

Ephesians 6:16

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[0 : 00] And open your Bibles to Ephesians 6. Ephesians 6 verse 14. And again let me just say that what we're trying to do is to look at this armor of God to in some ways to read scripture through this lens.

I don't think what I'm doing is really exposition. And so if you're a young preacher or an aspiring preacher probably best not to try this really.

But what I want to do is really I read William Gwynel a few months ago and I've been so taken with how he helped me I wanted to try and share that with you over these coming weeks. And so the fourth piece of armor verse 16 of chapter 4. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

And what I'm going to try and do tonight I'm just going to divide that into I'm going to look first of all at these flaming darts of the evil one and then look at the shield of faith. And I'm not really sure when one will transition to the other but it will.

The opening phrase can you see it in verse 16 reminds us that we need the full armor of God if we're going to stand as Christians. We need to take all of it to be able to stand the evil day. We need the belt of truth.

[1 : 31] We need the breastplate of righteousness. We need the boots. But they are not enough those things. Just what we're wearing. In addition to that we need to take other things.

And this first other thing, this first accessory is the shield of faith. Because the devil he keeps coming back at people who love the Lord Jesus. And he comes in lots of different ways and he comes from different directions.

And so we need the whole armor of God. If we're going to stand against him. The name that we usually give to the devil is the word Satan. And the word Satan means adversary.

The devil is our enemy. He is our adversary. And the word Satan is a really interesting word. It comes from apparently from a root in the Aramaic language. And it means literally one who lies in ambush.

One who lies in ambush. That's the picture that Paul is trying to convey in verse 16. If you ever watch those old westerns. They're not on so much anymore.

[2 : 35] But the old westerns. And the Indians come down from the hills. And the wagons would form themselves into a circle. And the Indians would come suddenly out of the hills.

And they'd fire their arrows into that kind of circle of wagons. It's a picture of a kind of ambush. And the devil lies in wait for us. And the devil loves to ambush the Lord's people with fiery darts.

And the thing about an ambush is there's an element of real surprise in it, isn't it? These fiery darts, they seem to come from nowhere. They just appear.

Suddenly and unexpectedly. And they seem to come from a hidden source. And that is one of the ways, I think, that you and I can tell the difference between sin and Satan.

Between what is your own corrupt nature. And what is actually coming at you from hell. There's that element of surprise.

[3 : 33] The element of the unexpected. The suddenness and the ferocity of the attack. And not only that it comes from the outside.

And that it doesn't originate from within. But arrows are shot at you from a source of the hidden. When you find your heart and your mind being besieged by thoughts and feelings.

That suddenly come on you like a raging fire. Out of control. And you don't know where they came from. Well, you're probably being ambushed. Let me try and illustrate it in a couple of ways.

C.H. Spurgeon, the great Victorian preacher. He tells about how as a young man in his late teens. He put his hand to his mouth. To prevent him physically from uttering hideous language.

Swear words and oaths. And he says, I never heard those swear words or those oaths in my life. And yet, they came to him. And he had to cover his mouth.

[4 : 35] Let me read to you from Pilgrim's Progress. John Bunyan. Pilgrim's Progress, most of it is autobiographical. And John Bunyan is talking in this book about his progress as a pilgrim through life.

And there's a very interesting section in it. Listen to what he says. He says, One thing I could not let slip. I took notice that poor Christian, that's the main character.

Poor Christian was so confounded that he did not know his own voice. And thus I perceived it. Just when he was come over against the mouth of the burning pit, one of the wicked ones got behind him and stepped up softly to him and whisperingly suggested many grievous blasphemies to him, which he truly thought had proceeded from his own mind.

This put Christian more to it than anything that he met with before, even to think that he should now blaspheme him that he loved so much before.

Yet if he could have helped it, he would not have done it. But he had not the discretion either to stop his ears or to know from whence those blasphemies came.

[5 : 50] That is an ambush. Do you see how coming the devil is there? Can you see what he's up to? He wants Christian in that book to believe that these horrible, unholy, ungodly thoughts and feelings, they're his.

He wants to throw the Christian into confusion. He wants to fill the Christian with panic. And so the Christian thinks, How can I possibly think such thoughts? How can I possibly be a Christian and think like that?

You ever said that to yourself? How can I possibly be a Christian and have those feelings stirring within me? How can that be the case? How can I be a Christian and contemplate things like that? How can I possibly be a Christian and have such strong urges taking hold of me? And half the battle, I think, is to recognise what's going on. Half of the battle is to recognise what is coming from your own kind of deceit and sinful heart, but what is actually being hurled at you from hell.

And if you and I are going to be able to stand against the devil, then you need to be able to discriminate at this point. It's a really practical question, isn't it? When we feel under attack, to ask the question, does this originate with me?

[7 : 17] Or is this something that's been shot at me from outside? So let me remind you that it's not only blasphemy, it says. And filth that the devil throws at us.

He does throw those things, of course. But some of the godliest people, some of the holiest people of God, the most consistent Christians, have found their minds filled with the most filthy and blasphemous thoughts.

But it's not only that. Because sometimes the devil can seem quite innocuous. And some of the thoughts that the devil throws at us are quite legitimate. And so I'm sure you've had the experience of sitting here on a Sunday morning, and you're trying to concentrate on the preaching.

And suddenly, some thought comes into your mind. It's a thought like this. Did you lock the back door? Did you lock the back door?

Or perhaps it's this. I can't remember if I turned the oven on. Or did I turn the oven on too high? I never have that second thought. But you know what it's like to be sitting under the preaching of God's word and something innocuous.

[8 : 37] Something that's not wrong. Something that's not sinful. Something that is legitimate. Consideration comes into your mind. And so you know, don't you, what it's like when you're trying to read the Bible.

You know, if you're a Christian, a real Christian, how difficult it is to concentrate. When you try to pray, how impossible it is to do. I never want to tidy my study.

I never want to tidy my study. My study is in an infectious disease zone, really. But the only time that I think of tidying, my study is, is when I set aside time to pray. You turn on the TV, and you can concentrate on it, no problems.

You go on the BBC News site, and that's no problem at all. You can read those articles there, but as soon as you turn to the word of God, as soon as you want to pray, and those are things, aren't there, that we want to do as Christians.

There's no joke about that. But the devil comes and he says, well, what about this? What about that? Oh, there's all those pencils to sharpen this study. And you and I need to recognise what's

happening, don't you?

[9 : 47] You and I need to recognise that the devil is at work there. Don't forget this, the Puritans used to call the devil God's ape. And that means that, they were saying, the devil tries to imitate God.

He's a very poor imitation of God. But it's an act of foolish, very often. The Bible says that he appears as an angel of light. And there are times in the Christian's experience, when it is the devil speaking to us, or our own hearts.

And I think there are times when it's difficult to tell whether it's the devil or God. Because the devil sounds very much like God sometimes. He appears as an angel of light. I think you get a really good example of that in the book of Job.

So we read the book of Job, and we've read chapters 1 and 2, don't we? We've read the end from the beginning. So we know how the story's going to turn out. But Job doesn't know how the story's going to turn out.

And Job had the most terrifying experience. Of course, if you turn to the middle of the sheet, I've just written out the passages we're going to look at, so you don't spend your time just wandering, trying to look for books in the Bible.

[10 : 56] But if you look at just a few verses from Job 9, verse 13. And I want you to just take in some of the confusion in Job's mind. And he's thinking, he's going through this awful, terrible experience, and his mind is terribly confused.

He's convinced that God is against him. He's convinced that God is judging him. That God is accusing him. And he says some terrible things against God. The God whom he has loved, and the God whom he has served.

And yet it seems to Job that that God has turned against him. This is what he says in verse 13. He says, God will not turn back his anger.

Beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab. How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him. I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.

If I summoned him, and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice, for he crushes me with a tempest. And he multiplies my wounds without cause.

[12 : 09] He's saying there, God is doing this to me. This God whom I've loved, and I've served all my days, God is behind the storm. Verse 17. For he crushes me with a tempest.

And multiplies my wounds without cause. He will not let me get my breath, but he fills me with bitterness. If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty.

If it's a matter of justice, well, who can summon him? Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me. Though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.

I am blameless. I regard not myself. I loathe my life. It is all one. Therefore, I say, he destroys both the blameless and the wicked.

When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked. He covers the faces of its judge.

[13 : 07] There are terrible things to say against God. There are terrible things to say about God. But look at verse 24. There's a glimmer of light. He says, if it is not he, who then is it?

Verse 24, what he's saying there, God is behind all this injustice. But, if it's not him, then who is it? There's a little glimmer of light there. If it's not God, well then, who is behind this?

Maybe there's someone else behind it. But of course, we know there is, don't we? We've read chapters 11 and chapter 2. We know that. He says, earlier on in the book, he speaks about the arrows of the Almighty, that they are sticking into him.

And we know that those arrows may well have been the fiery darts of the wicked. If not him, who then is it? Maybe it's someone else. Maybe there is someone behind all this.

And the point I'm trying to make, in a really long-winded way, I know, is that, is that Job thought it was God. He thought it was God, but it was the devil.

[14 : 20] He thought it was God, and the devil often comes to God's people like that. He blitzes our minds with fiery darts. He rains them down on us, and all the time we think it's God speaking to us, God convincing us, God accusing us, God nagging at us, but God doesn't nag.

And God doesn't accuse, does he? We are justified, declared right, made righteous. God doesn't accuse us. Let me give you another illustration.

I was reading, I'm a man this week, we've been in a church, not very far from here, and his life really had been shattered by this sort of thing. He'd read in some Bible notes, that he'd been given, that all inward prompting, and demands, are to be obeyed without question, and immediately.

There's a lot of that about you. All inward promptings, and demands, they are to be obeyed without question, and immediately. That's what it said in this Bible reading notes. Obey instantly. No matter how strange, no matter how unusual, you have in your mind to go and talk to a man, with purple shoes in a pub, you follow that prompting, and you talk to the man, with purple shoes in the pub. No matter how crazy, that command may seem to be, you obey it instantly. I said, I wanted to be right with God, I'd given my life to him, I wanted to be obedient. He says, these impressions, these demands, came upon my soul, and they nearly drove me out of my mind.

[15 : 56] Because I discovered, they were not the voice of God at all, but the fiery darts of the wicked one. The Bible does not tell you, the Bible does not tell you, to obey instantly, every prompting.

It doesn't. The Bible tells you, to test the spirit. To see if they are of God. So when you get, some sudden prompting, to do or to say something, don't just blurt it out.

Don't just go and do it. You get some inward impulse, sudden prompting, some sudden conviction, to do or to say something, I think the best advice I can give you, is actually sit down, and imagine that, Christ is sitting opposite you.

Put those words into his mouth, do they fit? Do they belong there? Can you imagine, the Jesus of the Bible, speaking like that? Would it be his tone of voice?

Would they be the words, he would use? Test the spirits. And so when God speaks, he does not blitz our mind. Satan does that.

[17 : 06] God doesn't accuse, he doesn't command us, harshly. God is persuasive, when he speaks to us, through his word.

The voice of the spirit, is a gentle voice, full of sweet, reasonableness. It convinces, it carries, our judgment with us. It's very important. Think of the area, of conviction of sin.

There is, all the difference, in the world, between, the voice of God, and the voice of the devil, when it comes to conviction of sin.

Satan does convict of sin. But he does it, in order to drive us to despair. And if you ever, are feeling your sin, and you're under conviction of sin, and there's nothing, nothing but blackness, and despair, that is the devil, and not God.

Because the kind of sorrow, that God produces, in a person, when he is convicting them, is a godly sorrow, which leads to life. And when God, convicts someone, when he makes them, feel their sin, by his spirit, it's not to drive them, to despair, but to drive them, to Christ.

[18 : 29] And we need to be able, to discriminate, between the voice, of the devil, and the voice of God. And these are some of the ways, that Satan tries to ambush, he's got varied, collection of fiery darts, that he tries out on it.

Any number of, incendiary devices. Some are intended, to make you doubt, and to make you fear. Some are, designed to, inflame your lusts, of the flesh.

Some are meant, to start a church on fire. And he has any number, of fiery darts, that he chooses to fire us. And what makes that, so dangerous, is because you and I, have got combustible hearts.

That's the real problem, isn't it? That's what makes it, so dangerous. There's something, in us, in all of us, answering to the devil's, temptations. That's the difference, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think about that, with me for a minute. There was nothing, in him, that answers, that answers, to the devil's, temptations. He says it much, in John 14. That verse is there, on your sheet.

[19 : 35] He's looking forward, to the devil's, greatest hour. When the devil, would do his worst. When the devil, would think, he's triumphant, over the son of God. And he says, doesn't he, his hour is coming.

And then, in John 14, verse 30. He says, I will no longer, talk much with you, for the ruler, of this world, is coming. But he has no claim, on me. The darkest hour.

The darkest hour, when the powers, of hell, will be unleashed, against the son of God. The ruler, of this world, is coming. And he's got no claim, on me. There's nothing in me. There's nothing in me, that his fiery darts, can latch on to.

Nothing in me, says Jesus, that he can set fire to. Well, that doesn't mean, does it, that the Lord Jesus, wasn't tempted. We know, that the Lord Jesus, was tempted, in every point, as we are, yet

he was, without sin.

That doesn't mean, that the Lord Jesus, never felt, temptation's power. He felt, temptation's power, more than you, and I did. Precisely because, the Lord Jesus, never gave in. Sin, desensitivizes us, doesn't it?

[20 : 51] You and I, we don't feel, the full force, of Satan's, terrible suggestions, because of our sinfulness. We give in, but because he was, without sin, not only did he face, the full force, the full range, of the devil's temptation.

nature. We give in, long before it reaches, the full force. But he resisted, the devil, to the very end. And there was, nothing in him, for those, fiery darts, of the devil, to latch on to. Nothing to set fire, to. His holy, sinless nature, was fireproof. His heart, was saturated, wasn't it, with the word of God.

Watered by prayer, but it's not like that with us. You and I, have got combustible hearts, flammable hearts, and a few sparks, from hell, set our hearts, and minds alight, on our lives, if we're not careful.

And before you know it, the fire's out of control, isn't it? James gives us, an example of that. Just one example, in chapter 3, he speaks about the tongue. The tongue isn't, it isn't the only area, that the devil aims at.

[22 : 09] I think probably, in the UK church, it's maybe the main area. The devil frequently, kind of, takes a pot shot, at the tongue, and you get so much, success there.

Because there's nothing, is there, that does so much damage, in church life, than the tongue. Listen to what he says, in James 3, verses 5 and 6. So also the tongue, is a small member, when it's only little, isn't it?

Yet it boasts, of great things. How great a forest, is set ablaze, by such a small fire. And the tongue, is a fire. A world of unrighteousness, the tongue, is set among our members, staying in the whole body, setting on fire, the entire course of life, and set on fire, by hell.

Until you remember that. Next time you're tempted, to say something, that you know, that you shouldn't. How often, I'm tempted to say something, that I know I shouldn't say.

And we know it's not helpful, we know it's not edifying, we know it won't build, people up.

Sometimes we're not even sure, if it's true. I'm frequently, we're tempted to say things, that we shouldn't say.

[23 : 19] Next time you're tempted, to say something, that you shouldn't say. Remember, remember what James, is saying here. Remember that that tongue, of yours, could be set on fire, by hell itself.

And the temptation, is from hell, it's very strong, isn't it? The temptation, to slander, another brother, or sister, or to deal with innuendo, or to speak half-truths, to carry gossip, it is from hell.

And what damage it does. Says James, that's one example, is that one area, that the devil aims at, in the church, the tongue. And once again, if we're to retain, our spiritual sanity, we need to discriminate, between temptation, and sin.

Temptation, is not sin. You may have your mind, filled with really, terrible, suggestions, from hell. You may have all kinds of, powerful, prompting, from the pit, but that is not sin. And you need to remember that. And so the devil, comes to you, and he comes to me, and he says, how can you possibly, be a Christian, and think like that?

[24 : 37] How can you possibly, be a Christian, and imagine, doing something like that? But don't listen to him. Temptation, is not sin. Jesus was, tempted, in every way, as we are.

The devil came to him, didn't he, with all those, those terrible things. Temptation, is not a sin, unless you're going to say, Jesus is a sinner. You're going to say that.

Now of course, giving in to temptation, isn't it? Allowing, the fiery darts, to stay there, is sin.

Allow it to set yourself, on fire, is sin. But temptation, itself is not sin. And we need to recognize, this temptation. What are we, what are we to do then? What are we to do then?

Well God has given us, a shield to take up. So, let's just, let me read you the verse, again. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish, all the flaming darts, the evil one.

[25 : 45] I said to the children, it's more like a door, than a shield. Crouched behind this door, a shield would be a Roman soldier, he'd be fully covered, it's a, all, over protection.

Made of wood, lined with metal. To extinguish the flame. So behind this shield, the Roman soldier was safe. And the fiery darts, could not pierce him, or set fire to him, as long as he was crouched, behind the shield.

And so the apostle Paul, says to you, what are you to do when, when the devil ambushes you, this week. When the devil, comes down from the hills, and fires darts, to rain over you, well you take up, the shield of faith, and you crouch behind it.

What does he mean, to take up the shield of faith? Well, it means this, doesn't it? It means this shelter behind, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's finished work. That's what it means. It means to put your trust in him, over, and over, and over again.

It means to look away, to him. That's your salvation, that is your defence. That when the enemy, hurls those, incendiary bombs at you, and whatever he uses, whatever he throws at you, you are to catch them, you are to extinguish them, with a bold, affirmation, of your confidence in Christ.

[27 : 07] You take up the shield of faith, and you look to him, and if you look to him, none of these things, will be able to find, a lodging place, in your lives. Look, to him, away from yourself.

That is what faith is. Faith never, turns in upon itself. Let's be absolutely clear on this. I've been told twice this week, I have a sort of faith.

What is that? We don't believe in faith, do we? We believe in Jesus Christ. And faith, never turns in on itself.

Faith always looks, to its object. Faith always looks, away from itself, to its object. That is, how it dawned in your life. That is how you became a Christian. It was when you saw Christ, wasn't it? It was when God, by his spirit, shone into your dark heart, and you saw his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ. That is where your faith came from, and that is when you first believed. And the secret of faith, as we saw this morning, is that clear view, of the Lord Jesus, and what he's done for you, on the cross.

[28 : 14] And so, to take up the shield of faith, is not to try and work up, your self-faith. To take up the shield of faith, is to remind yourself, day by day, hour by hour, that you have a great saviour, who's done great things for you.

To take up the shield of faith, is to look away from your feelings, to him. And so, if your eyes are fixed on him, you are invincible. And you will be able to take, whatever the devil throws up, at you. But you take your eyes off him, like Peter did, walking on the water, and you start to sink. That's the shield. That's our protection, against the evil one. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not, dry and arid, intellectual assent, to bare propositions. It's not like, ticking a box. What is faith? It is saturated, in the word.

It is watered, by the spirit. It is trust, in a living, real person. And when these fiery darts, meet that, when they meet, a real faith, trusting in a real, Lord Jesus Christ, they fizzle out.

[29 : 16] They splutter and die, whenever they come against that. When Satan attacks you, and you face, one of his onslaughts, when you feel, that barrage, of his lies, you are to flee to Christ.

And you are to lay hold, on him and his promises, and his power. So Genesis, Proverbs 30, verse 5. Every word of God, proves true, and he is a shield, to those who take refuge, in him.

God himself, is the shield. That's how he revealed himself, to Abraham, when we read it, at that crucial moment. And Abraham was being told, you're going to be a great nation, and Abraham is childless.

And the devil is seeking, to undermine his faith. And God comes to Abraham, and says, fear not Abraham, I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward. I know it looks bleak, I know it looks as if, that promise will never be, fulfilled.

But Abraham, shelter behind me, and I am your shield. Trust in me. Psalm 84. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer, and give ear, O God of Jacob, behold our shield, O God, look on the face, of your anointed.

[30 : 29] For a day in your court, it's better than a thousand elsewhere. I'd rather be a doorkeeper, in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents, of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun, and a shield. And the Lord bestows favour, and honour, no good thing, does he withhold, from those who walk uprightly.

The name of the Lord, is a strong tower, and the righteous run to it. That's what it means.

To take the Lord Jesus Christ, and to take God, as your shield. Other refuge of my none, hangs my helpless soul, on thee.

Leave, ah, leave me not alone, still support, and comfort me. All my trust, on thee is stayed, all my help, from thee I bring. Cover, my defenceless head, with the shadow of thy wing.

It's another way of saying, take up the shield of faith. One final thing, I've gone on way too long, really, I'm sorry, I'm skipping lots of things, let me just finish with this, alright. And it's the corporate aspect of this, we talked about it, with the children, last week, but you need to see it, you are not a lone ranger, alright?

[31 : 47] All these exhortations, are plural. And so when he says, take up the shield of faith, he's speaking to us, the people of God, to the church. The New Testament, has absolutely no concept, of a Christian, who is, outside of the local church, no such being exists.

And so he's not saying, go around like St. George, trying to slay the dragon, or, you're not like, Knights of the Round Table, and Sir Galahad, or Lancelot. You're not, this is not a picture, of some superhero, going out to fight the devil.

No, this is a picture, of an army. A trained, disciplined army, standing together, against the foe. I feel really strongly, about this. We've lost, lots of this, in the body of Christ.

As people come and go, as they please, I know it's difficult, they're here one week, we don't see them the next week, they're sometimes, at the prayer meeting, sometimes not. But God's provision, for us as a church, is Paul is saying, you stand together, you take the shield of faith, you stand together.

Do you remember, when there's riots, the police stand there, don't they, with those, perspex shields, and they walk forward, together, all as one.

[33 : 03] Stones come down, and the petrol bombs, run down on them, and they advance, as one solid wall, and they push back. And that's Paul's vision, for the church.

But as believers, we stand together, we link our shields, we strengthen, one another's faith, we close our ranks. And we look to Christ, by faith in him.

Let's sing. Let's sing.