

Sermon: The Shield, Helmet & Sword Eph. 6:16-17

We live in a world full of conflict.
It's everywhere.

And the most serious conflict we have to deal with comes from the place that we often give the least attention to and that is the demonic realm. In Ephesians 6, Paul calls us to wake us up and recognize the devil and his schemes. The devil seeks to sow the seeds of conflict so that **nations** would tear themselves apart. So that **families** would splinter apart and so that **individuals** would fall apart.

Being a Christian doesn't free us from conflict. Indeed, Jesus promised us that becoming a Christian in some ways even increases the conflict we face. Yet as Christians, we know that God has given us resources to properly deal with conflict... And today we are studying how we are to deal spiritually with the conflict the devil brings to each of us.

So let us read Ephesians 6:13-17.

Ephesians 6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. **14** Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, **15** and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. **16** In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; **17** and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...

This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Last week we considered the first three pieces of the armor of God and this week we are studying the final three.
You have a sermon outline and the first point there is...

I. The Shield of Faith

In ancient warfare, the shield was an indispensable part of a soldier's defenses. It was large, 4 to 5 feet tall and a couple of feet wide. And with it, a soldier could block sword thrusts close up and arrows from archers standing further off. Paul tells us that, spiritually speaking, faith is the shield against the fiery arrows of the enemy.

So we have to ask, how does this work?
How does faith extinguish the attacks of the enemy?

Well, it all goes back to Genesis. In Genesis 15, the Lord spoke to Abraham when he was at a point of crisis in his faith. He had been promised that his wife would bear a son but years had passed and still Abraham had no son. And so the Lord said to him:
Genesis 15:1 "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

The Lord went on to ensure Abram that he would indeed have a son and the passage closes with these words:

6 And [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

In Ephesians 6, Paul picks up on this imagery of the shield and links it to Abraham's faith.

Abraham believed God.

And this was especially difficult because everything in Abraham's experience pointed in the opposite direction of what God had promised.

Abraham was an old man and his wife Sarah was an old woman who, in her best years, was not able to bear any children.

But God promised that Abraham would have a son.

And so in that moment, Abraham had to choose which he would believe.

Would he choose the side of his own lived experience- or would he put his faith in God?

You see, that's what it often comes down to in terms of faith.

On the one hand you have your experience, what you see, sense and have learned over the years.

And on the other hand you have the word of God.

Abraham chose to trust in God because it was God who said it.

His faith was not in some vague belief that everything will turn out just fine.

His faith was in God.

And as we will see, his faith was not very great.

Because just one chapter later, in Genesis 16, Abraham gave into Sarah's plan for him to sleep with Sarah's servant Hagar and bear a son that way.

This was not God's plan.

This was Abraham and Sarah taking matters into their own hands.

Their faith was not great.

And so we see, first of all that the size of our faith is not the most important detail when it comes to being shielded from the enemy's arrows.

What is most important is that our faith is in the right object.

Abraham's faith, though small, was in God.

When speaking of faith as a defense, the size of our faith is not as important as is the object of our faith.

Imagine you are running from a bear in the winter time. And as you run through the woods, you come to a small cliff where there is a frozen lake below.

And so you have a choice, do you jump the 2 meters down onto the frozen lake or not?

Whether or not you jump all depends on how thick you believe the ice is.

Now, you're unfamiliar with the area you are in.

And ordinarily you would never take such a risk as to just jump out onto a frozen lake.

But you are forced to decide.

And with the tiniest bit of faith that the ice will hold you, you jump.

So will the ice hold up or will you fall through?

You see, it really doesn't matter how much faith you have at that point.
You only had enough faith to jump down.
But what is most important is the object of your faith which is the ice.
And thankfully, that time of year, that particular lake ice is a meter thick and so you easily run away to safety.
Happy ending.

Yet the point I hope is clear.
The amount of our faith is nowhere near as important as the object of our faith.

And this is why Jesus said in Matthew 17:20:
Matthew 17:20 ... if you have **faith** like a grain of **mustard** seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

Certainly it is better to have great faith in God rather than a little faith.
With great faith, we rest easier. We worry less.
We let God do the heavy lifting and we can be at peace.

But the most important question we should ask ourselves is: **do we have faith in God at all?**
Because the devil is going to hurl his arrows.
And those arrows take the form of all kinds of contradictions of God's word.

They contain the messages of the world.
You know, like: you would be so much happier and more fulfilled if you lived in a nicer house in that other place.
Or, your life would be so much more complete if your spouse were better behaved.
Or if you made more money.

Satan's darts also come in the form of lies regarding our self-image:
"Do you see all those other people who are happy and have their act together? They have it all.
You have got to do a better job at everything you are doing because frankly, you're a failure."

His lies come to us when we are faced with particular temptations:
"Why are you holding out from giving in to that particular sin?
You know your defenses are nothing compared to your desires. It's no use holding out. Just give in already.
Just vent your anger.
Just act in haste.
Just satisfy your lust."

Satan lies are burning arrows that come at us from all directions.
And by faith, we say "**not true.**"

Regarding temptations to seeking happiness in what we don't have, we know that the Lord has commanded us **not to covet.**
And further we know from God's word that only he can satisfy our hearts.
No amount of people's praise or material belongings will fill our souls.
Only a right relationship with God can do that.

Psalm 63:3 Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

Regarding the temptation to give into sin, We know by faith that the one who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world.

1 John 4:4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

*The faith that is useful in defending against the enemy is faith in God:
It is faith in all that God is, all he has done and all he has said.*

So, do you hold up the shield of faith as the arrows come whizzing in?
Or do you drop your faith and just let them hit their mark?

When the arrows bypass the shield and hit us, there will be many bad results.
But one result is sure to mark us and that is the feeling of defeat.

The fact is, if you are a child of God, you will never be ultimately defeated.
Jesus has made sure of that.
In John 10:27, Jesus said:
27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

As a child of God, you will never ultimately be defeated.
But Satan's arrows, if not met with faith, will hit their mark.
And they will cause us to **feel** defeated.
This is why we so often lack the joy of the Lord.

But when we take up the shield of faith, we call out Satan's lies for what they are.
We identify them, and their destructive fires are extinguished.

So, by faith in God's word, seek to identify what lies of the evil one are being shot at you...
And meet them with Faith in God and his word.
The next piece of armor we will consider is the helmet of salvation.

II. The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet refers to our hope.
Today when we talk about hope, we most often use it as a verb.
We "hope" that something will be the case.
Yet in scripture, hope most often is spoken of as a noun.
It's something objective.
And as Christians our hope is to be in God and the salvation he gives.

Peter puts the subject of hope front and center in the very beginning of his first epistle.
In 1 Peter 1:3, he writes:

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,

Our hope is to be in heaven, where we will receive an imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance.

So, let me ask you: where is your hope?
What are the things you hope for even now?
The answer to this is most readily found in our daydreams.

By nature I am a future oriented person and so I wrestle with this question of hope a lot.
I'm always fixed on some hope out there in the future.
And if my hope is not on heaven and seeking Christ's kingdom here and now, then who knows where my hope will be.
And so I need to continually ask myself, "Phil, where is your hope?"
And what about you, where is your hope?

Over the past several months, many Americans and many in the watching world have been day-dreaming that their candidate of choice would win the presidency. "If only our candidate wins... then all will be right in the universe."

Wouldn't it be great if as Christians, our hope was so fixed on God Himself and our inheritance in heaven, that our jubilation or sadness with political election results was tempered?
So many believers are so passionate about the direction their country is heading in, that they seem to have lost that dominating excitement for heaven which is where our true citizenship lies.

That's the country we should be most zealous for. Christ's kingdom is not of this world and I think we all need to be reminded of that.

As believers, our anticipation, jubilation or sadness over election results should not dominate us.
If an election win drives us to throw parties, then we probably have a misplaced hope.
And if an election loss causes us to curse and despair, then we have most certainly lost sight of what should be our hope.

If your candidate wins, then that's good news. Seek first the kingdom.
And if your candidate loses, well then that's a set-back. Seek first the kingdom.

In his book on The Armor of God, Ian Duguid gives us a great illustration.
Imagine you park your car in a place you shouldn't have. And when you come back to it you see that you have a \$50 fine.
That's bad news. A real downer.

But then, just a short while later, you are informed that a long lost aunt that you had never even met left you a share of an inheritance.

And your share is \$500,000 dollars.

Now, which one of those realities most shapes your outlook for the rest of your day?

Of course the inheritance does!

That inheritance is so much greater that the fine, that you hardly even take note of the fine anymore.

As a matter of fact, you can pay the fine with joy in your heart.

The fine is just a light, momentary affliction.
And for believers who hope in heaven, the same could thing be said about sickness, gnawing loneliness or government persecution.

In 2 Corinthians 4:17, Paul offers us an eternal perspective:

2 Corinthians 4:17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **18** as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Paul knew suffering. He was well acquainted with loneliness and persecution.

But when he compared his present sufferings with his future hope, He had this to say:

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Paul was protected from despair because he had set his hope fully upon the grace that was to be revealed to him.

Hope is vital to our outlook and usefulness as Christians.

No wonder Paul refers to the helmet as that of salvation.

Salvation is the whole goal of the Christian faith.

If our hope in salvation is not secure, then we will run around defeated spiritually and of little use for the kingdom.

Salvation is vital and our hope for it is vital to our usefulness as Christians.

Now, when Paul refers to the helmet as salvation, he is not the first one to do so.

In Isaiah 59:17, the Lord says regarding the messiah:

7 He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head;

Christ was the only man who ever lived who had a perfectly unwavering hope.

He never lost sight of his ultimate goal.

He set his face like flint to Jerusalem.

For the joy set before him he endured the cross.

His ministry was marked by homelessness, people misunderstanding him and in constant resistance.

It would have been so easy for him to quit.

And yet his hope was fixed on heaven with you and me.

Jesus was driven by the hope of heaven with the people he worked to save.

And in order to save us, he had to go to a place where there was no hope.

That is the cross, where he paid the penalty for our sins.

By swallowing up all the wrath of God that was due to us.

This he did in order to give us a hope.

Imagine Jesus speaking these words to you in whatever affliction you are going through:

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

That future and hope is for every believer who trusts in Christ for salvation.

Thomas Kelly expressed this hope well in his hymn written in 1854, "Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted"

Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost

Christ, the Rock of our salvation, His the name of which we boast

Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt!

None shall ever be confounded, Who on Him their hope have built

So where is your hope?

Is it in the career you wish to someday have?

The marriage or home you wish to have?

The earthly country you wish to live in?

Or is your hope in heaven?

The helmet of salvation refers to our hope.

And we are all to put it on.

The final piece of armor is the only offensive piece in the bunch.

And in a very real sense, it is the ultimate weapon.

It is...

III. The Sword of the Spirit

All of the other pieces of armor are defensive in nature.

The only offensive weapon we have is the sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

And this sword is to be wielded in two directions.

First, we are to use it surgically on ourselves.

In Hebrews 4:12, we read:

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

When we read the word of God, we learn a lot about ourselves because it pierces us first of all.

That is, if we are attentive to it, and really let the Spirit speak to us through it.

The word of God is so offensive to us if we just let it speak.

It identifies our idols, our vain hopes, our love of money and pleasure.

It shows us just how highly we think of ourselves and how mistaken those thoughts are.

If it wasn't for the word of God, we would all believe that we deserved good things in this life.

We would think that there is some amount of good things we could do to earn God's favor.

And most of us would think that we are doing a pretty good job.

But then in comes the sword of the Spirit.

He pierces us and tells us that we aren't the great people we dream we are.

And further, it tells us that our best course of action is to trust in Christ, who really was good enough.

Christ wielded the word of God with expert agility-which shows us the other way we are to use it.

We are to use it against the devils lies.

Jesus did this in exemplary fashion in Matthew 4, where he was met with the direct temptations of Satan.

Jesus was in the wilderness, he had fasted for 40 days and so he was hungry.

The devil tempted him to command the stones to become bread.

And to that Jesus quoted Scripture.

Deuteronomy 8:3 "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Then Satan commanded him to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple.

And again, Jesus quoted scripture.

Deuteronomy 6:16 "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Finally Satan commanded Jesus to worship Him.

And again, Jesus' reply was scripture:

Deuteronomy 6:13 "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

Tim Keller said concerning Jesus that if you cut him, he bled scripture.

This is how Jesus dealt with his temptations.

He didn't rely simply upon his own fortitude.

He wielded the sword of the Spirit.

And in Ephesians 6:17, Paul is teaching to do the same.

And this means that we have to be rooted in God's word.

We have to be continually taking it in, memorizing it even.

It is the offensive weapon that drives the devil away.

So, do you meet your temptations with verses from scripture?

Do you speak the scriptures to yourself?

Are they sweet to you?

Are they life to you?

The word of God is our most effective weapon against the schemes of the devil.

So take up the shield of faith, put on the helmet of salvation and wield the sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

This is how we are to stand against the devil's schemes. Amen.