

Ephesians 6:16

Introduction

Charles Hodge was an important church leader and theologian in the 1800's. Here are some words that he wrote as he reflected on Ephesians 6.

“The Apostle [Paul]... teaches [us] that everything pertaining to [the conflict we're engaged in] is supernatural... He shows that we belong to a spiritual as well as to a natural world, and are engaged in a combat in which the higher powers of the universe are involved; and that this conflict, on the issue of which our salvation depends, is not to be carried on with straws picked up by the wayside. As we have superhuman enemies to contend with, we need not only superhuman strength, but Divine armor and arms. The weapons of our warfare are not natural, but Divine.” (Hodge; quoted in Lange)

Brothers and sisters, a battle is being waged day, after day, after day for our *souls*. For all of us who (by faith) have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places, the outcome of this battle is already assured. Victory is already guaranteed. And yet the battle *must* still be fought. If there is no fight, then how can we possibly be assured of the outcome? If there is no intense struggle, then how can we be assured that we are, indeed, seated with Christ in the heavenly places? One of the signs that we participate in Christ's victory is that we are fighting, and struggling, and engaged in the conflict. We have *felt* our sinfulness and inadequacy, and so our desperate need to “be empowered in the Lord, and in the strength of his might.” We have *felt* our desperate need for that complete set of armor that He has so abundantly and graciously provided. And so therefore we listen with true gratefulness and joy to what Paul says in Ephesians 6:

“Stand, therefore, having girded your waist with TRUTH, and having put on the breastplate of RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod your feet with the preparedness that comes from the gospel of PEACE...”

I. “in all things having taken up the shield of faith”

All of the pieces of armor are at all times necessary, but it does seem like Paul wants to draw some special attention to the shield of faith (cf. Thielman). “In all things,” he says, at all times, “in all circumstances” (ESV), “in every situation” (HCSB; cf. Braune), having taken up the shield of faith.*

The word for shield here is “*thyreos*” which comes from the Greek word for “*door*.” So as opposed to the small round shield called an “*aspis*,” Paul is thinking specifically of the Roman shield which was rectangular shaped much like a door and could cover the *whole* body. To

* Most commentators say that the Greek “*en pasin*” (neuter plural) has the force of “In addition to all this” (NIV; cf. NASB; NLT; Thielman; Hoehner; Bruce; Hodge; Hendriksen; O'Brien). Lincoln translates, “besides all these,” the NET Bible says, “in all of this,” and the NRSV says “with all of these.” No commentator, however, offers any contextual or grammatical support for this interpretation. I would suggest that the most natural reading of the Greek is “in all things,” and that there is nothing in the context that would argue strongly against this reading. (Following a textual variant, the YLT, NKJV, and KJV translate, “above all.”)

borrow one commentator's description: "It was made of sturdily constructed wood... with outside edges curving toward the soldier... It was covered in leather, rimmed with metal, and had a metal boss [in the center] for the protection of the hand that held it." (Thielman) The shield is unique in that it covers up not only the body but also the other parts of the armor that Paul has already described (cf. Hoehner; Bruce). The shield is the first line of protection and defense. The shield is not something we wear, but something we take up and wield (cf. O'Brien) – something that is able to protect any and every part of our body.

So what is the Christian's shield? It is the shield of *faith*. The shield that God has given to each one of us in the battle *is* faith. "Stand, therefore... in all things [at all times, in all circumstances, in every situation], having taken up the shield of faith." Biblical "*faith*" is a powerful and a wonderful thing. It's not the sentimental, nebulous thing that we find in the world where having faith just means thinking positive, optimistic thoughts. Biblical faith is not believing something because we *want* it to be true or *hope* it's true or because we're *pretty sure* it's true. Biblical faith is not the final "leap" we take after evaluating all the evidence.

Biblical faith is believing something because it *is* true – because *God* has said it's so. So faith isn't something that we "work up." It's not some magical potion that we have to mix and stir until we have the right concoction to get the right results. Faith is simply believing something because it *is* true – because *God* has said it's so. Faith is *taking God at His word*. Remember that famous verse in Hebrews:

- ✓ Hebrews 11:1 — Now faith is the assurance [100%] of things hoped for, the conviction [100%] of things not seen.

Now to be 100% convinced of something we can't see with these [physical] eyes is not at all "blind faith." Otherwise we could never have 100% assurance. Otherwise, we could never know beyond a shadow of a doubt, and we could only live in perpetual torment and fear. The only possible way for us to be 100% assured of things hoped for, and 100% convinced of things not seen is because *God* has spoken. The writer of Hebrews says in verse 6 of chapter eleven:

- ✓ Hebrews 11:6 — And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

We don't believe these things just because they seem most likely to us! We believe these things because God has said they are so!

- ✓ Romans 10:17 — Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

So faith is the eyes to see not only that God has spoken, but that when He speaks He **never** lies, and is always **true** to His Word.

Can you see now how faith must actually be a moral obligation – something required and expected from everyone in all the world (John 6:28-29; 5:37-38; Heb. 10:38)?

- ✓ John 3:18 — Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, **because he has not believed** in the name of the only Son of God.

The absence of faith is by default to call God a liar. Just think about the implications of saying that the God of the universe has spoken. That's saying something! But if the God of the universe has really spoken, then won't **His own Word** be its **own** final and irrefutable **proof** (John 8:17-18; 1 John 5:9-12)? What other, greater proof could there possibly be? What other, greater source of **certainty and assurance** could there be?

- ✓ 1 John 5:9-12 (cf. John 8:17-18) — If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Since God has spoken, then nothing in all the world is more obvious and self-evident **than that He has spoken** – and that when He speaks, He never lies, and is always true to His word.

So then why doesn't everyone in all the world believe? The answer is our own sin. Because sin blinds the mind and the heart – producing all of our doubt and unbelief. Sin blinds the mind and the heart, causing us by our doubt and skepticism, and unbelief to call God a liar. To be born into this world dead in sin means that we were born into this world without even a glimmer of faith.

And so now we can see how wonderful, and how miraculous, and how completely undeserved is God's sovereign **gift** of faith!

- ✓ Ephesians 2:8 — For by this **grace** you are saved **through faith**, and **this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God**.

How does God save us? He saves us by granting to us faith, the ability to *see* the most obvious truth in all the universe – that He has spoken, and that His words are faithful and true. God saves us by granting to us the ability to *see* the most obvious truth in all the universe – that He has spoken supremely through His Son, and that the word He has spoken through Jesus is faithful and true (cf. 1 Jn. 5:12).

- ✓ Isaiah 42:6-7 — “I am the LORD; I have called you [my Anointed One] in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, **to open the eyes that are blind**, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.
- ✓ Acts 26:15-18 — The Lord said [to Paul], “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you **to open their eyes**, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the

power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified *by faith* in me.”

Faith is the wonderful, and miraculous, and gracious gift of God. Faith is the ability to *see* the most obvious truth in all the universe – that God has spoken, and that His words are faithful and true.

This obviously *can't* be mere intellectual knowledge. If it were just intellectual, then all the smart people in the world, in fact anyone with brains, would already believe. And so faith is not “*just*” the ability to see the most obvious truth in all the universe – that God has spoken and that His words are faithful and true. It naturally assumes an implicit *reliance*, an unquestioning *confidence*, and a wholehearted *trust* in the God who has spoken so truly and so faithfully. This is the faith by which we were justified (Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:24), and this is the faith by which we are continuously being guarded and kept even today, and this is the faith by which we will ultimately be glorified on the final day of redemption.

- ✓ Hebrews 10:39 (NASB) — But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have *faith* to the *preserving* of the soul.
- ✓ 1 Peter 1:5 — [We,] by God’s power are being *guarded* through *faith* for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Faith is a wonderful gift of God *through which He Himself* is guarding us *by His power* (cf. *Heb. 12:1-2*). And yet from beginning to end, faith is still something *exercised* by us! And so Paul calls us here in Ephesians to “*take up*” the shield of faith – to use, and to exercise this saving gift of God. The writer of Hebrews says:

- ✓ Hebrews 10:35–38 — Therefore do not throw away your *confidence*, which has a great reward. For you have need of *endurance*, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall *live by faith*.”

But how do we “take up” the shield of faith? How do we *exercise* our faith, and *grow stronger and stronger* in faith? Not by working it up in ourselves, not by any “power of positive thinking,” but simply by considering *who it is* that has spoken, and therefore the reality that *what He has said is faithful and true*. In this way our *reliance* upon God will become more and more *implicit*, our *confidence* in God more and more *unquestioning*, and our *trust* in God more and more *wholehearted*. Paul pictures this so very beautifully with the example of Abraham:

- ✓ Romans 4:18–21 (cf. Col. 2:5) — In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

And so as we take up this shield of faith, we know that we will never be among those who “shrink back to destruction” (Heb. 10:38-39). As we take up this shield of faith, we know that we will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. “In all things, having taken up the shield of faith...”

II. “...with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

Once again, we’re reminded of Satan’s hatred for us, and of his one consuming desire to destroy us (cf. Meyer; quoted in O’Brien). And yet even as we’re being reminded of this, we’re also being reminded of the protection and defense that we have in the shield of faith. O’Brien writes:

“Paul’s expression conveys the sense of extreme danger. The forces of ‘the evil one’ are incredibly powerful, and left to our own devices we would certainly fail. But these flaming arrows cannot harm those whose *trust* and *confidence* are ‘in the Lord’ (v. 10).”

So what are these flaming arrows that the evil one hurls against us? Hendriksen says: “Some of these missiles enkindle doubt, others lust, greed, vanity, envy, etc.” All of these arrows are not just petty sins. They are fatal to our souls. Lincoln writes: “Here the burning arrows represent *every* type of assault devised by the evil one, not just temptation to impure or unloving conduct but also false teaching, persecution, doubt, and despair.” (Lincoln; cf. O’Brien)

How is the shield of faith able to repel and extinguish every single one of these flaming arrows? Well, faith is the ability to see the most obvious truth in all the universe – that God has spoken and that His words are faithful and true. Faith then assumes an implicit reliance, an unquestioning confidence, and a wholehearted trust in the God who has spoken so truly and so faithfully. But every kind of arrow that Satan could ever hurl against us is effective only in so far as it causes us to doubt either that God has really and truly spoken, or that His words are really 100% faithful and true. To lust is to disbelieve and call God a liar. To be greedy is to disbelieve and call God a liar. To be envious is to disbelieve and call God a liar. To be unloving is to disbelieve and call God a liar. To be vain is to disbelieve and call God a liar. To be rationalistic is to disbelieve and call God a liar. To compromise under the pressure of trial is to disbelieve and call God a liar. And haven’t we all failed in these ways? But yet the point here is *not* that we should despair. That’s just another one of Satan’s fiery arrows! The point is that we should be reminded of that one great defense which is the shield of *faith*. Hendriksen writes:

“Only by looking away from self to God Triune, placing one’s trust in him for life, death, and eternity, relying on his word of revelation and promise, is it possible to repel this shower of flaming arrows.” (cf. O’Brien)

But when we do rely on his word of revelation and promise, when we do take up the shield of faith, then we will “be *able* to extinguish *all* the flaming arrows of the evil one.” So let us remember from day to day who it is that has spoken, and therefore rejoice to know that all that He has said is faithful and true. In this way our *reliance* upon God will become more and more implicit, our *confidence* in God more and more unquestioning, and our *trust* in God more and more wholehearted. In this way, we will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Praise God for His wonderful, and miraculous, and gracious gift of *faith*!

“Stand, therefore,” brothers and sisters, “having girded your waist with **TRUTH**,
and having put on the breastplate of **RIGHTEOUSNESS**,
and having shod your feet with the preparedness that comes from the gospel of **PEACE**,
in all things having taken up the shield of **FAITH**,
with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”