

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Website: www.churchredeemeraz.org

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Pastor/Teacher
Gary L. W. Johnson

The Christian's Armor: The Shield of Faith

Ted Haggard, the former president of the National Association of Evangelicals and megachurch pastor who stepped down from these positions after it was discovered he had a relationship with a male prostitute has resurfaced, announced this past Wednesday (June 2) that he's hosting a "launch party" at his own house for a new church he's starting. "I don't expect to have another megachurch," Haggard said. "I'll be happy if just a few people join." Haggard said he and his family plan to launch a church called St. James Church, with a mission of "helping other people going through the most difficult times of their lives." A launch party for Haggard's new church was planned at the Haggards' own home for Sunday at 10 a.m. At the party, Haggard says people can mingle, swim and jump on the family's trampoline. The following weekend, a planning meeting was scheduled, again at the Haggard home, to determine about how many members the new church will have. "I was not willing to let the scandal we faced be the final chapter of our lives," Haggard's wife, Gayle, said. Haggard declared that this new church is an act of *faith*. After the planning meeting, Haggard says the church will find a location. Haggard did not rule out the possibility of a reality TV show that will focus on the new church. Haggard says everyone is welcome to attend the party, mentioning Democrats, Republicans, Independents, gays, straights, the short and tall, specifically.¹ Sadly, many misguided Christians think that this kind of bold venture defines *Faith* – simply maintaining an optimistic outlook. The Apostle Paul addresses the subject in a totally different light.

We come in our study of the Christian's armor to the second division. The first three pieces of armor, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness and the steadfastness of the Gospel of peace (the footwear), all had this in common: they were attached directly to the body at all times. "The pieces of armor already mentioned being fitted on the body and fastened to it, each by appropriate mechanism, have each its characteristic verb - PERIZΩ SAMENOI (*having girded about*), ENDUSAMENOI (*having put on*), HUPODΩ SAMENOI (*having strapped under*); but shield, helmet, and sword need no such special fastening, for they are simply taken up or assumed, and therefore they are joined to one general participle, ANALABONTE (*taking up*), and the verb DEXASTHE (*take up*)."² The first piece of armor in the division is the "shield of faith." The word "faith" may indeed be the most important word in the Bible. It is certainly one of the most crucial. Heb. 11 stands out in the N.T. as the "faith" chapter. Why was it that these Old Testament men lived such effective lives for God? Because they were men of faith – they did not have the bare minimum of faith whereby they could receive the grace of God, but they were, as we are told in the case of Abraham, *strong* in faith. The faith to which Paul refers here is not the body of Christian beliefs (for which the term is used in 4:13), but basic trust in God—the faith in Christ that appropriates salvation and continues to bring blessing and strength as it trusts Him for daily provision and help. The substance of Christianity is believing that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6); putting total trust in His Son as the crucified, buried, risen, and ascended Savior, obeying Scripture as His infallible and authoritative Word; and looking forward to the Lord's coming again. Habakkuk's great declaration that "the righteous will

live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4) is quoted and reaffirmed twice by Paul (Rom. 1:17; Gal 3:11) and once by the writer of Hebrews (10:38).”³

I. THE SHIELD OF FAITH

“*in addition to all this* (EN PASIN, lit. ‘in all’. The KJV “above all” is incorrect. Paul is not implying that this is more important than the rest of the armor. The expression also refers to the rest of the armor, not just the shield.) *Take up* (ANALABONTES, aorist active participle, to pick up, lit. ‘having taken up’ used as a technical military term) *the shield* (TON THUREON, refers to a large shield) *of faith* (TES PISTE S, genitive of apposition, lit. ‘the shield,’ namely, faith) *with which* (EN H , instrumental use of the dative) *you can* (DUN SESTHE, future middle, lit. ‘to be able,’ to have ability. “The future is properly used, not because the combat does not begin until the day of the great future conflict with evil, but because the whole duration of the fight is contemplated. At all times ye shall be able, etc.”⁴) *extinguish* (SBESAI, aorist active infinitive of SBENNUMI, lit. ‘to put out, quench,’ extinguish) *all the flaming arrows* (PANTA TA BEL TA PEPUR MENA. The word BEL , from BELOS, related to BALL , to throw, lit. a missile or dart. PEPUR MENA, perfect passive participle of PURO , to set a blaze, fire. Our English word “pyro” as in “pyrophobia,” excessive fear of fire, is derived from this Gk. word) *of the evil one* (TOU PON ROU, lit. ‘of the evil or wicked one,’ not “the wicked” as in the KJV. This is not evil in the abstract sense, but in the personal, the devil, the evil one.)

A. The Nature of the Armor. It is important to identify the shield. Soldiers in ancient times carried two different kinds of shields. One was a small arm shield called in Greek ASPIS (and PELTA). This was a small round shield used in close hand to hand combat. The shield Paul is alluding to was the large shield, THUREOS, a word derived from THURA, door. The size of this piece of armor was approx. 4 ft. by 2 ½ ft., large enough for a soldier to hide behind so as to protect himself from an assault of enemy arrows and the like. The shields, due to their size, could not possibly be made of solid metal or they would prove to be too heavy and cumbersome to lug about. Although they might have some metal covering, they were for the most part made of a large wooden frame, tightly fitted with layers of leather. This leather was then treated so as not to burn when struck by flaming arrows. Sometimes they were soaked in water before battle.

B. The Nature of the Metaphors. In this verse we have two metaphors. One dealing with the Christian’s armor, the other with the devil’s weapons.

1. What does the shield of faith mean? In keeping with Paul’s O.T. references, the language bears striking resemblance to texts like Prov. 30:5 where God “is a shield to those who take refuge in him;” Ps. 3:3, “But you are a shield around me, O LORD;” Ps. 7:10, “My shield is God Most High;” Gen. 15:1, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield;” and Ps. 84:9, where Christ is the shield, “Look upon our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one.” “These O.T. utterances make it unlikely that only man’s faith is meant in a text as drenched in O.T. thought pattern as is Eph. 6.”⁵ Clearly Paul is not speaking of “faith in faith” – the strength of faith is not in itself, but in its object. Faith presupposes knowledge concerning the One trusted. It is the content of faith that gives the victory in the battle (I Jn. 5:4,5). The charismatic cult known as the health and wealth Gospel (also referred to as the prosperity ‘word of faith,’ and their churches are called *Rhema* churches), teach a faith formula that has more in common with New Age gnosticism than with Biblical Christianity.⁶ The following book titles reflect a recent trend linking the Gospel to personal affluence: Kenneth and Gloria Copeland’s *The Law of Prosperity* (1979); Kenneth Hagin’s *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God* (1980) and *You Can Have What You Say* (1979); Joe Magliato’s *The Wall Street Gospel* (1979); Kenneth Hagin, Jr.’s *How God Taught Me About Prosperity* (1980); Elbert Willis’ *God’s Plan for Financial Prosperity* (1982); and Jerry Savelle’s *Living in Divine Prosperity* (1987). Others teaching this heresy on TBN include

Jesse Duplantis, Marilyn Hickey, John Avanzini, and Benny Hinn. Gloria Copeland has written confidently that “the Word of God simply reveals that lack and poverty are not in line with God’s will for the obedient...Allow the Holy Spirit to minister the truth to your spirit until you know beyond doubt that *God’s Will is Prosperity*.” (She means the kind of prosperity that can be converted into hard cash—as in diamond rings, luxury cars, and big houses.) The chief business of her God is to ensure material prosperity.⁷ This group makes much to do over this particular verse in Eph. 6, but they distort the Biblical understanding of faith by twisting the Scriptures to construct a mechanical notion of faith as primarily a positive attitude that can be used as a formula to make God your servant.

2. To what do the “flaming arrows” of the devil refer? The imagery is that of darts or arrows that were dipped in tar, pitch, or some other combustible substance and then set on fire and thrown or shot. “The devil’s darts no doubt include his mischievous accusations which inflame our conscience with what (if we are sheltering in Christ) can only be called false guilt. Other darts are unsought thoughts of doubt and disobedience, rebellion, lust, malice or fear.”⁸ The devil’s darts are described as “flaming” or “fiery” because they are intended to consume or burn when they strike. “He will labor to make us distrust God’s grace,” said Calvin, “and on the other hand, he will make us believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is far from us, and even tempt us to murmur against Him, or to raise trifling and unprofitable questions, or else blasphemies, and similar things. And all these are darts.”⁹
- C. The Importance of the Armor. The soldier’s shield served the purpose of protecting him from a barrage of arrows, esp. those with flaming tips. The believer’s shield is not “faith” in the sense of positive mental attitude, much less the absurd “faith in faith,” but his shield is God in whom faith has rested – but it is an ACTIVE faith, a faith engaged in battle. How does this protect us against the evil one’s flaming arrows? When Satan seeks to inflame our conscience or passions or to consume our peace, how does the “shield of faith” protect us? Faith lays hold of that which is not seen (Heb. 11:1). Faith sees God! (Compare Gen. 39:9 and Joseph’s response to Potiphar’s wife). Martin Lloyd-Jones asks, “But how does faith act as our shield? The answer is that faith never points to itself, it always points to its object. That is absolutely crucial. The cults produce people who have faith in faith. But if you put your faith in faith you are eventually undone. There are people who try to work up faith, the quality of faith, in themselves; but they will never succeed. That is Couèism, a thing purely psychological. We are not told to work up faith or to put our faith in faith. No, faith never points to itself. Faith never protects a man in and of itself. Faith always points to its object, and in that way it makes us strong. Paul deals with this matter in chapter 4 of his Epistle to the Romans, beginning at verse 18. He is writing about Abraham, ‘who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, so shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.’”¹⁰

CONCLUSION: The apostle Paul referred to faith as something that should continue to grow (II Cor. 10:15; II Thess. 1:3). The faith that brings a person to salvation in Christ does not depend upon the strength of faith, but in the reality of it. But faith must grow if progress in Christian maturity is to be made. “While even the weakest faith mediates a perfect justification, the degree of sanctification is commensurate with the strength of the Christian’s faith and the persistence with which he apprehends Christ.”¹¹ It is faith in God as He is revealed in Scripture. Faith comes from hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Faith must be nurtured on the God revealed in Scripture. In order for faith to be strong

it must be God-centered, Christ-centered, Word-centered. This is our shield. Anything else is tissue paper. Finally, faith is never to be viewed in the abstract. It always has its orientation to the Gospel. “Hence there is never,” declares Berkouwer, “a stretch along the way of salvation where justification drops out of sight. Genuine sanctification—let it be repeated—stands or falls with this continued orientation toward justification and the remission of sins.”¹²

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.9news.com/news/article.aspx?storyid=140196&catid=339>. For an extended analysis, see my sermon series “Current Issues,” No. 1, 2 and 3, “The New Atheism, Idolatry and the Tragic Case of Ted Haggard” (Nov. 12, 19, 26, 2006).

² John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (T & T Clark, 1883), p. 302.

³ J. MacArthur, Jr. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Ephesians* (Moody, 1986), p. 358.

⁴ T.K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (T & T Clark, 1987), p. 195

⁵ Markus Barth *The Anchor Bible: Ephesians II* (Doubleday, 1960), p. 772.

⁶ In Gnosticism, not only the object of faith (Christ), but the act of faith, becomes radically revised. In Christianity, faith is trust in God's specific promise of salvation through Christ. In Gnosticism faith is magic. It is a technique for getting what we want by believing in it strongly enough. As C. Peter Wagner, an advocate of the Vineyard movement, puts it, “Empirical evidence also validates the absolute necessity of faith or whatever else you want to call it—possibility thinking and goal setting—as a prerequisite for church growth.” Is faith really a synonym for possibility thinking and goal setting? Then would not everyone possess faith? Or is faith a unique gift from God to trust in Christ, as in biblical teaching? The Second Helvetic Confession (a 16th century Reformed statement) declares, “Christian faith is not an opinion or human conviction, but a most firm trust and a clear and steadfast assent of the mind, and then a most certain apprehension of the truth of God presented in the Scriptures and in the Apostles' Creed, and thus also of God himself, the greatest good, and especially of God's promise and of Christ who is the fulfillment of all promises.” M.S. Horton, “The New Gnosticism” *Modern Reformation* (July/Aug., 1995), p. 11.

⁷ In the discussion by D.W. McCullough, *The Trivialization of God: The Dangerous Illusion of a Manageable Deity* (NavPress, 1995), pp. 44-45.

⁸ J.R.W. Stott, *God's New Society; The Message of Ephesians* (IVP, 1979).

⁹ *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1973), p. 673.

¹⁰ M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-20* (Baker, 1981), p. 805.

¹¹ L. Berkhof *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 536.

¹² G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Sanctification* (Eerdmans, 1952), p. 77.