

The Shield of Faith

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help, if we could turn to Paul's letter to the Ephesians and chapter 6.

Ephesians chapter 6, continuing our study of the whole armour of God. Ephesians chapter 6, and read there at verse 10, where Paul writes,

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

You know, one of the many dangers of the devil is to make us think that our study of the armour of God is nothing more than theoretical, or hypothetical, or even philosophical.

[2 : 11] But it's not. It's really not. And I say that because a couple of months ago, the news broke that one of my favourite preachers, I've mentioned him a number of times from the pulpit, that one of my favourite preachers, Steve Lawson, who is 73, he had been having what was termed an inappropriate relationship with a woman who was in her 20s for over five years.

And of course, the consequence of his sin was that Steve Lawson, he was removed from being the pastor of his congregation in Dallas. And a public statement was issued, which read, and I'll read it to you, or part of it.

The elders at Trinity Bible Church of Dallas regretfully announced that, effective immediately, Stephen J. Lawson has been removed indefinitely from all ministry activities.

After being informed by Steve Lawson of an inappropriate relationship that he has had with a woman, the elders have met with Steve and will continue to come alongside him and pray for him with the ultimate goal of his personal repentance.

In light of this, may we be reminded that we are all sinners, and Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and Christ remains the head of his church, which is bigger than any fallen man.

[3 : 39] Let us always be mindful of the words of 1 Corinthians 10, 12. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall.

Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall. But Steve Lawson, he was not only removed from being a pastor, he was also made to resign from what was called, or maybe you know about it, One Passion Ministries.

It's a ministry that I've followed for a number of years as a minister. It's a ministry that Steve Lawson founded in order to support pastors and preachers in the work of the gospel.

And they also issued a statement, a statement which read, In response, Steve has resigned from all his duties at One Passion Ministries.

All scheduled events and engagements have been cancelled. Steve has confessed and regrets the damage he has caused to his family, the church, the reputation of One Passion Ministries, and most of all, Jesus Christ.

[4 : 52] We are all saddened for the glory of Christ in this matter. The truth of the gospel will continue to go out to the lost world, as it is empowered by the Holy Spirit and not by men.

Then the statement reads, Be sober-minded, be watchful.

Just quoting scripture. Be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

But as you know, sadly and solemnly, Steve Lawson, he is not an isolated incident. Because over the past number of years, as we all know, even in our own island, there have been a number of popular and prominent preachers who have sadly succumbed to the temptations of Satan and fallen into sin.

And each and every circumstance and situation, it's distressing, it's damaging, it's detrimental to the cause of Christ. But it ought to reaffirm to us what my good friend J.C. Ryle once said, The best of men are only men at best.

[6 : 12] The best of men are only men at best. More so, it ought to remind us how dangerous and how deceptive the devil really is.

This is not theoretical. This is not hypothetical. This is not philosophical. What we are studying this evening. This is so important to our Christian walk and our Christian witness.

And of course, the attacks and the advances of the devil, they're not just confined to the servants of the Lord. Because the saints of the Lord, they're also susceptible to the dangers and the deceptions of the devil.

That's why we have Psalm 51. My favourite psalm. It's such a precious and powerful psalm of repentance. And as you know, Psalm 51, it was written after the event that we read earlier in 2 Samuel 11, where David had an inappropriate relationship with another woman.

David is for us a witness and a warning in Scripture. Because when things are going well, when things are going well in Israel, the kingdom, as we said, it was growing.

[7 : 20] The Ark of the Covenant had returned to Jerusalem. There was plans to build this temple for the Lord. The nation was at peace. David was meant to be wearing his armour in the battlefield.

But instead, he was watching Bathsheba in the bathtub. David had lost focus. He let his guard down. And the dangers and deceptions of the devil got in.

And before he knew it, as we read there in 2 Samuel 11, a look progressed to lust, which progressed to laying with Bathsheba, which progressed to lying about their affair, which ultimately ended in the loss of Bathsheba's rightful husband, Uriah the Hittite.

And it was all because David lost focus. And David let his guard down. David lost focus. And David let his guard down. And you know, my friend, David is a witness.

He's a warning to us. Because like Steve Lawson, it wasn't a young, naive, immature David that succumbed to the temptation of Satan and fell into sin.

[8 : 31] It was an older, wiser, maturer, with lots of life experience. That's the kind of David that fell into sin and succumbed to the temptation of Satan.

Which is all the more reason as to why we need to study the whole armour of God. Which is why we need to be on our guard against the wiles of the devil. Which is also why, as Paul tells us here in verse 16, we need to take up the shield of faith.

We need to take up the shield of faith, which is the fourth piece of armour from God's armoury. The shield of faith. And I want us to consider this under two headings this evening.

Two headings. Faith armour and flaming arrows. Faith armour and flaming arrows. Paul writes there in verse 16, In all circumstances, in all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

As you know, we've said many times before, Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it's full of encouragement to the Christian, but it's also, as we come to the end of his letter, it's full of exhortations to the Christian.

[9 : 50] And as Paul comes to the conclusion of his letter, he gives this one final exhortation. There in verse 10, So Paul says to us, he's saying to us as he comes to the conclusion of his letter, Christian soldier, have you put your armour on today?

Have you put your armour on today? Because the Christian life, as we said before, it's not a playground. It's a battleground. And it's not a physical warfare.

It's a spiritual warfare. We have an enemy, and as Paul tells us, he's the enemy of our soul. He's our adversary. He is the devil. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

It's therefore. Therefore. And never miss Paul's therefore. They're so important. Therefore, take up the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against, withstand in the evil day, having done all to stand firm.

So we must stand firm. But we can only stand firm if we have begun our day by going into God's armoury and prayerfully picking up and putting on the whole armour of God.

[11 : 32] And as we mentioned before, each piece of armour for the Christian soldier, it emulates the character of Jesus. He's our commander-in-chief. So each piece of armour emulates the

character of Jesus.

And each piece of armour emphasises that we are to emanate the character of Jesus. When we put this armour on, we are to be more and more like Jesus ourselves. As Christian soldiers, our Christian character conduct and conversation is to follow in the footsteps of our commander-in-chief, Jesus Christ.

And the first piece of armour, as Paul mentions, that we are to prayerfully pick up and put on, that's the belt of truth. It's the key component in the armour of God.

Like the Roman foot soldier who wore his military belt at all times, on and off duty, we are to wear the belt of truth at all times, on and off duty. Because as Christians, we're to be soldiers with integrity, honesty and reliability.

We're to delight in the truth and rejoice in the truth and love the truth and speak the truth because Jesus is the truth. And without the belt of truth, we are not dressed, we're not ready for battle.

[12:44] We're not ready for the day ahead if we're not wearing the belt of truth. But we also need to prayerfully pick up and put on, as Paul tells us, the breastplate of righteousness.

Because through Calvary's great transaction, Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us. We've received it by faith alone. But we've not only received the robe of righteousness, where we are presented faultless before God's glory, we've also received the breastplate of righteousness to protect our heart against the wickedness of sin and the wiles of the devil.

And the last time, I don't know, probably a month ago now, we prayerfully picked up and put on the gospel shoes of peace. The Lord cares about our feet.

He cares about our footwear. We have beautiful feet and we have brilliant footwear. Because our footwear is footwear of peace. They're gospel shoes of peace.

Paul says, they're shalom shoes. And as Christian soldiers, we're to be ambassadors for Christ. We're to go to lost sinners with a gospel message of peace and reconciliation.

[13:55] And our Bible tells us we are always to be ready. That's the motto of the Christian soldier. Always ready. Always ready to give an answer for the reason of the hope that is within us.

So we've got our belt on. We've got our breastplate on. We've got our shoes on. And now the fourth piece of armour that we're to prayerfully pick up and put on is faith armour. It's the shield of faith. The shield of faith. And of course, unlike the belt and the breastplate and the shoes, which were actually worn by the soldier, the shield wasn't worn as such.

And as you can see from Roddy the Roman here, the shield is carried. But there's a sense in which it still had to be picked up and put on because, as we said before, the military belt that a soldier wore, it's a key component in the armour because the belt actually supported the shield and as you can see it sheathed the sword.

The belt supported the shield and sheathed the sword. And so in that sense, we still have to prayerfully pick up and put on the shield of faith because it's faith armour.

[15:09] And we need this faith armour because as Christian soldiers, we're in a fight. Paul tells Timothy, we are to fight the good fight of faith.

Fight the good fight of faith. So it's a fight of faith. But as you know, as we've said before, we're not fighting the good fight of faith for victory, we're fighting from victory. The victory has already been won.

It's been won at the cross. Jesus has put all his enemies under his feet. Therefore, we are to fight the good fight of faith from victory, from the victory of Jesus.

But we still need faith armour because the shield of faith, it's important. It's integral to the Christian soldier. In fact, the shield of faith you could say is the first barrier that the enemy attacks.

That's the first barrier that the enemy comes up against is the shield. Which is why Paul says it's to be taken up, verse 16, in all circumstances.

[16:12] Don't leave your shield behind. Don't leave it on the ground. No, you're to take it up in all circumstances. Because faith armour is crucial and critical for the protection of the Christian soldier.

But you know, before we consider the dimensions of the shield, I just want us to think about, briefly, the design of the shield. The design of the soldier's shield.

Because the design always corresponded to the commander-in-chief that they served. There was always a design on the front of the shield. And it always related to the army that you belonged to.

In other words, a soldier's shield, it had these identifying marks which distinguished whose army they were in and who they served. And this is why Paul describes this faith armour as the shield of

faith.

Because we're in the faith army. We're in an army of faith. Faith is the identifying mark of a Christian soldier in the Lord's army.

[17:27] Faith is the identifying mark of a Christian soldier in the Lord's army. As you know, our Bible teaches us that without faith it's impossible to please God. So without faith it's impossible to be in the Lord's army.

And without faith it's impossible to please Him. Therefore, we need to be people of faith. We need to receive faith and rest upon the Lord in faith. We need to stand firm in faith.

And as Paul teaches us, we need to walk by faith and fight the good fight of faith. As Christian soldiers, we're to be people of faith. Because faith is a gift.

One of the greatest gifts of salvation. Because it's through faith that we receive all the other gifts of salvation. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 just a few chapters earlier it's by grace that you're saved through faith.

Not of yourselves. It's the gift of God. Not of works lest anyone should boast. And so our shield of faith it's faith armor. And we need this faith armor to defend against the fiery arrows of the evil one.

[18:40] These flaming arrows from Satan. So we see first of all faith armor then secondly flaming arrows. Flaming arrows.

Paul tells us there in verse 16 in all circumstances every day all times take up the shield of faith.

Don't leave it on the ground. Take it up with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

So we mentioned the design. The design of the shield corresponds with whose army you're in. The design always reflects whose you are and who you belong to.

Whose army you're in. But also the dimensions of the shield are really fascinating. Because as you can see from a Roman soldier on the screen his shield is covering half his body and it's also curving around his upper body.

And that's because the Roman shield was called a scutum. a scutum it was about a metre long and it was just under half a metre wide. It wasn't made of metal because that would have been too heavy to carry.

[19:51] It was actually very cleverly made of three layers of light wood and then it was overlaid overlaid with a hard leather.

So there was three layers of wood and then a hard leather that was on it. At most you could say the shield probably weighed about ten kilos. The only metal that was on the shield is the dome front.

You can see there. The wee dome, that's where the handle was. Where that dome is. And so on the other side of the shield, that's where the soldier is holding it.

But the dome is also this hard, blunt object. So when you're running towards the enemy, it's the first thing the enemy feels. It's this dome front as you're running towards the enemy.

But you know what I love about the Romans and the Roman shield is the way in which they strategically used them. Because as you know, the Romans, they didn't ever fight as individuals.

[20:52] Now I hope this works. They didn't ever fight as individuals. They always fought as an army. They weren't small in number.

As you know, the Romans, they were set out in different legions. There were thousands of them. Thousands of soldiers that often stood together and fought together, which is often something to remember.

It's important to remember because one of the greatest ploys of the devil to destroy, well, you know that he wants to destroy the Christian church, but the way he does it is by isolating Christians.

Christians. The devil destroys the church by isolating Christians. And the devil does that not only by causing chaos in our lives, but also by even creating a culture around us, a culture of individualism, where we don't see the importance of spending time visiting other Christians or visiting one another, or even having fellowship with one another.

We don't see that importance. We need to be on our own. We need to do our own thing. We need to be independent. We need to be individualistic. But for the devil, he's making us isolated.

[22:08] He's making us isolated from the whole. And that's where the devil, the diabolos, the divider, wants us. He wants us isolated from one another. And when we're isolated from one another, that's when the devil can break us down and make us really weak.

But you know, that wasn't ever the mindset of a soldier. And it shouldn't be the mindset of a Christian soldier in the Lord's army. Because soldiers aren't to look after number one. Soldiers are to look out for one another. Soldiers are to look after one another. Soldiers are to have each other's back and ultimately protect one another.

That's what you can see in the picture there. Soldiers are to love one another. Which is what Jesus teaches us in the Gospels. That as Christian soldiers in the Lord's army, we're to love one another. We're to stand together and fight the good fight of faith together with our shield of faith. But as I said, I love the strategic way in which the Romans used their shield.

[23 : 16] Because they didn't fight as individuals, they fought as an army, they fought as a body. In fact, the Romans, they had this strategic fighting formation. It was called a testudo or a tortoise.

I hope this works. A tortoise. And where it would be just like this protective shell of a tortoise. The Roman soldiers, they would link all their shields together at the front and on the top and even sometimes on the side and they would create this protective covering just like a tortoise.

And also, like a tortoise, they would move forward slowly, advancing towards the enemy. But the testudo only worked if all the soldiers kept focused and all the soldiers kept formation.

It only ever worked if everyone in the army was focused and kept formation. And this formation was particularly protective against all these flying and flaming arrows of the enemy.

They would move towards the enemy even though there were arrows flying towards them. The Roman army, they would actually wet their shields before making the formation.

[24 : 33] So they would soak the shield and then they would make the formation, the testudo formation, and then they would move forward towards the city walls of their enemy. And as the enemy was firing arrows on them, all these arrows would be immediately extinguished.

So the testudo formation, as one historian said, the testudo formation was the surest protection against the flaming arrows of the enemy. And that's the message Paul wants to get across to us as Christian soldiers in the Lord's army.

That it's far better for us to stand together. It's far better for us to be an army facing the flying and flaming arrows of the evil one.

arrows that you could say have been set on fire by hell. It's far better for us to stand together and stand side by side, far better for us to be an army of the Lord's people than to stand alone and to stand isolated.

As the old saying goes, and we don't really know who came up with the saying, but it's a good saying, united we stand, divided we fall. United we stand, divided we fall.

[25 : 51] And the thing is the devil, the evil one, he wants to live up to his name. He's the diabolos, he's the divider. Divided we fall, and that's what he wants to do.

He wants to divide, he wants to separate, he wants to isolate. But with our faith armor against the flaming arrows of the evil one, we need to keep focused.

We need to keep formation. We need to stand firm with our shield of faith. Keep focused, keep formation, stand firm with your shield of faith.

So stand firm, Christian soldier. Stand firm. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Our Father in Heaven, O Lord, that thou wouldst keep us.

We realize how easy it is for the devil to get in, and how we let our guard down so often. But Lord, we pray that thou wouldst enable us, as thy people and part of the Lord's army, help us in all circumstances, in every moment, to keep picking up our shield, because we never know when a flaming dart is heading towards us.

[27 : 14] Help us, Lord, to stand firm, not only on our own, but to stand firm together, to keep formation, to keep walking, ever looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

And Lord, we give thanks for thy goodness to us, for protecting us. But Lord, when we do fall, when we do faint, when we do fail, as we all do, help us, Lord, to see that there are a God who is gracious, and who is merciful, and long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, a God who is able to forgive, and to cleanse, and to create within us that clean heart, and renew that right spirit within us.

So Lord, encourage us, we pray, remember us, we ask, help us to keep fighting the good fight of faith, help us to keep walking, in the paths of righteousness, ever looking towards our commander-in-chief, knowing that he is the fairest among ten thousand, and one who is altogether lovely.

Cleanse us, then we pray, go before us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake.

Amen. Amen. We're going to bring our time of worship to a conclusion this evening.

We're going to sing the words of Psalm 115. Psalm 115, it's in the Sing Psalms version, on page 153. Psalm 115, we're singing from verse 9 down to the verse marked 13.

[28 : 53] Psalm 115, it's one of the great Egyptian Hallel hymns, where there's the confession of the Christian, that our life song is not unto us, not to us, but to your name be the praise.

We're to give all the glory to the Lord, because we don't worship dumb and dead idols. And so verse 9, there's this plea, O house of Israel, place your trust upon the Lord alone.

He is the mighty help and shield of all who are his own. O house of Aaron, trust the Lord, he is their help and shield. All you who fear him, trust the Lord, he is your help and shield.

So down to verse 13 of Psalm 115, from 9 to 13, to God's praise. O house of Israel, bless your trust upon the Lord alone.

He is the mighty help and shield of all who are his own.

[30 : 23] O house of Israel, trust the Lord, he is their help and shield shield.

All you who fear him, trust the Lord, he is your help and shield.

The Lord remembers Israel, and he will bless us all, the house of Aeon and all those who fear him, great and small.

all. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.