

WAR – SHEILD OF FAITH

London, England is farther north than Saint John's, Newfoundland, yet London has a very mild climate and Newfoundland a very harsh climate. The difference is caused by the Gulf Stream, that ever-flowing current of warm water from the Gulf of Mexico. Likewise in life we see two people going through exactly the same difficulties. One seems to be destroyed by them; the other faces them heroically. The difference may be due to a spiritual current of faith that warms the soul of one but is not present in the other.

Eph 6:16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

In the days of Paul, the flaming arrow was a formidable weapon. This arrow had a heavy iron tip which was dipped into pitch and set on fire. It was a deadly flaming missile. These arrows would cause panic within the opposing ranks, especially when they embedded themselves into things which would burn like a shield. A frightened soldier would throw down his burning shield leaving himself unprotected from arrows and spears. You can imagine the result.

Such a deadly weapon needed a formidable defense; and thus the Roman shield was invented. It was very large - 4.5 ft. high. It was made of 3 thin layers of wood, with linen sandwiched between each layer. It also had an outer layer of leather or animal hide. To hold it all together a bronze strip was wrapped around the whole edge. They were soaked in water before battle so they would not burn. These shields could be linked together with other shields to form a wall. So how is faith like a shield? What are the flaming arrows we face today?

John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

The war we wage against the devil is not a matter of our own strength but of truth. In order to fight the devil we need to hold to the truth through faith. So what is faith? Faith means complete trust or confidence in something or someone.

John Paton was translating the Bible for a South Seas island tribe, he discovered that they had no word for trust or faith. One day a native who had been running hard came into the missionary's house, flopped himself in a large chair and said, "It's good to rest my whole weight on this chair." "That's it," said Paton. "I'll translate faith as 'resting one's whole weight on God.'"

The new Disney film Moana is about the Polynesian culture. For centuries New Zealand was unpopulated. The first settlers were Polynesians from other Pacific islands who had sailed a thousand miles in outrigger canoes. How did they know the land was there? How did they know they would not simply sail across empty seas until food and water ran out and they perished? The Polynesians had known for generations that land was there because their voyagers had seen a long white cloud on the distant horizon. They knew that when a cloud stayed in one place over a very long period of time, there was land beneath it. They called New Zealand the Land of the Long White Cloud.

Faith is like that. It is voyaging to an unseen land, journeying to an unknown future. But it is not mere guesswork, or chance, or superstition. There are facts behind faith, facts that suggest conclusions.

The devil always fights the church when the church is on the move. Charles Spurgeon used to say that the devil never kicks a dead horse. It is only when the devil knows that a church is on the move that he attacks it. Think about it. In Acts 2 we read that the Holy Spirit came and that 3000 people came to Christ. Then what happened? According to Acts 4, the devil came like a lion and had the apostles harassed and threatened. That did not work so in chapter 5, the devil came like a serpent, influencing Ananias and Sapphira to infect the church with their lying and hypocrisy. If he could not stop the church by persecution from the outside, he will try pollution from the inside. Then in Acts 6 the devil came as the accuser. One group of widows accused the other group of widows of getting preferential treatment, over the issue of race. Then in Acts 7 the devil came as a murderer. Stephen is killed and the church is forced to scatter.

The devil will use whatever he can to attack us. Generally, there are 3 basic ways in which the devil will try to hold you captive. His 3 most common flaming arrows are:

1. Temptation –

The first way that the devil tries to bind us is by turning our eyes away from God and onto other things through temptation. He will do everything he can to get you sidetracked and to make you take a detour off the path God is calling you to follow.

Matt. 3:3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

The devil tempted Jesus with possessions, power and position. Aren't these also the things which he also uses to try to tempt us today? Follow me and you will be wealthy. You will never have to worry or be in want. Follow me and I will give you power. You can do whatever you want. Follow me and I will make you successful. Everyone will like you and want to be with you.

The Skylark's Bargain - a young skylark discovered one day a man who would give him 2 worms for a feather. The next day the lark was flying high in the sky with his father. The older bird said, "You know, son, we skylarks should be the happiest of all birds. See our brave wings! They lift us high in the air, nearer and nearer to God." But the young bird did not hear, for all he saw was an old man with worms. Down he flew, plucked two feathers from his wings and had a feast. Day after day this went on. Autumn came and it was time to fly south. But the young skylark couldn't do it. He had exchanged the power of his young wings for worms. That is our constant temptation in life -- to exchange wings for worms.

Notice that Jesus responded to the devil by using the Bible. Temptation is based upon the lie that good can come out of evil. We combat temptation by standing on the truth through faith.

Let me speak some truth into you. All the devil can offer you is hell. It is not he who gives you what you need from day to day but God. Material success will not bring you joy – only sorrow. It is God who fills you with power. What more can you gain when you have the creator of all things living in your heart. It is God who will make you successful – not in the eyes of the world but in His kingdom.

A number of years ago, the Douglas Aircraft company was competing with Boeing to sell Eastern Airlines its first big jets. War hero Eddie Rickenbacker, the head of Eastern Airlines, reportedly told Donald Douglas that the specifications and claims made by Douglas's company for the DC-8 were close to Boeing's on everything except noise suppression. Rickenbacker then gave Douglas one last chance to out-promise Boeing on this feature. After consulting with his engineers, Douglas reported that he didn't feel he could make that promise. Rickenbacker replied, "I know you can't, I just wanted to see if you were still honest."

Maybe you can relate to that. You know the feeling. Maybe you are tempted to cheat on your tax return. Maybe you are tempted to watch a certain TV show or visit a certain website. The truth is that temptation is a part of our everyday Christian life. Christ was not exempt; neither are you. You will be tempted. Holiness of character depends upon your resisting these temptations.

2. Accusation –

A second way that the devil seeks to bind us is through accusation. He will use any lie he can to accuse you and make you feel worthless and like a failure. If he can keep our focus on our weaknesses we will never discover and use your God given strengths.

Rev. 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

The devil will accuse you of many things. He will remind you of every mistake and sin you have ever committed. He will tell you that you are worthless and of no value. He will tell you that others are more godly and talented than you. The way we handle accusation in our lives is by understanding who you are and what you have in Christ based on the truth of God's Word.

Let me speak some truth into you. When the devil stand against you as a prosecution attorney remember that your Father is the judge, that Jesus is your defense and the Holy Spirit is your witness. You are more than a conqueror in Christ. E.g. Read "Who I Am In Christ".

Martin Luther was a lowly monk who helped changed the face of Europe in the course of his lifetime. During his life he faced many critics and was often the object of accusation. He often wrote about how the devil would try accuse and attack him. He said that this is how a Christian needs to respond when the time of battle comes and the devil attacks and accuses him. The devil will remind you that you are a sinner and that you deserve death. When he does so say to the devil "Yes, I am a sinner and yes I deserve death. But I have placed my trust in Jesus Christ who died on the cross for my sins. He has bore my sins, and so now I am His. If you have any charge against me, take it up with Him since He is my master. I am no longer merely a child of man, I am a child of God."

If the devil accuses you, remind him that he has been conquered and condemned. The next time the devil reminds you of your past – remind him of his future.

A man worked in an office with several attractive ladies. His wife was constantly jealous and always had a list of questions ready every day when he got home. Then she would examine his coat. If she found a blond hair she would accuse him, "You're having an affair with a blond woman." If she found a red hair, black hair, brown hair the accusations would come. Finally, the man bought a lint brush and kept it in the car. After looking his coat over and finding nothing, he expected a smile. Instead, she began to bawl. "What's wrong honey?" he asked. "I can't believe it," she screamed. "Now you're having an affair with a bald woman!"

3. Deception –

The third way that the devil tries to bind us is through deception. If he can isolate you from the truth and make you believe a lie then you will live for him and not God. Often we know when we are facing temptation and accusation but you do not know it when you are being deceived.

2 Cor. 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

The devil is a master in deception. He is a liar. The way we handle deception in our lives is with the truth. We shine light into falsehood and replace error with truth. The more we know the truth the more we will be able to see falsehood as it really is. This is why community is so important.

E.g. Talking to our youth about lust – like I knew their thought! They went away as if they had been set free. Parents, talk to your children! Kids will learn about it from the devil or from you.

Let me speak some truth into you. God knows you and loves you. You are not alone. Don't suffer in silence. Get into God's Word. Surround yourself with mature Christians who can encourage and support you. Like the Roman shields faith is designed to be linked together. Be open and honest about your struggles and talk to someone if you face areas in your life that seem out of control.

Mac Hammond in his book "Doorways to Deception" says, "Satan cannot afflict you with the destructive effects of the curse unless you allow it by choosing, with your own free will, something that opens you up to those effects. Think about it for a moment. Satan is not called the father of destruction; he's called the father of lies. If Satan had the power to destroy you, he would have already done so. But he can't... To deceive someone is to convince him that something is true or valid when it is actually untrue or invalid. You see, no one intentionally chooses destruction or the curse. No, the only way Satan can defeat people is by getting them to believe something that is untrue and invalid. In other words, Satan can't bring evil into your life unless you, in effect, choose it. And you won't choose it unless he can deceive you into believing a lie."

Remember, if you ever feel like you are being tempted, or you are being accused, or you feel you are being led to do something that you know that God has declared to be wrong, that it is a lie. Perhaps the greatest deception of all is self deception. That is when we try to convince ourselves that, while something may be wrong for everybody else, that in our instance it is OK. If you have to justify your actions and convince yourself that what you are doing is OK, it probably is not.

In A View from the Zoo, Gary Richmond, a former zoo keeper, has this to say: Raccoons go through a glandular change at about 24 months old. After that they often attack their owners. Since a 30-pound raccoon can be equal to a 100-pound dog in a scrap, I felt compelled to mention the change coming to a pet raccoon owned by a young friend of mine named Julie. She listened politely as I explained the coming danger. I'll never forget her answer. "It will be different for me...." And she smiled as she added, "Bandit wouldn't hurt me. He just wouldn't." Three months later Julie underwent plastic surgery for facial lacerations sustained when her adult raccoon attacked her for no apparent reason. Bandit was released into the wild. Sin, too, often comes dressed in an adorable guise, and as we play with it, how easy it is to say, "It will be different for me." The results are predictable.

Remember, God's plan A for us is that we do not sin. Avoid the traps of the devil. Stay far away. Run at the first sign of trouble.

Three men applied for a job driving a truck over a mountain route. The first guy said, "I'm such a good driver, I can come within one foot of the edge without losing control." The second guy said, "Oh yah, well I can come within six inches of the edge and not lose control." The man doing the hiring looked at the third man, and asked him how good of a driver he was. He replied, "Well, I'm a good enough driver to know not to try to drive close to the edge at all. I stay as far away from the danger as possible." Guess who got the job?

WHO I AM IN CHRIST

I AM ACCEPTED...

I am God's child.
As a disciple, I am a friend of Jesus Christ.
I have been justified.
I am united with the Lord, and I am one with Him in spirit.
I have been bought with a price and I belong to God.
I am a member of Christ's body.
I have been chosen by God and adopted as His child.
I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.
I am complete in Christ.
I have direct access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ.

I AM SECURE...

I am free from condemnation.
I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances.
I am free from condemnation against me and I cannot be separated from the love of God.
I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
I am hidden with Christ in God.
I am confident that God will complete the good work He started in me.
I am a citizen of heaven.
I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.
I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

I AM SIGNIFICANT...

I am a branch of Jesus Christ, the true vine, and a channel of His life.
I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.
I am God's temple.
I am a minister of reconciliation for God.
I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm.
I am God's workmanship.
I may approach God with freedom and confidence.
I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.