

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

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A SERMON
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*“Above all, taking the shield of faith,
 wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.”*
Ephesians 6:16

LIKE the Spartans, every Christian is born a warrior. It is his destiny to be assaulted, it is his duty to attack. Part of his life will be occupied with defensive warfare. He will have to defend earnestly the faith once delivered to the saints. He will have to resist the devil, he will have to stand against all his wiles, and having done all, still to stand.

He will, however, be but a sorry Christian if he acts only on the defensive. He must be one who goes against his foes, as well as stands still to receive their advance. He must be able to say with David, “I come against thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom thou hast defied.”

He must wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. He must have weapons for his warfare—not carnal—but “mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” He must not, I say, be content to live in the stronghold, though he be then well-guarded and munitions of stupendous strength his dwelling place may be, but he must go forth to attack the castles of the enemy and to put them down, to drive the Canaanite out of the land.

Now, there are many ways in which the Christian may to a great degree forget his marshal character. And alas! there are not a few who, if they be Christians at all, certainly know but very little of that daily warfare to which the Captain of our salvation calls His disciples. They will know most of fighting who cleave closest to King David, who are willing not merely to be with him when he is in Saul’s court with his fingers amid the strings of the harp, going in and out before the people, and behaving discreetly, so that “all Israel and Judah loved David because he went out and came in before them.”

But men who are willing to go with David into the cave of Adullam when he is outlawed, when his character has become a stench in the nostrils of every proud hypocrite, and when Saul the king—in his day the representative of that worldly religion which is not of God, but stands in the strength of man—when he hunts David to seek his life.

Thus, the men who are willing to follow Christ in the midst of an ungodly and perverse generation, to come right out from it and be separate—their life will have to be like the life of the men of Naphtali, who hazarded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

You will remember that Jonathan, one of the sweetest characters in the Word of God, is one of whom after all there is little to be said. His life was inglorious from the very time that he forsook David and his death was amongst the slain of the Philistines upon the dewless mountains of Gilboa.

Alas, poor Jonathan, he could give David his bow, but he could not draw the bow for David. He could give David his garments, even to his armor, but he could not put on the armor for David. The attraction of his father’s court was too much for him and there he stayed. In that Book of the Chronicles, where the Holy Ghost has recorded the names of the mighty men that were with David in Adullam, we find not the name of Jonathan.

We find the names of those who broke through the Philistines to give David a drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem. We find the name of the man who went down into the pit in the time of winter

and smote the lion. But Jonathan has not the honor to stand recorded in the list of the great host which was like the host of God.

And there are Christians of that kind nowadays. They have a soft religion—a religion which shuns opposition, a reed-like religion which bows before every blast, unlike that cedar of godliness which stands aloft in the midst of the storm, and claps its boughs in the hurricane for very joy of triumph, though the earth is all in arms abroad.

Such men, like those who shunned David in Adullam, lack the faith that shares the glory. Though saved, yet their names shall not be found written among the mighty men who for our Great Commander's sake are willing to suffer the loss of all things and to go forth without the camp bearing His reproach.

Those Christians too, who having come clean out from the world, are diligently engaged in building up the church, will have to fight more than others who are rather built up than builders. You remember, in Nehemiah's day, how the Jews wrought in their work when they built the walls of Jerusalem. With one hand they held the trowel and in the other they held a weapon. "The builders, every one had his sword girded by his side and so builded."

Moreover, there were master masons along the wall, and the laborers all actually engaged, yet here and there you might see a sentinel ready to sound the trumpet so that the workmen might prove warriors, rush to the fray, and drive away their foes. Be very diligent in doing good to the church of Christ and you shall soon have reason to defend your cause. Do but serve your Master zealously and diligently, and let but the Lord's blessing rest upon your labors, the Lord's blessing will entail Satan's curse, the smile of God will necessarily incur the frown of man.

According to your nonconformity to the world, your daring to be singular—when to be singular is to be right—according to your diligence in building up the walls of Jerusalem, you shall be compelled to recognize your soldierly character. To you the text shall come with greater emphasis than to more cowardly souls. "Above all, take the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

Having treated the character of the persons who will most require the shield provided in the text, let us proceed at once to discuss the words before us. We will do so thus. First, let us *expound the comparison*. Secondly, *enforce the exhortation*. And thirdly, *propound it as a word of comfort to any trembling sinners who are now specially attacked with the fiery darts of the wicked*.

I. First, then, let us EXPOUND THE METAPHOR.

Faith is here compared to a shield. There are four or five particulars in which we may liken faith to a shield.

The natural idea which lies upon the very surface of the simile is, that faith, like a shield, *protects us against attack*. Different kinds of shields were used by the ancients, but there is a special reference in our text to the large shield which was sometimes employed. I believe the word which is translated "shield," sometimes signifies a door, because their shields were as large as a door. They covered the man entirely. You remember that verse in the Psalms which exactly hits the idea, "Thou LORD wilt bless the righteous, with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield."

As the shield enveloped the entire man, so, we think faith envelopes the entire man, and protects him from all missiles wherever they may be aimed against him. You will remember the cry of the Spartan mother to her son when he went out to battle. She said, "Take care that you return with your shield, or upon it."

Now, as she meant that he could return upon his shield dead, it shows that they often employed shields which were large enough to be a bier for a dead man, and consequently quite large enough to cover the body of a live man. Such a shield as that is meant in the text.

That is the illustration before us. Faith protects the whole man. Let the assault of Satan be against the head, let him try to deceive us with unsettled notions in theology, let him tempt us to doubt those things which are verily received among us—a full faith in Christ preserves us against dangerous heresies, and

enables us to hold fast those things which we have received, which we have been taught and have learned, and have made our own by experience.

Unsettledness in notion generally springs from a weakness of faith. A man who has strong faith in Christ, has got a hand that gets such a grip on the doctrines of grace, that you could not unclasp it, do what you would. *He* knows what he has believed. *He* understands what he has received. *He* could not and would not give up what he knows to be the truth of God, though all the schemes that men devise should assail him with their most treacherous art.

While faith will guard the head, it will also guard the heart. When temptation to love the world comes in, then faith holds up thoughts of the future and confidence of the reward that awaits the people of God, and enables the Christian to esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, and so the heart is protected.

Then when the enemy makes his cut at the sword-arm of a Christian, to disable him, if possible, from future service, faith protects the arm like a shield, and he is able to do exploits for his Master, and go forth, still conquering, and to conquer, in the name of Him that has loved us.

Suppose the arrow is aimed at his feet, and the enemy attempts to make him trip in his daily life—endeavors to mislead him in the uprightness of his walk and conversation? Faith protects his feet and he stands fast in slippery places. Neither does his foot slip, nor can the enemy triumph over him. Or suppose the arrow is aimed at the knee, and Satan seeks to make him weak in prayer, and tells him that God will shut out his cry, and never listen to the voice of his supplication? Then faith protects him, and in the power of faith, with confidence, he has access to God, and draws near unto His mercy seat.

Or let the arrow be aimed at his conscience, and let it be winged with the remembrance of some recent sin, yet faith protects the conscience, for its full assurance of atonement quenches the fiery darts with that delightful text, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” So there is no part of a man which is not secure.

Although Satan will certainly attack him in every direction, yet let him come where he will.

***“He that hath made his refuge God,
Shall find a most secure abode.”***

Nor does faith only protect the whole man, but if you will think for a moment, you will see that the apostle suggests the idea that *it protects his armor too*. After re-counting various pieces, he says, “Above all.” The man of God is to put on the girdle and the breastplate, and he is to be shod, and he is to wear his helmet. But though these are all armor, yet faith is an armor for his armor. It is not only a defense for him, but a defense for his defenses.

Thus faith not only shields the man, but shields his graces too. You may easily perceive how this is. Satan sometimes attacks our sincerity. He tries to cut the girdle of truth which is about our loins. But faith enables us to be all sincere, like Moses who forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, and refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.

Then the enemy will often make an attack against our righteousness and try to batter our breastplate. Yet does faith come in and enable us like Joseph to exclaim, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God.” Or like Job we cry, “Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me.” Or like David we can cry, even in the worst of slanders, “Thou LORD that delivered me out of the jaw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, wilt deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.”

You see how faith guards the breastplate and protects the girdle? All our virtues are unable to live of themselves, they need grace to preserve them, and that grace is given us through faith. Are you meek? cover your meekness with faith, or else you will give way to a hasty speech. Are you full of decision? let your decision be shielded with confidence in God, or else your decision may waver, and your firmness may give way.

Have you the spirit of love and gentleness? take care that you have the shield of faith, or your gentleness may yet turn to anger, and your love be changed to bitterness. We must protect our graces with faith as well as the nature they adorn. It is not simply the head, but the helmet; not merely the feet, but the shoes; not the loins, but the girdle—all must be shielded and secure by this all-covering, all-protecting, all-triumphant shield of faith.

In the second place, let me suggest that faith like a shield *receives the blows which are meant for the man himself*. Some Christians think that faith would enable them to escape blows—that if they had faith everything would be quiet, everything would be peaceful and calm. I know how young Christians imagine this. They think as soon as ever they have come out of their first convictions of their own sinfulness and found the Savior, oh! now they are going to ride softly to heaven, singing all the way.

What did they put their armor on at all for if there were to be no battles? What have they put their hand to the plough for if they are not to plough to the end of the furrow and often to wipe the sweat from their face through their hard toil? Why enlist, young men, if you are not wanted to fight? What is the good of a fair-weather soldier—one who stays at home to feed at the public expense?

No! let the soldier be ready when war comes, let him expect the conflict as a part and necessary consequence of his profession. But be armed with faith—it receives the blows. The poor shield is knocked and hammered and battered like a penthouse exposed in the time of storm, blow after blow comes rattling upon it, and though it turns death aside, yet the shield is compelled itself to bear the cut and the thrust. So must our faith do—it must be cut at, it must bear the blows.

Some people, instead of using the shield of faith to bear the blow, use the skulking place of cowards. Ashamed of Christ they make no profession of Him, or having professed Christ, ashamed of the profession, they hide themselves by deserting their colors, by conformity to the world. Perhaps they are even called to preach the Gospel, but they do it in so quiet and gentle a way, like men that wear soft raiment and ought to be in kings' houses. Unlike John the Baptist, they are "reeds shaken with the wind."

Of them no one says anything ill, because they have done no ill to Satan's kingdom. Against them Satan never roars—why should he! He is not afraid of them, therefore he need not come out against them. "Let them alone," says he, "thousands such as these will never shake my kingdom." But this is not to use the shield of faith. This, I repeat it, is to use the sulking-places of an ignoble cowardice.

Others use the shield of presumption, they think it is right with them when it is not, but so they are proof, not against the attacks of Satan, but against the weapons of our spiritual warfare. Seared in their conscience as with a hot iron, they fear not the rebukes of God's law. Deadened even to the voice of love, they bow not before the invitations of Christ. They go on their way caring for none of those things, presumption has made them secure.

Such people have no blows to suffer. Their shield lets them go through the world quietly, saying, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." But only uplift the shield of faith, bearing the blood-red escutcheon of the cross, and there are plenty of the knights of hell who are ready to unhorse you. On, champion, on! in the name of Him who is with you. No lance can pierce that shield, no sword shall ever be able to cut through it. It shall preserve you in all battle and in all strife. You shall bring it home yourself, through it you shall be more than conqueror. Faith, then, is like a shield, because it has to bear the blows.

Thirdly, faith is like a shield because it has good need to be *strong*. A man who has some pasteboard shield may lift it up against his foe, the sword will go through it and reach his heart. Or perhaps in the moment when the lance is in rest, and his foe is dashing upon him, he thinks that his shield may preserve him, and lo it is dashed to shivers and the blood gushes from the fountain and he is slain.

He that would use a shield must take care that it be a shield of proof. He who has true faith, the faith of God's elect, has such a shield that he will see the scimitars of his enemies go to a thousand splinters over it every time they smite the bosses thereof! And as for their spears, if they but once come in contact

with this shield, they will break into a thousand splinters, or bend like reeds when pressed against the wall—they cannot pierce it, but they shall themselves be quenched or broken in pieces.

You will say, how then are we to know whether our faith is a right faith and our shield a strong one? One test of it is, it must be all of one piece. A shield that is made of three or four pieces in this case will be of no use. So your faith must be all of one piece. It must be faith in the finished work of Christ, you must have no confidence in yourself or in any man, but rest wholly and entirely upon Christ, else your shield will be of no use.

Then your faith must be of heaven's forging or your shield will certainly fail you. You must have the faith of God's elect which is of the operation of the Holy Spirit who works it in the soul of man. Then you must see to it that your faith is that which rests only upon the truth, for if there be any error or false notion in the fashioning of it, that shall be a joint in it which the spear can pierce.

You must take care that your faith is agreeable to God's Word, that you depend upon true and real promises, upon the sure word of testimony and not upon the fictions and fancies and dreams of men. And above all, you must mind that your faith is fixed in the person of Christ, for nothing but a faith in Christ's divine person as "God over all, blessed for ever," and in His proper manhood when as the Lamb of God's Passover He was sacrificed for us—no other faith will be able to stand against the tremendous shocks and the innumerable attacks which you must receive in the great battle of spiritual life.

Look to your shield, man. Not so fast there with that painted God! Not so fast there with that proud heraldic symbol which has no strength in it. See to your shield. See if it be like the shields of Solomon which were borne before the king, each one made of gold. Or at least let them be like the shields of Rehoboam, every one of the best brass, so that there be found no wooden shield in your hand which may be dashed in pieces when most you need its help.

But to pass on—for we must not pause long on any one particular—faith is like a shield because it is of no use except it is *well-handled*. A shield needs handling and so does faith. He was a silly soldier who, when he went into the battle, said he had a shield but it was at home. So there are some silly professors who have a faith, but they have not got it with them when they need it. They have it with them when there are no enemies. When all goes well with them, then they can believe, but just when the pinch comes then their faith fails.

Now, there is a sacred art in being able to handle the shield of faith. Let me explain to you how that can be. You will handle it well if you are able to quote the *promises* of God against the attacks of your enemy. The devil said, "One day you shall be poor and starve." "No," said the believer, handling his shield well, "He has said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.'" "Bread shall be given thee and thy water shall be sure."

"Ay," said Satan, "but you will one day fall by the hand of the enemy." "No," said faith, "for I am persuaded that he that hath begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

"Ay," said Satan, "but the slander of the enemy will overturn you." "No," said faith, "he maketh the wrath of man to praise him; the remainder of wrath doth he restrain." "Ay" said Satan, as he shot another arrow, "you are weak." "Yes," said faith, handling his shield, "but 'my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.'"

"Ay," said Satan, "but your sin is great." "Yes," said faith, handling the promise, "but he is able to save to the uttermost them who come unto God by him." "But," said the enemy again, drawing his sword and making a tremendous thrust, "God has cast you off." "No," said faith, "He hates putting away, He does not cast off His people, neither does He forsake His heritage."

"But I will have you, after all," said Satan. "No," said faith, dashing the bosses in the enemy's jaws, "He has said, 'I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.'" This is what I call handling the shield.

But there is another way of handling it, not merely with the promises, but with the *doctrines*. "Ah," says Satan, "what is there in you that you should be saved? You are poor and weak, and mean and

foolish!” Up comes faith handling the shield doctrinally, this time, and said, “God hath chosen the base things of this world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought the things that are,” for “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.”

“Has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them who love him?” “Ay,” said he, “if God should have chosen you, yet after all you may certainly perish!” And then, Christian, handling his shield of faith doctrinally again, said, “No, I believe in the final perseverance of the saints, for is it not written, ‘The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger’?” “Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost,” and so forth.

So by well understanding the doctrines of grace, there is not a single doctrine which may not in its way, minister to our defense against the fiery darts of the wicked.

Then the Christian soldier ought to know how to handle the shield of faith according to the rules of observation. “Ay,” says the enemy, “your confidence is vain, and your hope shall soon be cut off.” “No,” says faith, “I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken.” “Yes, but you have fallen into sin, and God will leave you.” “No,” says faith, “for I saw David, and he stumbled, but yet the Lord surely brought him out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay.”

To use this shield in the way of observation is very profitable when you mark the way whereby God has dealt with the rest of His people, for as He deals with one, so He will deal with the rest, and you can throw this in the teeth of your enemy. I remember the ways of God. I call to remembrance His deeds of old. I say has God cast off His people, has He forsaken one of His chosen? And since He has never done so, I hold up my shield with great courage, and say He never will. He changes not. As He has not forsaken any, He will not forsake me.

Then there is another blessed way of handling this shield, and that is *experientially*. When you can look back, like the psalmist, to the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar, when you can return to those days of old, and call to remembrance your song in the night, when your spirit can say, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, why art thou disquieted within me. Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him.”

Why, brethren, some of us can talk of deliverances so many, that we know not where to end, scarcely do we know where to begin. Oh! what wonders has God done for us as a church and people! He has brought us through fire and through water. Men did ride over our heads, but hitherto all things have worked together for our good.

His glory has appeared amidst all the villainies and slanders of men to which we have been exposed. Let us handle our shield then, according to the rules of past experience, and when Satan tells us that God will fail us at the last, let us reply, “Now you lie, and I tell it to you to your face, for what our God was in the past, He will be in the present, and in the future, and so on even to the end.” Young soldiers of Christ, learn well the art of handling your shield.

Lastly, for the matter of the figure. The shield in olden times was an emblem of the warrior’s honor, and more especially in later days than those of Paul. In the age of chivalry, the warrior carried his escutcheon upon his shield. Now, faith is like a shield, because it carries the Christian’s glory, the Christian’s coat of arms, the Christian’s escutcheon. And what is the Christian’s coat of arms? Well, good Joseph Irons used to say it was a cross and a crown, with the words, “No cross, no crown”—a most blessed coat of arms too.

But methinks the Christian’s best coat of arms is the cross of his Savior—that blood-red cross, always stained, yet never stained; always dyed in blood, yet always resplendent with ruby brightness; always trodden on, yet always triumphant; always despised, yet always glorified; always attacked, yet always without resistance, coming off more than conqueror.

Some of the old Reformers used to have an anvil for their coat of arms, and a significant one too, with this motto, “The anvil hath broken many hammers.” By which they meant that they stood still, and just let men hammer at them till their hammers broke of themselves.

Another old coat of arms with some of the Reformers, was wont to be a candle with a great many enemies all puffing to blow it out, and though they all blew as hard as they could, yet the candle did but burn the brighter. Out of darkness came light, and from all their attacks, the light grew stronger.

This morning put your coat of arms upon your shield and lift it up. Let that blood-red cross be your choice, then when your battle is over, they will hang your escutcheon up in heaven, and when the old heraldries have gone, and the lions, and tigers, and griffins, and all manner of strange things have vanished from remembrance, that cross and your old shield indented with many a blow shall be honorable with many a triumph before the throne of God. Above all things, then, take the shield of faith.

II. I now leave the expounding of the figure in haste, and pass on to ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION. “Above all, taking the shield of faith.”

If you sent a servant upon an errand and you said to him, “Get so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so, but above all now see to such and such a thing.” He would not understand that he ought to neglect any, but he would perceive that there was some extra importance attached to one part of his mission.

So let it be with us. We are not to neglect our sincerity, our righteousness, or our peace, but above all, as the most important, we are to see to it that our faith is right, that it be true faith, and that it covers all our virtues from attack. The necessity of true faith is clearly explained by the text. Faith is here said to have a quenching power.

The ancients were wont to use small arrows, perhaps light cane arrows, which were tinged with poison. They would be called fiery darts, because they no sooner touched the flesh or even grazed the skin, than they left a fiery poison in the veins. Sometimes too they employed darts which were tipped with tow that had been dipped in some inflammable spirit, and were blazing as they flew through the air in order to set the tents of their antagonists on fire or burn down houses in besieged cities.

Now faith has a quenching power. It sees the temptation or the blasphemy, or the insinuation coming against it with poison and with fire in it to take away its life or to burn up its comforts. Faith catches the dart, not only receives it, but takes away its sting, and quenches the fire. Oh it is wonderful how God sometimes enables His people to live in the midst of temptations and tribulations as though they had none of them.

I believe that some of the martyrs when they were burned in the fire suffered hardly any pain, because the joy and peace which God gave them delivered them from the vehement heat. This I know. There are times when everybody is speaking well of some of us, and we are wretched by reason of the world’s fawnings. We do not want to be called “Son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” And yet there are other times when, though everyone speaks ill, our peace is like a river and our righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Truly at such times we can say, “Now I am in my proper place, this is where I should be—outside the camp, bearing the reproach of Christ.” The praise of man is deadly and damnable—his censure is goodly and godlike. Let it come, it cannot dishonor, it does but ennoble. Thus does it often happen that faith quenches the fire of attack, nay, more—turns the attack itself into comfort, extracts honey from the nettle, and sweets of joy from the wormwood and the gall. “Above all, take the shield of faith.”

Another commendation which the text gives is this—that faith alone, out of all the pieces of armor, is able to quench *all* the darts. The helmet can only keep off those that are aimed against the head. The foot is only and alone protected by the sandals. The breast alone is guarded by the breastplate, but faith protects against all attacks. Have all other virtues, but most of all have faith, for faith is the *Catholica*, it is the cure-all, it is the universal remedy, it is good not only for the heat of fever, but for the shaking of ague.

It is good for everything—good for the timid to make them strong, good for the rash to make them wise. It is good for those who are desponding to make them brave, and good for those who are too

daring, to make them discreet. There is no respect in which faith is not useful to us, therefore, whatever you leave out, see to your faith. If you forget all besides, be careful above all that you take the shield of faith.

And then, again, we are told above all to take the shield of faith, *because faith preserves from all sorts of enemies*. The fiery darts of the *wicked!* Does that refer to Satan? Faith answers him. Does it refer to wicked men? Faith resists them. Does it refer to one's own wicked self? Faith can overcome that. Does it refer to the whole world? "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." It matters not who the enemy may be, let the earth be all in arms abroad, this faith can quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. Above all then, take the shield of faith.

I know there are some ministers who seem to teach doubting as a duty. I cannot, I dare not. Above all, take the shield of faith. You know in the old Grecian contests the aim of the enemy was to get near enough to push aside the shield and then to stab under the armor. And that is what Satan wants to do. If he can knock aside the shield and get under it, then he can stab us mortally. Take care of your shield.

Do not live in perpetual unbelief. Be not always cast down. Pray unto your God till you can say, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." Oh! the old saints were not always doubting. "My beloved is mine and I am his," said Solomon. David said, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." "The LORD is my salvation." "The LORD is my shepherd." Job too could say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Paul could speak very confidently in full many places.

And why should we be content to say—"I hope, I trust"—when they said they knew, and were persuaded—all was well between God and their souls? Let it be so with us. Unbelief dishonors us, weakens us, destroys our comforts, prevents our usefulness. Faith will make us happy, and make us useful, and what is best of all, it will enable us to honor God on earth, and to enjoy His presence while yet we are in the low-lands of this present world.

III. Lastly, I have a word or two to say by way of conclusion to some POOR SINNER WHO IS COMING TO CHRIST, BUT WHO IS GREATLY VEXED WITH THE FIERY DARTS OF THE WICKED ONE.

You remember how John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress* represents Christiana and Mercy and the children coming to knock at the gate? When they knocked, the enemy who lived in a castle hard by sent out a big dog, which barked at them at such a rate that Mercy fainted, and Christiana only dared to knock again, and when she obtained entrance, she was all in a tremble. At the same time, hard by in the castle there were men who shot fiery darts at all who would enter, and poor Mercy was exceedingly afraid because of the darts and the dog.

Now, it generally happens that when a soul is coming to Christ the devil will dog him. As sure as ever he feels his need of a Savior and is ready to put his trust in Christ, it will be true of him as of the poor demoniac child—as he was a coming, the devil threw him down and tore him. Now, poor tempted sinner, there is nothing that can bring joy and peace into your heart but faith. Oh, that you may have grace this morning to begin to use this shield.

"Ah, sir," say you, "I have been looking within, and I cannot see anything that is good. I have been looking to my experiences, and I am afraid I have never felt as So-and-so did." That is the way to ruin yourself. Did you ever hear of a man who in cold winter's weather got warm by rolling on the ice, and saying, "I don't feel any heat as some people do." No, because he is looking in the wrong place to get the heat. If you expect to get anything in yourself, you expect more than Paul ever got, for he said after he had long known his Master, "I know that in me—(that is, in my flesh)—there dwelleth no good thing."

"Oh, sir," you reply again, "I find I am willing to do a great many things, but I cannot, and when I would be what I should be, I find a resistance somewhere within my own breast." Well and what of that? Even so did the apostle, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." The fact is you have no

business to look there. These things are not shields against Satan. What cares he for your experiences? Were they never so good he would still roar at you.

What he is afraid of is your faith. Throw down these things, then, which only encumber you and expose you, and lay your breast bare to his attacks, and take up the shield of faith. What has Satan said to you? “You are too great a sinner to be saved.” Well, quote this text, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out.”

I had a lesson this week in the case of a good Christian man, who through feebleness of mind has fallen at last into the deepest despair. I never met with a person in such awful despair as he was, and you cannot tell how it puzzled me to give him any sort of comfort. Indeed, I failed after all.

He said, “I’m too big a sinner to be saved.” So I said, “But the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” “Ay,” said he, “but you must remember the context, which says, ‘If we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.’ Now, I do not walk in the light,” said he, “I walk in the dark, and I have no fellowship with the people of God now, and therefore it does not apply to me.”

“Well,” I said, “but he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him.” “That is the only text,” he said, “I never can get over, for it says ‘to the uttermost,’ and I know I cannot have gone beyond that, and still it does not yield me comfort.” I said, “But God asks nothing of you but that you will believe Him, and you know if you have ever so feeble a faith you are like a child—the feeble hand of a child can receive, and that is the mark of a Christian—‘of His fullness have we all received’—and if you only receive with your hand, that is enough.” “Ay,” said he, “I have not the hand—I have not the hand of faith.”

“Very well,” I said, “you have the mouth of desire—you can ask, if you cannot receive with the hand.” “No,” said he, “I have not. I do not pray, I cannot pray. I have not the mouth of desire.” “Then,” I said, “all that is wanted is an empty place, a vacuum, so that God can put it in.” “Ah, sir,” said he, “you have got me there! I have a great deal of vacuum. I have an aching void—a vacuum. If ever there was an empty sinner in this world, I am one.” “Well,” I said, “Christ will fill that vacuum. There is a full Christ for empty sinners.”

Let me now say the same to you as I said to that poor man. All God wants is a vacuum. You have got a vacuum. This is not much to have, simply to be empty, to be pumped dry, to have nothing at all in you. But then, “He filleth the hungry with good things, and the rich he sendeth empty away.” All that is wanted is to be down there on the ground. It is not hard work. It is not to sit up, nor to stand up, nor to kneel, but to lie there at His feet. And when He sees the soul flat on its face before Him, He will have mercy upon him.

Now, soul, for that shield of faith. Say to Satan, “In the name of God I dare believe.” “You are a great sinner,” says he. “Yes, but I believe He is a great Savior.” “But you have sinned beyond all hope.” “No, there is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared.” “But,” he says, “you are shut out.” “No,” say you, “though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” “But, your disease is of long standing.” “Ay, but” say you, “if I but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be clean.” “But,” Satan says again, “how dare you? would you have the impudence?” “Well,” say you, “if I perish I will trust Christ, and I will perish only there.”

Have it in your soul fixed that in the teeth of everything, you will trust Christ—that be you such a sinner or no, still you will trust Christ—that whether Satan’s accusations be true or false, you mean to have done answering them and simply trust Christ.

Ah, soul, then you shall have such joy and peace that nothing shall be like it. O that you would believe on Jesus *now*! Leave your feelings, leave your doings, and your willings, and trust Christ. “I dare not,” says one. Dare it, man, dare it! You cannot do wrong for He commands you. This is the commandment, that you believe on Jesus Christ whom He has sent. “Oh! but I may be lost even if I do.” You will be lost if you do not, for “He that believeth not shall be damned.” “But I am afraid of being condemned if I were to believe.” “He that believeth not is condemned already.”

You are like the poor lepers at the gate—you are dying, and you say, “Let us fall to the Syrians; if they kill us we can but die, and if they save us alive we shall live.” Say, as Benhadad did concerning king Ahab, “We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings, but let us put ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.”

So say you to God, “I have heard that You are merciful—if there is a wretch out of hell that deserves to be in it, I am that sinner. If there is one who now feels that earth is provoked against him, and the ground says, swallow him up; and heaven is provoked against him, and cries, let the lightning flash destroy him; and the sea says, drown him; and the stars say, smite him with pestilence; and the sun says, scorch him; and the moon says, let him be blasted; and the mildew says, let me devour his crops; and fever says, let me cut off the thread of his life—if there be such a wretch out of hell, I am he.”

Yet say, but to God, “I believe in Your mercy, I believe in Your promise, I believe in your Son Jesus, I believe in His precious blood, and here I am, do with me as seems good in Your sight.” Say but this and you shall have mercy, and pardon, and peace.

My dear hearers, shall I say this for myself and not for you? Nay, but may God grant that many a score of you this morning may be led to put your trust in Him who has said, “They that trust in me shall never be confounded.”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.