

July 7, 2013

Acts 27:13-26 / Hebrews 11:1-6, 32-40 / Ephesians 6:16
The Weapons of Our Warfare (#4) - Faith As The Shield Against
Satan's Attacks

Before I get into sharing about the piece of armor Paul speaks of today: I wanted point out how Paul's use of all these pieces of armor -- in the context of our spiritual conflict with evil -- gives us a unique understanding of how he viewed the Christian life.

Because whereas many in our day tend to see the faith (or want to see it) as an escape from conflict -- or a way to enter into a state of inner peace and spiritual tranquility (similar in many ways to what is offered by eastern forms of meditation and yoga), Paul saw it as unavoidably including conflict or warfare.

And I do have to admit that in our fast-paced society where we always feel pressured to do more -- to be here, and go there, or do this, and complete that (often finding it hard to get even one uninterrupted minute to ourselves because we have so many things packed into our schedules) peace, and tranquility of spirit, and escape from conflict, and entering into an inner Sabbath rest of God has a nearly irresistible lure to most all of us.

It does. I myself find great comfort, and immense inner strength, in times of quiet, peaceful, uninterrupted communion with God.

Yet as much as we may yearn for those times of inner tranquility and cherish the times when they come, Paul also wants us to know that there is, unavoidably, a good deal of conflict in the Christian life as well.

Conflict that arises from within because we have a sin nature that urges us to do things that would dishonor God, requiring us to fight those sinful desires and cravings that arise from without, because

Satan is a very real enemy who earnestly seeks and plans and schemes (with military-like precision) to bring about our demise -- or at the very least, the demise of our Christian testimony.

So, whether we like it or not, when a person comes to trust in Christ they enter what John Bunyan called, "The Holy War." Not a war against people... not a war against flesh and blood... but a war that involves fighting our own sinful nature on the inside, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms on the outside.

It's the conflict which CANNOT BE AVOIDED, since coming to faith in Christ brings us directly into the cross-hairs of the sight Satan has mounted on his crossbow. Or as one gentleman put it: "Coming to Christ is like to drawing a bull's-eye on the front and back of your shirt." It gains you an enemy who's determined to take you down.

So today I want to speak about one of the primary pieces -- if not THE primary piece -- of the armor God gives to us to keep us from getting wounded or injured in our battle with the adversary -- the shield of faith.

And in doing so I want to divide my message up into 3 sections:

1.) What we know about Roman shields. **2.)** The three main uses they had. And **3.)** How the shield of faith can protect us from, or help us to extinguish, the "fiery arrows of the evil one."

So let's begin **FIRST** with what we know about "shields," so we can then see how "faith" acts as such a shield to us and can protect us in every spiritual conflict with Satan.

The heavily armored Roman soldiers carried a large body shield called a scutum. It was curved -- generally described as semi-cylindrical -- and measured about 2.5 feet wide by 4 feet tall. It was made of plywood / covered with leather.

(Pictures of Roman shields)



It was about a half inch thick, with a full metal rim running around the outside and generally weighed between 20-22 pounds. It would have been painted with the insignia of the fighting unit. Yet because its size and weight, it was not used in hand to hand combat, since sword fighting required speed and agility that would have been lost when holding or carrying such a heavy shield.

Which brings us to our **SECOND** point -- the three main uses of the Roman shield, since we've already seen it was generally discarded once the soldiers were engaged in fierce hand-to-hand combat, where speed and agility were required, and a shield would have been too heavy and cumbersome.

So what were the **THREE** main uses of a Roman shield?

1st) Before one even entered the fray of battle, one's shield displayed who they were. Their shield not only showed what side you were on, it frequently displayed one's wealth, status or position in life. Some shields were decorated with the family seal, or the tribal or national crest, identifying who they were and what army they belonged to.

2nd) Once the battle started, the shield protected the bearer from the arrow, spear, rock, projectile and at times boiling oil poured from the walls of a castle. In fact, as Paul points out in today's passage, their main defensive purpose was to stop the initial barrage of arrows and javelins (often "flaming arrows") aimed at both killing or at the very least sticking into the wood and leather shields and starting them on fire.

In fact, that's why Roman soldiers would often wet their shields with water before a battle. Because then the "flaming arrows" would not light their shields on fire. And in the spiritual sense, that's an awesome insight -- especially when one considers that Paul speak of being, "washed with water through the word."

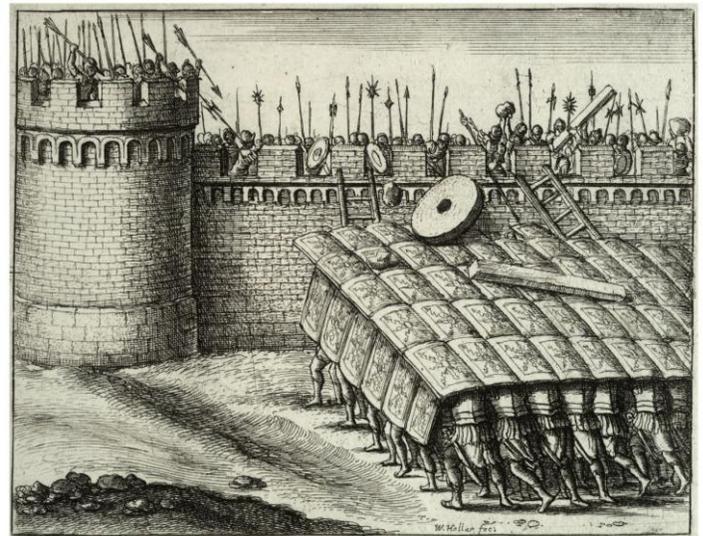
If the shield represents "faith," then our faith must be washed in the word. It must be saturated in Scripture. "For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ."

Faith germinates and grows strong in the soil of Scripture! It must be sustained by the Bible if it is to quench Satan's fiery darts.

And, **3rd**) The purpose of a shield was not only to protect YOU, but to protect your fellow soldiers. Romans began an engagement by advancing close to their enemies in a formation called the "turtle."

When the army attacked a walled city, they would march right up to the wall in close formation with very large shields held above them and in front of them so that whatever was shot at them or dropped on them would not harm them.

They locked their shields together in front of them, and over their heads and marched up to the gates of a city protected from the arrows and flaming darts reigned on them from above.



With swords drawn, the line of soldiers would charge the enemy with his shield in front of him, hoping that the force of the impact from this wall of soldiers would knock their opponents to the ground. In this way, the shield could serve as an offensive weapon by battering the enemy with the central boss, and by hacking at him with the metal-bound edge.

And you know what I found interesting? Paul's use of the shield imagery differs from every other place it is used in Scripture. In every other place, the shield refers to God Himself, His grace, or His salvation, and not faith.

Thus we read in Ps. 5:12: ***"For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous: you surround them with your favor as with a shield."*** / Ps 18:2 says: ***"I love you, O Lord, my strength. 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."*** / And Ps 7:10: ***"My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart."***

In fact, verses 11-13 speak of God as our shield in protecting us against His own wrath against our sins! ***"God is a righteous judge,"*** says David, ***"a God who expresses wrath every day. If He does not relent, He will sharpen His sword, He will bend and string His bow. He has prepared His deadly weapons, He makes ready His flaming arrows."***

In other words, God offers Himself as the shield that protects His people (people of faith in Jesus) from His wrath against their sin! It affirms the words of A. W. Tozer, who once said that, ***"the only way to escape God's wrath is to run, by faith, straight into His arms."***

WHY? Because God Himself is our shield. That's one of the forgotten aspects of the shield of faith -- faith unites us to God.

And because it does, the shield of faith is in many ways just another way of voicing the truth of the OT - that God Himself is our shield. Through faith we become united to Him, and all that He is to us.

Then **THIRD**, how is it that faith functions in our lives the same way an ancient shield functioned in battle? **1st)** It projects the emblem and authority of Christ. It serves us like a policeman's badge. In fact, a policeman's badge is often called his "shield." And in many ways it is. When a he goes out on patrol, his badge is his first line of defense. It's a display of his authority which causes many people (who would not otherwise do so) to become more passive, compliant or surrender immediately.

Not with the worst criminals -- they will resist and fight on regard-less. But those who still have some fear or respect for authority will yield to it. Because they know that the badge (or his "shield") signifies the entire weight of the law that stands behind him.

And so it is with the shield of faith. It signifies the authority of Christ. The forces of evil who come against us will know that the One who possesses all authority in heaven and earth stands behind us.

We go forth in His name! Which means that anyone who takes us on doesn't simply have to deal with us. They must deal with the One who has invested us with His authority! He stands behind us, and through faith we have access to all that He is and all that He can do! And that should give us great confidence in any battle with evil!

So, when the enemy comes and messes with us, he's not just messing with us! He's taking on the God who stands with us and beside us and behind us! The one who has commissioned us to do what we do in His name!

It's the same thing that is true for our young children. When anyone messes with them, they have decided to take us on as well. Because we are not going to stand there and let them be abused.

Then **FOURTH**, we need to remember that the shield Paul envisions here is the Roman shield. One that was so large, a person could hide behind it. It was 2 and 1/2 feet wide, and 4 feet tall. Not one of those little arm shields that only protected your mid-section, but one you could hide yourself behind entirely and not even be seen! It protected all of you and left no part of you vulnerable to being hit (as long as you hold it up)!

In the stage production of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress the Devil is represented by a thirty-foot dragon which snakes around the theatre and up the stage. Out of the mouth of the dragon came fiery darts.

On the stage was Christian, holding his shield of faith. And as the darts flew, a voice could be heard whispering their names — guilt, lust, greed, worry, envy, pride, self-pity, unforgiveness, hopelessness, depression, self-loathing, wrath, and so forth.

And Bunyan's insights are wise, because he implies that Satan's worst darts or arrows are internal temptations, condemnation and accusation. Not sex, drugs, drinking, etc., but internal and invisible things.

Because it's much easier to get the believer to fall to invisible sins, which others can't see, than to get him to fall into open, overt sin. We tend to be more intent on guarding against outward, visible type sins.

That's why Satan will sneak up behind us and seek to fill our minds with all kinds of thoughts. He will deceive us into thinking it's ok to entertain or toy with sin on the inside just as long as other people can't see it.

He'll convince us it's ok to commit emotional adultery long before he tries to get us to commit physical adultery. He will cause us to notice and focus on the inconsistencies and hypocrisies in other Christians,

and make us feel superior to them. / He will even make us wonder if all the effort in fighting sin is worth it.

And if we do not have faith as a shield to protect us, there is no way we will be able to withstand his assaults. And please, don't let him deceive you. Inward sin always leads to some sort of outward sin -- be it anger, irritation, dishonesty, lying, hypocrisy, embracing wrong ethics or morals -- you name it. It will come out.

Then **LAST**, true Christian faith joins us to others for mutual defense. There are times for each one of us when doubts come and our faith is weak, or even fails. Or as I've heard some testify, their faith was "all but gone." Yet, when we walk with other believers, if OUR faith fails, then THEIR faith can step in to protect and defend us. We cannot always be strong alone -- that's why we need one another!

And this is totally Scriptural. For as we read in Mk 2:1-5, after some friends of a paralytic could not get him to Jesus because of the crowds, and went to the roof, and dug through it to lower their paralyzed friend down by ropes in front of Jesus, we read, ***"When Jesus saw THEIR faith (that is, the faith of this man's friends) he said to the paralytic, 'Son, YOUR sins are forgiven.'"***

You see, I've often been with people in extreme pain and heard well meaning friends say to them, "You just need to trust God." And I've felt like saying, "People, if they could, they would. But right now they can't."

At the worst times in our lives, when we are in immense pain, it is often difficult, and sometimes near impossible to trust in God. One theology professor was honest enough to admit that when he was in an accident where his van burst into flames before his wife and children were able to get out.

It's at those times that we need someone else to trust in God for us -- and according to Mark 2:5, God will honor that!

We need believing friends who will surround us with their shields! People who will pray for us, and encourage us to keep on going, and offer us the strength of THEIR faith until that time when we regain our right state of mind and are again able to trust and believe for ourselves.

Like the ancient Romans, we need to form the "turtle formation" over them. And likewise, when they are going through such times, we need to return the favor and do the same for them.

When one believer loses their strength to go on, the others can (and should) be there to defend him with their faith -- putting their shields in front of him or around him to keep those darts from hitting him.

That's the beauty of spiritual friendship. That's the beauty of the Body of Christ. Me there for you, you there for me, us there for each other -- "faithing it" for each other.

We need to place OUR shield of faith in front of THEM as the fiery darts of the evil one are being shot at them!