against it.

Oh, how many times the believer is spared from sin, how many times he is kept from stumbling into unbelief or presumption by the shield of faith, and if true faith, my friends, never delivers you from hell's temptations, you can be sure that it will never lead you to heaven's rewards because then your faith is no true faith. True faith has times when it believes, true faith can't but believe, and now God's people wish, of course they wish that faith were always active, and they condemn themselves if they do not always hold the sword and the shield of faith in their hands, but they do know what it means to hold it by faith. They do know times when they are spared from Satan's temptations by the power of the shield of God held in the hands of faith.

Do you know something of it too, my friends? But also do you know times in your life where you have grieved bitterly, when you were not holding that shield, when you were not wielding that shield properly? Times when you tried to wield that shield out of something you found in yourself? But then you have found out that you are a very uncoordinated soldier who stumbles over your own feet and trips over the very shield you hold and you try to do it for any reason in yourself. Oh, when we lean upon ourselves, my friends, we stumble. We stumble. Those are the times where Jesus must come to us and say to us as he did to his disciples with complaints, with holy complaints, "Where is your faith? Why didn't you watch and pray? Why didn't you hold the shield of faith?" Oh, then the child of God must say, "Guilty, Lord. Shamefully guilty. Embarrassingly guilty because thou art so rich and thou art so full and thou art so readily available to the lost

sinner, and thou dost invite sinners that thou will be their shield. Oh, how sad it is that I let thee go so easily."

My dear friends, do you know these struggles, these ups and downs, struggling to hold the shield of faith? Oh, dear child of God, never be proud of but be ashamed of your unbelief and be sure that perpetual unbelief is a sign that you are no child of God at all. A true believer is one who struggles with unbelief but he knows times of peace. Oh, unbelief is that great captain that must be destroyed in the city gates of man's soul. Unbelief dishonors us. It weakens us. It destroys our comforts. It prevents our usefulness. But above all, it dishonors a God whom we serve and love. To think that God would come so low to be a shield between himself and his people, between Satan and his people, and that his people would disparage, would despise, would disregard this one shield of faith.

There was an old German Grecian custom that in wartime when they fought hand-to-hand the enemy, they would try to get one end of this sword underneath the enemy's shield and thus pry the shield back and aim at the vital spots. My dear friends, that's the way Satan still works today. As long as he can get around and he get underneath, even if he can get the tip of his spear or the tip of his dart on the underside of the blood of Christ, that fireproofing and that shield he knows he is injured and he knows he will get a heavy blow if not a fatal one. Oh, be sure, be sure that only the blood of Christ will shield the fiery darts of the wicked. Seek to be covered with the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ not only cleanses from all sins but the blood of Christ is the power of God to everyone who believes. The blood of Christ is the fire extinguisher of the shield of faith.

Are you covered? Are you enrobed with the bloody righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you wonder why, child of God, you are so weak and why you are bruised so easily? Oh, then heed the advice of the apostle, "Above all, take the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." And dear unconverted among us, when you don't have the shield of faith, do you realize that you are standing exposed to Satan's fiery darts? Do you realize at any moment you may perish? And when you perish, how shall you stand in the great day of God's appearing? How shall you meet the eyes of your Judge who then shall be eyes of fire and no more shall offer you the shield of faith? Oh, one day then you shall stand exposed to the wrath of the Lamb and if you think that Satan's darts are fearful, the wrath of the Lamb shall be unbearable. Despise not the invitations of the gospel. Hear the call of God to repent and turn as we heard it this morning. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be assured that he who hath the Son hath life and he who hath not the Son hath not life.

My friend, do you know, do you have, have you experienced the shield of faith and is that shield in your hand this very day, and are you using it to fight the fiery darts of the evil one? Amen.

Gracious God, bless what we have heard and use it to our eternal soul's gain, to the encouragement and instruction of thy people and to their increased reliance upon thee alone as their source of strength, but also to the conviction of the unconverted who stand

naked and exposed to both the fiery darts of Satan and thy holy wrath. O great God of majesty and justice, Lord, convince us that we need the shield of faith and grant thy Holy Spirit that we use it rightly and may be enabled to hold it firm and steadfast with unbended arm against the powers of the enemy. Lord, forgive all our unwieldy holding of the shield of faith, all our ineptness, your washing cleanses us. Also wash away our poor handling of the shield of faith in the very blood out of which the shield itself is constructed and go with us further this day, bring us back into thy house of prayer tonight and, Lord, oh, let not this day pass without an application from above. We ask it in Jesus precious name with the pardoning of our many sins. Amen.