

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 30:10:2007

Readings: Hebrews 11:1-6 Ephesians 6:10-20

THE WELL DRESSED CHRISTIAN

6. FAITH: OUR DEFENCE SHIELD

During the early days of terrorism in Northern Ireland the infamous “*Molotov Cocktail*,” was a common weapon of the insurgent terrorists. It became more commonly known as the “*petrol bomb*.” It was a terrible night in Londonderry in 1969 when the IRA rained flaming bottles down on the security forces and set buildings on fire. As the bottles filled with petrol hit the ground, the fire fiercely spread as the petrol ignited and exploded over the ground and the police. At that time the security forces were ill prepared for such attacks. However, out of that terrible experience they developed more fire resistant protective shields which provided them with added cover against rioters and arsonists. *Do you realise that Satan is an arsonist?* We live in a world where Satan is constantly raining down his fiery darts upon us and that’s we need the shield of faith. Now the spiritual armour that Paul describes in this passage are the simple resources for normal Christian living.

We have examined three items that are to be worn at all times, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the gospel shoes. But now Paul begins in (6:16) with the words “ *above all*.” This does not mean that the shield

of faith is the most important piece of the armour, for all the pieces of the armour are essential. Another translation puts it like this, “ *in addition to all*.” Now what is Paul saying here ? He is saying that in addition to your belt, your breastplate, and your shoes to take “ *the shield of faith, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit*.” (6:16-17) You see, Paul is making a distinction between the first three pieces of the armour and the last three. Did you notice that the first three pieces of the armour are translated with the word “ *having* ?” Look if you will at (6:14) Now that indicates permanency. Paul is communicating something that is permanent. We are to wear those three pieces *permanently*, but the last three pieces are translated with the word “ *taking*.” Look at (6:16-17) which indicates that they are close at hand for whenever the battle begins.

You see, the Roman soldier would always be wearing his belt, his breastplate and shoes, but when there was a lull in the battle he might temporarily lay aside his shield, sword and helmet. But he would be ready to pick them up at a moments notice. Now the same principle applies in sports. For example in ice hockey a player who sits on the bench does not take his uniform off. *He may have pads on for protection, but when it’s his turn to go on the ice, he puts on a helmet and takes his hockey stick*. Now that is the distinction that Paul is making here. You see, there are some long range elements of preparation and some for immediate readiness as the battle starts. Do you see here that God doubly protects His children ? It would have been enough protection when we wear the right shoes, the breastplate of righteousness and the girdle of truth, but by

using the three remaining pieces of the armour, we have double protection when the arrows of the enemy come flying in. God doubly protects His children. Paul says, “*Your life is hid with Christ in God.*” (Col 3:3) that would have been sufficient, but the Lord Jesus says, “*And I gave unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father which gave them Me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand.*” (Jn 10:27-29) We are in Christ’s hand and the Father’s hand, and no one can remove us. Both God and Christ hold on to the believer, securing and hiding us. Thus, the Christian soldier has a double protection from the enemy. Now lets look at this shield of faith this and see what it does. For the sake of clarity and simplicity I have divided the outlines into three.

(1) THE ADVERSARY WE FACE

You see, we are to avail ourselves of the shield of faith in order that we might quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. The Greek text should be translated “*the wicked one.*” He of course is Satan. Paul is not merely content to refer to wickedness, he reminds us that wickedness is more than a principle, it is a person. Now we have noted already in the previous verses that our enemy is not an earthly, physical, visible enemy. Our conflict is not with the human and visible, but with the superhuman and invisible. Look if you will at (6:12) The leader of these “*spiritual forces of wickedness,*” is none other than the wicked one, the Devil, the arch-enemy of God. Notice for example,

(a) THE REALITY OF THE DEVIL:

As I have said the phrase “*the wicked,*” in (6:16) should be translated “*the wicked one.*” This is Satan. The “*wicked,*” in Greek (*poneros*) means, “*the bad one, the vile one, the wretched one.*” The Devil is the incarnation of wickedness. He is wickedness personified, in the same way as God is goodness personified. Dr. Ted Rendall says, “*what do we mean when we say concerning the Devil that he is wicked ? Do we not mean that he is unchangeably, ceaselessly, and militantly opposed to God, and to His goodness, purity, truth, righteousness and love ? Do we not mean that he is characterised by a malicious intent toward, a profound hostility against, and an unrelenting hatred of God, the King of Heaven, and the Ruler of the universe ? Do we not mean that he is unalterably opposed to the plan and purpose of God ?*”

The answer is yes, the Devil is real, even when he approaches you with a smile and outstretched hand. His intent is to defeat and ruin you as a child of God. My This battle is not against a philosophy, it’s against a personal being. Some time ago the Los Angeles Times reviewed a book by a man named Robert Jewett, who claims that people who talk about the second coming of Jesus Christ are misrepresenting the truth of the Bible. One of the things he implies is that the Devil isn’t real. But that’s not true. For in this very passage Paul says that there is a Devil. There is no question about his reality. To Scripture he is no myth, not a phantom of the mind, but a grim personality, the arch enemy of God and His people.

Victor Maxwell in his book “ ***Dress for Success***, says, “ *he is opposed to the person of God in His goodness, purity and truth. He is opposed to the sovereign rule of God in its extent and character. He is opposed to the Word of God in its authority and power. He is opposed to the Son of God and the programme of redemption. He is opposed to the people of God and God’s purpose in their lives.*” (a)

(b) THE SUBTLETY OF THE DEVIL:

Look at (6:11) The Devil is a master of deception and trickery. This word “ *wiles*,” in English refers to subtle trickery or craftiness to deceive. The Greek word employed by Paul means exactly the same. The Devil is a master strategist who can completely out manoeuvre us by his deceptions and devices. Fiery darts remind us how cunning and deceptive Satan is. A dart is something which arrives silently and suddenly and does more damage in a moment that can be repaired or healed in months. This is why Paul urges his friends to “ put on the whole armour of God.” At times we are so busy trying to put out the fires that we miss the battle. (a) (b)

(c) THE ARTILLERY OF THE DEVIL:

Look at that phrase, “ *the fiery darts of the wicked one.*” What are they ? Well, in the battles of Roman times, archers would put a cotton material on the tip of their arrows and soak it in pitch, which would burn slowly but was very hot. Before they shot the arrow, they would light it. When the arrow hit its target, the pitch would splatter

and start little fires on the clothing of the soldier or on a wooden target. This was the very practice that was common in Paul’s time during the siege of an enemy fortress or castle. These flaming darts would not only hit the enemy but would ignite fires in the fortress which in turn would keep the defenders busy trying to quench them. *Centuries later the Indians of North America used the same tactic to burn down the wagon trains or stockades of the settlers.* My the Devil has fire tipped arrows and like a bolt from the blue these flaming missiles fall into our lives They start raging fires in our hearts. They kindle fires of passion and pride that are hard to extinguish, and all the time they are igniting the flesh, the Devil is making further progress in his attack against us. Never forget that we are called to be fighters on the front line, not fire fighters in the camp.

Paul says we are facing “ *all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*” Do you recall he shot the fiery darts of greed at Lot and the flaming temptation of immorality at Joseph ? Disappointment was aimed at Mary Magdalene, doubt was directed by Thomas, division was trained on the Christians at Corinth, slander was aimed at Paul, discouragement was used against Timothy, and covetousness was pointed at Demas who loved this present world. Let’s zoom in specifically and identify some of Satan’s most popular fiery darts. There is,

1. THE DART OF FEAR:

Do you ever struggle with fear ? Sometimes during a normal and uneventful day we can suddenly become

afraid. This is sometimes triggered by something someone says to us, by a change in our circumstances, by a letter we read, by a notice we hear on television. Sometimes it's conveyed to us by a telephone call. Whatever the source we are suddenly gripped by fear. And if we allow this fear to linger, it soon spreads like wildfire and begins to destroy our faith. Do you know something? Fear and faith don't live in the same heart. When we become afraid, we lose our faith in the Lord's ability to help us. Do you recall that when that fierce storm arose on the Lake of Galilee the disciples were terrified? (Mk 4:35-40) So there is the dart of fear.

2. THE DART OF DOUBT:

For often the Devil assaults the citadel of the mind. His arrows come to us red hot with doubt. Do you remember that first fiery dart shot by the Devil at the human race? In (Gen 3:1) the serpent said to Eve " *Yea, hath God said ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?* " And that flaming arrow fell I into the tinder dry mind of Eve and soon she was burning with the desire to eat that forbidden fruit. The dart of doubt. Sometimes we have,

1. Doubts about God:

We ask ourselves " *Does God really know what He is doing? Does the Lord understand what my problems are? Is His Word really true?* " It is amazing how people can read the Bible all of their lives and then say, " *You know I don't believe that.* " Satan works in us, planting these doubts until we begin to question even the basic

tenants of our faith.

2. Doubts about Others:

We become sceptical about fellow believers in the church. We begin to question. Does she really like me? Is he really qualified to be a pastor, elder, deacon, Sunday School teacher, youth leader? What did he really mean by that statement in the message? You see, Satan fans these fires of doubt, and before long, they grow and multiply unto they destroy our faith and our relationships with others.

3. Doubts about Ourselves:

For Satan loves to cause us to have doubts about ourselves. Of course, we should not be overly confident in ourselves, for then we would be guilty of the sin of pride. But we need to guard about having doubts about our salvation and our Christian life. Now the Lord does want us to examine our hearts frequently. The words of the Psalmist need to be on our lips, " *Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts.* " (Ps 139:23) We need this soul searching at times to get rid of the sin that has crept in. (Ps 139:24) But sometimes this can become dangerous when we dwell on the faults we find and begin to fan the flames of doubt instead of trusting God. My are you battling with this fiery dart of the Devil? Doubt. Are you having doubts about God, about others, about yourself? (a) (b)

(c) THE DART OF CONFUSION:

When we find our thinking, emotions, or lives becoming confused we immediately know that Satan is the cause, “*for God is not the author of confusion.*” (1 Cor 14:33) And we need to resist the Devil’s efforts to confuse us by relying on the strength and peace of the Lord. What about,

(d) THE DART OF LUST:

You see, while it is true that the human heart by itself is quite capable of forming and fulfilling its own sinful desires, it’s also true that some temptations come to us directly from Satan. Satan tempts us believers to believe him. He will say to us, “*I know the Bible says you are not to have sexual relationship outside of marriage, but its great fun.*” Christianity Today interviewed some Christians in an article entitled, “***Sex and Singleness the Second Time Round.***” One man they interviewed had over 50 sexual encounters and was not married. He said, “*Christ wants us to have abundant lives, to me that includes sex.*” My who is he believing ? He’s not believing God, he’s believing Satan. Every time you sin, you believe Satan’s lie. Someone will say, “*I know the Bible says I should only marry a Christian. But I have a wonderful relationship with someone who isn’t a Christian. We’re all praying that the Lord will do a saving work. After all, the Lord is gracious.*”

God says, don’t do it. Satan says do it. God says, “*Don’t read that dirty magazine, don’t watch that dirty film, don’t cheat on your income tax, and don’t claim something you are not entitled to.*” But Satan “***do it. You’ll get more money and you’ll have more thrills.***” Who do you

believe ? When you sin, you believe Satan, when you obey, you believe God. (a) (b) (c) (d) Satan’s darts hit us suddenly, without warning, spreading quickly. And when our minds are suddenly filled with these fears, and doubts and lusts we say, “*where did that come from ? I don’t usually think like this.*” You see, we live in a world where Satan rains temptation on us. That’s why we must have the shield of faith. There is the adversary we face.

(2) THE ARMOUR WE NEED

For God provides a piece of armour by which we may victorious over the Devil in his assault on us. It’s called “*the shield of faith.*” Now I want you to think with me, about,

(a) THE DESCRIPTION OF THIS SHIELD:

There were basically two kinds of shield in use in the Roman army.

1. A SMALL ROUND SHIELD:

This shield was like a giant Frisbee, curled at the edges. It was usually strapped to the left forearm of the soldier. It was very light so it could be carried about by a foot soldier in battle. He would use it to parry the blows during hand to hand combat. But I don’t think that this is the kind of shield that Paul was thinking about.

2. A LARGE DOORLIKE SHIELD:

This was the “*thureon*,” which came from the Greek word “*thura*,” meaning “*a door*.” This shield was a large door like rectangular wooden board which measured four and a half feet by two and a half feet. The wooden board was covered on the outside with metal or thick leather and could withstand up to two hundred arrows in a raid. When a barrage of arrows hit the metal they were deflected or extinguished by the specially treated leather. You see, by couching behind this shield the soldier could hide himself completely. Here was a shield that was designed for full protection. Now Paul uses the image of this kind of shield to represent the Christians faith. For not only does he talk about (a) he talks about,

(b) THE DEFINITION OF THIS SHIELD:

For he refers to it as “*the shield of faith*.” Now what kind of faith was Paul referring to ? I don’t think that he was referring to something ***Historical:*** “*I believe all the historical facts of the Bible. I believe that Jesus Christ lived and died and rose again.*” I don’t think he was referring to something ***Doctrinal:*** I don’t think he was saying, “*take all the doctrines of the faith and use them as a shield against the fiery darts of the Devil.*” Moreover, I don’t think he was referring to something ***Vital:*** like saving faith. Rather I believe that Paul was speaking here of something ***Practical,*** a practical everyday faith that says, “*I’ll not rely on myself or base my decisions on my experience or knowledge, instead I am trusting God to give me the victory today.*” This is the kind of faith that overcomes Satan and his forces. John says, “*and this is the victory that overcometh the world even our faith.*”

(1 Jn 5:4) But what is faith ? Faith is believing God. Every fiery dart that Satan shoots at you is a lie, and if we believe his lies we are not believing God. When missionary John Patton was translating the Scriptures for the South Sea Islanders he could not find a word in their vocabulary for believing or trusting. He had no idea how he could convey that concept to them. One day while he was in his hut translating the Scriptures a native came running the stairs into Patton’s study, and flopped on a chair exhausted. He said to Patton, “*It’s good to rest my whole weight on this chair.*” John Patton had his word. Faith is resting your whole weight on God. Believing is putting your whole weight on God. If God said it, then its true and we’re to believe it. My do you have this door like shield of great faith in a great God ?

Have you ever noticed the degree’s of faith in the New Testament ? Let me give them to you very quickly.
(1) No Faith: (Mk 4:40) **(2) Faith:** (Matt 9:22)
(3) Little Faith: (Matt 6:30) **(4) Great Faith:** (Matt 15:28) **(5) So Great Faith:** (Lk 7:9) I wonder which characterises you ? Faith is always a close relationship with the Saviour and when we walk close with the Lord we’re safe from “*the fiery darts of the wicked one.*” As we rest wholly in the Lord we can know His protection. Jim Elliott was a missionary to the Auca Indians of Ecuador. One day before boarding the plane for a flight which would ultimately take him and his four colleagues to their deaths at the hands of the Auca Indians whom they sought to win for Christ, they sang, “*We rest in Thee our Shield and our Defender.*” Regarding faith Charles Spurgeon wrote, “*faith like a shield, covers all*

and is therefore important above all. Look well to your confidence in God, for if this fails, all fails.” (1) (2)

(3) THE ASSURANCE WE HAVE

Look at what Paul says again, “ *Above all, or in addition to all, or to cover them all, taking the shield of faith whereby ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one.*” Do you see the certainty of this promise ? Paul tells us that this shield of faith is effective enough to deflect Satan’s darts to the ground where they will soon fizzle out and die. My we have the assurance of victory, for this shield is effective and powerful, look at what it does. This shield,

(a) UNIFIES THE ARMY:

“ *How could it do that ?*” you ask. Well, let me tell you. The edges of these big shields were bevelled in such a way that they could be locked together. A row of Roman soldiers could put their shields together to form a solid wall. Haven’t you seen this in some of the films ? Where these Roman soldiers locked their shields together to form a solid wall, that swords and arrows could not penetrate. You see, the shields unifies the army. Is this not what faith ought to do ? Because of our common bond of faith in the Lord Jesus, you and I should love each other, walk together, stand together, and fight together against our enemy. *Do you know something ?* The sad and solemn truth is this, that too often we spend all our energy fighting with each other. We spend all our energy competing with each other, and we have no energy left to

combat the real enemy. This is what the Church of Jesus Christ is doing today, indeed some believers seem to have nothing else to do, but to be Satan’s instrument to discourage others. Other churches are too busy bragging about their shields and polishing their shields, but they never use their shields. Just think of what the Lord could accomplish in this church, your church if every believer would stand with his shield united with his fellow believers in one great wall of faith. This is what Paul was thinking about when he said, “ *till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.*” (4:13) But the problem is, we’re all trying to fight our own battle and do it our way. Do you recall what Peter says ? Look if you will (1 Pet 5:8-9) Peter was saying, “ *Don’t think that you are fighting that lion by yourself. Don’t even try to defeat him yourself. Move close to the other soldiers and lock your shields together. Don’t let any division be found in the ranks and then God will give you victory.*”

We need true, Biblical unity among us today. If we would all pray and trust God together we would accomplish so much more. But we’ve become selfish, proud, and individualistic. We don’t want to stand together or work together, yet the Lord is saying, “ ***Lock your shields together.***” (a)

(b) NULLIFIES THE ENEMY:

You see, this shield of faith protects us in two ways. First, it stops the fiery darts so they don’t injure us, and then it puts out the fire so the damage does not spread. Now what

kind of faith is Paul referring to here ? Practical, every day faith in the Lord who is our shield. You see, we need,

1. FAITH IN GOD'S PERSON:

We not only believe that He exists, but that He is actively involved in our daily lives. After Abraham had returned from rescuing Lot, the Lord told him in a vision, “*Fear not Abram, I am Thy shield and Thy exceeding great reward.*” (Gen 15:1) God is our shield (Protection) and our great reward. (Provision) He is all we need. When he was experiencing trouble David knew that he could trust the Lord to shield him. He said, “*Lord, how are they increased that trouble me, many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, there is no help for him in God But Thou, O lord, art a shield for me, my glory and the lifter up of my head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill.*” (Ps 3:1-4) God hears us when we cry to Him and will shield us when we have faith in Him. 1.

2. FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES:

Satan will come and fire the dart of doubt. He will say, “*What is there in you that you should be finally saved, poor, weak, sinful wretch that you are.*” But up comes faith handling the shield and says, “*But God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*” (1 Cor 1:27) Yes, says Satan “**but you will finally perish.**” No cries faith for I hear the promise of the Saviour, “*I gave unto my sheep eternal life and they shall never perish.*” (Jn 10:28) Faith in the promises of

God. Indeed “*faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*” (Rom 10:17) The Word of God contains promise and answers for every problem we face, and the Lord has never once failed to keep one of His good promises. (1 Kings 8:56) (1) (2)

3. FAITH IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE:

This is the kind of faith that says, “*We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.*” (Rom 8:28) 1, 2, 3,

Billy Bray tells about some of the conflicts that he had with the Devil. On one occasion Billy had a very poor yield of potatoes and the Devil came and whispered in his ear, “**Billy, do you think that the Lord loves you ?**” “*Yes,*” replied Billy. “*Well, I don't,*” said the old Devil, “*For He would not have allowed this to happen if He did.*” But Billy had learned to use the Shield of Faith and he said, “*the Lord loves me and the Lord has enriched my life in countless ways while you only gave me, poor, hard service all the years that I served you.*” And when he said that the Devil was gone. Here is our defence shield. **Faith.** Take the shield, hold it, use it and you also will be able to extinguish the fiery darts of the Devil.

