

Ready to Live

Study 4: Faith Foils Fiery Attacks

Trusting God for everything has a special place in being ready to live as a Christian. This is the only item where Paul tells us what it is for—we can snuff out the fires Satan tries to light with a shield of faith (Eph. 6:16).

The shield Paul is referring to is large, made of wood, covered with leather and, if necessary, soaked in water. Arrows intended to start fires would be extinguished on impact. In other words, faith is very effective!

Being a Christian doesn't remove us from our weaknesses.

- ❑ Satan can stir us up about something we've done.
- ❑ He can sow doubts about God's goodness or make us feel silly about our faith.
- ❑ He can stir up fears about our future.
- ❑ He can lure us with a passion until it's out of control.
- ❑ He can manage all of these things at the same time! He has lots of strategies and they come with force.

Important things are at risk.

- ❑ Satan likes to dull our minds to God's presence.
- ❑ More importantly, he wants us to think God is not able, or willing to step in and help.
- ❑ He wants us to think we are not important to God.
- ❑ He wants us to move from trusting God to trusting things we can see and control. Our world only believes what it can see or describe, what it can measure or control.

We have to admit, trusting something we can't see doesn't come naturally. The unbelief of the world has a way of seeping into us. We forget the unseen world God is revealing.

But the big questions in life are: is God powerful? is he good? is he near? and does he love me? Faith says 'Yes! And, by this, Satan is foiled.

Faith like this is something we do but not something we work up.

- ❑ It's a proper response to the God who reveals himself.
- ❑ It is created in us by God's word (Romans 10:17).

Here's what Paul tells us in this letter of Ephesians.

First, faith is all about Jesus Christ (1:12-15; cf. 1 Pet. 1:21). He is the reason we believe.

- ❑ Much of what Jesus does in his ministry on earth is to build up the faith levels of God's people. Many kind and powerful acts demonstrate that God is alive and well and interested and capable to care for his people (Acts 10:37-43).
- ❑ Four times Jesus tells his disciples—which includes us—to have faith, or more faith.
 - Two of them are in life-threatening emergencies—at sea (Matt. 8:23-27; 14:23-32).
 - Another is when the disciples see a miracle Jesus does to indicate the state and fate of Israel (Mark 11:20-25).
 - Another is when Peter is told how badly he will behave (John 13:37—14:1). Imagine being told you are a failure, and then being told to believe in God and in Christ!

- ❑ Everything God has done to bless us is done through Jesus (1:3-14). If we forget him and focus on ourselves, we lose the sense of our high calling as God's holy, forgiven and beloved people.
- ❑ All the hard work of coming to God has been done by him.
- ❑ Christ is called 'the Beloved'. That's what the Father calls his Son on two occasions (Mark 1:11; 9:7). And now we are accepted in him. We are loved too.
- ❑ If we keep looking at him rather than ourselves, Satan can't get anywhere. He can't offer redemption when things go wrong. He can't promise a future that's worth having. He has nothing to offer! Not anything that's permanent or satisfying, or real! His fiery arrows fizzle.

Second, faith is certainly not about us.

- ❑ Having faith in Jesus Christ is a decision to make and an action to take. But it's not something we do alone. We're not saying, 'Look at me!' We're saying, 'Look at him!'
- ❑ We've had enough of trusting ourselves. It resulted in some nasty behaviour and states of mind. We deserved God's anger and got mercy. We were dead and came alive to God. We were nobody and now sit with Christ next to God (2:1-10).
- ❑ This is just the beginning! God has done all this so he can show us the full extent of his kindness in the world to come.
- ❑ Those who forget this are in trouble. Those who think they deserve this are dreaming. But we who know he is gracious are counting on it.

Third, faith is coming to God, confidently (3:12).

- ❑ Paul tells us not to be discouraged by the difficulties we have to face. We need to go to God and pour our hearts out to him.
- ❑ We can be bolder coming to God than we can be in coming to anyone else. He's given us more reason to trust him than any human can do. People around us may make us feel unwelcome or threatened or inferior. But God makes us welcome.

Fourth, faith is very personal (3:14-17).

- ❑ Can we trust God with our very selves? Faith includes thinking and deciding but, in the end, it's an affection that submits to the one we have found can be trusted and loved.
- ❑ Paul asks for the Holy Spirit to inwardly strengthen us. It takes real people to love—not self-made phantoms.
- ❑ What God does to save us, and the reconciliation he offers to all nations—the things Paul has been talking about—leaves us out of our depth. But we need to swim!
- ❑ Trusting in Jesus Christ has taken us to God himself. And God has come to us—into us.
- ❑ Keep reading God's promises, and keep asking to grow in understanding until faith grows warm!
- ❑ In practical terms, having a shield of faith is having God himself as protection (Genesis 15:1; Psalm 33:20; 91:4). Many have found that God is like a shield—'a very present help in time of trouble'.

We all need to say what Mary says, 'May your word to me be fulfilled' (Luke 1:38). That's how Jesus comes to be born. And it's how we live by faith. Satan can't get near this (1 Peter 5:9). He can't give anything to someone who is already satisfied!