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"The Shield That Says God Is on Our Side"

Ephesians 6:13-17

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Ephesians 6:13-17 (PowerPoint)

Preface

Continuing from last week, I would like to think a little more about the "shield of faith" in verse 16.

The work of the "shield of faith" is "to extinguish all the flaming arrows shot by the evil one, that is, the devil."

It is indeed true that sin dwells within us, but more than that, last week we learned that the devil's flaming arrows are shot in various forms, unnecessarily stirring up the sinful part within us, setting the stirred-up sin ablaze, and trying to burn us up completely with that fire.

When we try to do things that please God and that our spirit rejoices in—for example, when we try to read the Bible or pray—he puts in strange hindrances.

Or suddenly he stirs up instinctive, physiological urges, causing sexual temptation, or causing a short temper that makes us want to explode in anger, or stirring up a desire for self-display that makes us want others to recognize us, or material desire, or else he tempts us to doubt God, to doubt the words of the Bible, and to take an attitude that blasphemes God—and as a result, we learned that there is a flaming arrow of the devil that tries to push us down into unnecessary spiritual self-loathing and into despair, making us think, 'Why do I keep doing such things... I am not someone who can be called a Christian... having committed such a sin, with what face can I go to church, with what face can I pray to God...'

In order to extinguish such flaming arrows of the devil, we take up the "shield of faith."

As for what, in the end, becomes the greatest spiritual battle both for the devil and for us, it is to cause despair before God, to bring us—us as people, as believers—to the state of feeling we cannot go out before God, to the depths of the abyss.

As for why despair is a battle of faith, as I have said before, in the end it is because despair is the same as pride, as arrogance.

Despair, when traced to its root, in the end arises because we have expectations of ourselves.

A kind of pride remains that says, 'At the very least, I can do this much,' and from that, despair is born, saying, 'Can I not even do this?'

In other words, despair could also be said to be the reverse side of pride.

The front side is pride, and the back side is despair.

Of course, beating our chest and saying, 'I have committed such a sin,' and connecting that to repentance before God is an important and necessary thing, but going beyond that and sinking ourselves into despair, saying, 'A person like me is no longer needed, no longer of use, I'm finished,' is a cunning pride disguised as humility.

Why is that?

Because, in the end, it is not God but ourselves in whom we place our expectation and our hope.

It is also because it ends up denying the word that Jesus, that God the Father, speaks to the point of staking his life, saying, 'You are precious and honored in my sight.'
And making us deny that is precisely Satan's purpose, and that is what becomes the battle of faith.

Part One

If we were to name one word that forms an important core in the Christian faith, some would say, plainly, 'faith—a believing heart,' and some, depending on the person, would say 'grace,' but from the standpoint of the Bible, both of these seem to carry the same meaning.
If we feel that the words 'faith—a believing heart' and 'grace' carry different meanings, if we think that the nuance of 'faith' and 'grace' is different, then we may be understanding 'faith' differently from what the Bible says about it.

When we say 'grace,' the focus naturally goes to the one who bestows the favor, but when we say 'faith,' at first glance we tend to think it has to do with the conduct of the human side—of us who believe.
But, as we learned last week, the most important thing in 'faith' is that its focus must go to the object of belief.
In other words, the most important thing in faith is that what, who, whom we believe in, and what kind of person that one is, determines the entire content of it.

The 'faith' that the Bible teaches, 'faith that believes in Christ,' is not something swayed or determined by us who believe, but depends on the one in whom we believe.

More than the person who believes, the believing side, it is who the object of belief is that determines the value of that faith.

What determines whether faith is good or bad is not some religious pluralism that says it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe earnestly, but rather a battle over whether the one called God is a being worthy of belief.

Religious pluralism, simply put, is the idea that, in aiming to climb to the top of a mountain, since there is not just one road but several, it's fine to use any road, because as long as you climb, you'll eventually reach the summit.
In other words, it is the idea that it depends not on what the object of belief is, but on the conduct and piety of us who believe.

But the Bible does not say that.

As it is written: 'And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).

In short, 'faith,' just like 'grace,' has its focus and emphasis on the one who bestows it, the one who gives it.

That is why Satan the devil, who knows this far more accurately than anyone, far more accurately than us humans, attacks and stalks not God, but people.

He shoots flaming arrows that make us focus not on God but on ourselves, saying things like, 'Can you really call yourself a believer after doing something like that? After committing such a thing, how can you attend worship, how can you sing praise, how can you sit there with the face of a worshiper?'—attacking us in an attempt to burn us up completely within the pride of self-disappointment.

Using the sins and failures we have committed, Satan attacks us so that we come to the mistaken thought that ‘that very sin or failure is something that shakes our faith at its foundation and causes it to collapse.’ Of course, this does not mean we are free to commit sin as much as we like. Faith includes the ability to kneel and repent before God, and the ‘faith’ given to us—the faith in Christ that begins from God, stands by God, and has God as its foundation—is never something that collapses because of our failures or sins.

Part Two

The ‘faith’ that the Bible teaches is God himself, the very existence of the one called God.

As God himself says, ‘I, the Lord, have made you my people and my children. I have chosen you, and through my only Son I have made you my treasured people’—‘faith’ is not from our side, but a ‘grace’ that began from God.

I would like to confirm this through the word of Romans.

Romans 3:19-27a (PowerPoint)

All our boasting has been removed.

Our deeds also have no meaning whatsoever in salvation from eternal destruction; we are saved only and solely through Jesus Christ.

The meaning of the word ‘law’ here is a word that means ‘deeds’ on our side.

In other words, faith is not a result accompanying our deeds, such as ‘when you sow a seed, it sprouts, and you get a harvest.’

The law of cause and effect has absolutely no room to be applied in our salvation from eternal destruction.

As for the ‘law,’ that is, God’s commands and words such as ‘do this, do that’ that God shows us, there is not a single person who can keep them 100% perfectly; not only that, even by the standard of conscience that God has implanted from birth in every person, that everyone possesses, there is no one who can completely fulfill it.

Then how can one come to salvation?

We ourselves cannot reach it.

To believe that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the atonement for my sin—that is, that my salvation begins from Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ is the cause, that I rely on Jesus Christ for everything—it is, simply, 100% by the grace of God.

It was not we who provided the result; God prepared the result and bestowed that result upon us. We only received it; it is a ‘grace’ that we can only receive.

Therefore, our ‘faith’ is not something that came out from our side, but originates from God, something granted and given 100% from God.

The devil pokes at this very point, and attacks at this very point.

He tempts us to base our faith on our own deeds, repeatedly inducing us to make ourselves, as a person, the basis, saying, ‘I am worthy of receiving salvation. I have done this and that; there must be a reason I can go to heaven’—or conversely, he drives us, buries us, and stokes us toward despairing on our own, into the place of thinking, ‘After all, I have sinned again. I have had evil thoughts. I have committed an irreparable mistake.’ Unlike the true humility of ‘no matter what, whatever happens, first going out before God,’ Satan accomplishes his purpose by means of ‘causing

despair.'

When a failure that arose from placing our 'hope' in ourselves comes to light, we are driven into the strange place of feeling as though even our faith has disappeared, and we lose sight of the fact that we are being driven there by Satan in that way.

What protects us from that is the 'shield of faith.'

We come to know clearly what the core of the Christian faith is.

It is not based on me, nor is it something I received because I have the ability to keep it; it is something given and received freely, without merit, by God's grace and mercy. We come to know firmly that the basis of everything we have is not in ourselves, but in God's graciousness, mercy, power, and wisdom.

This is the 'shield of faith.'

This is a story about a certain Christian I know whom I could never hate. He was a man who ran a company, and all the employees of that company knew that the president was a Christian.

However, this president would get angry, and when irritated would drink and show his bad drinking habits, and would sometimes even overturn the documents on his desk. One day, a subordinate at that company apparently asked him this question.

'President, you are a Christian, aren't you?'

'Yes, that's right.'

'But that's quite far from the image I have of Christians—what about that?'

Well, that was a courageous question to ask.

Then the president replied with a famous line.

'That's exactly why I'm a Christian. It's because I'm like this that I believe in Jesus.'

'It's because I'm like this that I believe in Jesus!'

What a famous line that is.

There is probably no more mistaken statement than, 'That person doesn't believe in Jesus, but since he's such a fine person who has done such fine things, he must be going to heaven.'

Even we Christians may end up thinking this way, and it may be words we cannot help applying to ourselves as well.

If one of the companions sharing our life of faith is a mess, and we think, 'Why is that person like that even though they're a Christian?'—to put it a bit extremely, I think it is that very thought that is mistaken.

Rather, it is precisely when we think, 'No, if that person didn't believe in Jesus, who would believe in Jesus!' that faith becomes based not on a person but on God.

When I became a Christian as a university student, people around me were surprised, saying, 'What, you're a Christian?' But 'it's exactly someone like that who needs to believe in Jesus!' is the gospel that the Bible teaches.

The Apostle Paul himself, who wrote Ephesians, was exactly such a person.

Part Three

Although we had neither the qualification, nor the condition, nor the ability to receive salvation, we were saved.

Only by the grace of God, because of the ransom through Christ Jesus, we have been counted righteous.

Every condition by which a Christian was able to become a Christian rests on this: 'God had compassion on me, a person.'

That alone is the only reason we are here now.

If that is so, then if Satan shoots flaming arrows and attacks us, how should we respond?

We respond, 'That's right. Your accusation is correct. That I am sinful—you know it, I know it, and God knows it too. That is precisely why I am a Christian.'

Conversely, if it becomes, 'That's right, you're not wrong. Indeed I am hopeless. I am no good,' then we fall completely into the devil's trap.

'Faith' is not relying on myself as a person, but knowing how the one in whom we believe—the Lord God, the Savior Jesus, God the Holy Spirit—sees and treats me as a person; that is everything.

To put it in one phrase, it is exactly as the word of Romans 5:8 says.

Romans 5:8 (PowerPoint)

'While we were still sinners' naturally includes the fact that we were actually doing bad things, but the more essential, biblical meaning is, 'the time when we lived turning our backs on God and ignoring God.'

That was a time when we did things evil in God's sight without a qualm, a time when we did not even know God existed, when we were stubborn, and when we made ourselves our own god.

And at such a time, God loved us.

So now, we have come to want to live for God after all, we have also come to want to repent if we do something wrong, and we have come to feel pain over having sinned, to be able to strike our chest and ask, 'Can I really say I believe in Jesus when I'm like this?'—what a great spiritual progress that is. In other words, compared to the time when we were doing things before God that should never have been done, we are now considerably better off. Having been changed in that way, can we stop believing in God?

We cannot stop.

This is the 'shield of faith.'

In Numbers 23:19,

Numbers 23:19 (PowerPoint)

'God is not man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind.'

As this word says, God the Father, God the Son Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit have never once regretted having saved us.

God is the one who called us out with joy, redeemed us, and rejoiced together with all the angels of heaven over our being saved.

All those who believe in Jesus Christ, without a single exception, are without doubt better now than during the time when, 'still sinners,' they turned their backs on God, ignored God, and did not know God.

Against the devil who tries to deny that fact, we take up the 'shield of faith.'

Romans chapter 8 explains this in this way.

Romans 8:31 (PowerPoint)

God is on our side.

The basis of our faith is not that we are good people, but that God is on our side.

Not because we have met God's requirements or conditions, but because God is on our side.

As for how much he is on our side,

Romans 8:32-33 (PowerPoint)

He is on our side to that extent.

The content of this word becomes, precisely, our 'shield of faith.'

God is on my side.

Who can cut us off from the love of Christ?

This is the final word of Romans chapter 8.

Romans 8:38-39 (PowerPoint)

This is the 'shield of faith.'

We surely take up the shield of faith and extinguish all the flaming arrows that the evil ones shoot at us.

We escape from the pride that is based on myself and the despair that is based on myself.

The basis of all our hope is God, and that God is on my side.

If God were to have a different intention, problems might arise for us, but as long as God does not have a different intention, nothing can shake us.

I believe this is the most important content in faith that the Bible teaches us.

Part Four

Of course, when we wage the battle of faith, anguish and suffering always accompany us, and we fail.

We wish to be more perfect, to be people praised more by God, and to be holy victors, but we always stumble.

We hate sin and wish to be holy, but we are troubled and anguished by the fact that we are not.

But this is not a problem of inferior faith; it is a problem of timing, of being impatient and anxious, unable to wait.

The deeper our faith becomes, the more sensitive we become to sin, and we come to feel pangs of conscience of faith even over small things.

Even though, in the past, it was nothing at all.

It is not because we are committing worse sins than before; rather, the pangs of conscience have grown larger than before, and it happens that those pangs shake us.

It is as if we were wearing white clothing.

If you wear light gray clothing for a long time, it will eventually become dark gray, and you will no longer notice even if it gets a little dirty.

White clothing, however, no matter when you wear it, stands out the moment even the slightest stain appears.

I have heard it said that if you pursue clothing color and fashion to its conclusion, you end up at white, and that the most fashionable people are those who wear white pants or a white skirt—meaning, I suppose, that they are people who are always ready to change as soon as it gets even slightly dirty.

They are the ultimate fashionable people.

Looking at Revelation, there is the image of saints who believe in the Lord Jesus, who 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Revelation 7:14), and that is exactly it.

Indeed, a Christian is one who wears, in his very body, the fact of having been made white through the atonement of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Until the desire that we know sin, feel revulsion toward sin, do not want to commit sin, do not want to do what does not please God, and want to do

what pleases God actually takes shape and appears, we may fail many times and stumble many times, but it is promised to us as believers that the fact of having been clothed in that white garment and its content will come to match.

Therefore, we ourselves have no need to shrink back more than necessary, nor any need to unnecessarily make others shrink back.

That would, I think, end up becoming a faith-like act based not on God but on man.

Therefore, as we live our life of faith, we must be careful not to fall unnecessarily into a kind of compulsively over-scrupulous faith.

I think being sensitive to sin is important, but to use that to torment others and torment ourselves ends up putting the cart before the horse.

Conclusion

When the devil shoots his flaming arrows, I want to be a Christian who takes up the shield of faith and says, 'That's right, I failed. But the Lord Jesus does not fail. Both I and that person received God's love when we were even worse off than now, and the Lord is on our side even now. If you want to drive us further into a corner, go directly to God and oppose him!'

Let us pray.

Benediction: Romans 8:31b