

The Anatomy of the Conflict

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into the Christian warfare described in Ephesians chapter 6, emphasizing the need to be strong in the Lord and put on the whole armor of God to stand against the schemes of the devil. The speaker highlights the importance of faith as a shield to extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one, directing believers to focus on God's promises and character to combat doubts and distractions from the enemy.

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10, Romans 4:18, 1 Peter 5:7, James 2:26, Malachi 3:10, Hebrews 2:13, John 5:30, 1 Corinthians 10:13

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Faith as Protection"

Description

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Transcript

I'd have you turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 6. For the last several years, I've been preaching through the epistle to the Ephesian church, and coming over here, I was midway through chapter 5, and then one of the elders at Grace asked me if I might try to finish the Christian warfare found in Ephesians chapter 6 before I left. But I left sooner than I anticipated, and I was only able to do two of the messages there, which I did here via Zoom, and I'm wanting to pick this up. I recognize for some of you visiting, this is the fourth message that I'm bringing from this portion of Scripture, and there's likely going to be, I don't know, maybe six more, perhaps.

But we'll just remember, bring to our remembrance this portion of Scripture. Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10 through 18, we'll read that in its entirety. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints. Any of you like John Piper? Probably a lot of you.

You know, he had a yearly pastor's conference, and he got to the place where he began to have a fall conference that wasn't just specifically for pastors. I don't know if they still do that there at Bethlehem. But the first time they did it, Piper wanted the theme to be Jonathan Edwards.

Any of you ever heard any of the messages that came from that? There was a pastor from Oklahoma that he had speak, Sam Storms. Anybody know that name? You know that name. Sam Storms.

When he preached there, every message was flowing from what Jonathan Edwards had done. Sam Storms, addressing that conference, he told his largely reformed, somewhat Calvinistic crowd that if they wanted to study a subject that was largely ignored today, but that Jonathan Edwards spent a lot of time with, and if you read his works and you read his sermons, you'll find this to be absolutely so. Sam Storms said, Want to deal with something he dealt a lot with that doesn't get dealt with much today? Subject of angels.

Now look, we're dealing with rulers and authorities and powers and forces. These are angels. These are a category of angelic being because they're the fallen ones.

They're not elect. And yet, nevertheless, they're in that angelic realm. I want to read a few verses to you about the angelic realm.

There's going to be a common thread through here. So listen for what this is. Matthew 18.10. You don't turn to these.

Just listen to me because, well, you can turn there if you want, but I'm going to move through probably quickly. Jesus said, See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven, you've got to love this.

You've got to love this pronoun here. They're angels. Now, you don't want to despise one of these little ones, one of these Christians, because they're angels.

Not just angels. They're angels always see the face of my father who is in heaven. And, you know, when I was here before, I went through the churches there in Revelation 2 and chapter 3. We get used to it, but to the angel of the church at Ephesus.

The angel. I know some people want to argue that that's a pastor or something, but, again, like I pointed out then, that word angel, everywhere through the book of Revelation, it is always speaking about what we regard as angelic beings, not men. Listen to this.

Daniel, what was it? They're angels. And the angel, what you have is, Jesus is saying that, okay, you take Christians, they have angels. When you take Ephesus, they have an angel.

When you take Thyatira and Smyrna and Philadelphia and et cetera, they have their angels. You get this idea of angels being specifically designated. This shows up as well in the book of Daniel.

Listen to this. Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. Now here's what it seems like is happening.

Daniel prayed, and he asked for light from God. And you know what happened? An angel was dispatched. And you know what the angel's telling him? You know what? When you prayed that, God sent me.

There was a problem along the way, however. I didn't get here as fast as I might have liked to have gotten here because something happened. What happened? He says, the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me 21 days.

But Michael, one of the chief princes, this is angelic realm, folks. This is not talking about princes and kings in an earthly sense, in a man sense. This is angelic beings.

He's saying, I was dispatched to come to you to bring you this message, but there was someone called the prince of Persia that withstood me. And you know what? He kept withstanding me until Michael, and there's a debate about who this Michael is, but, I mean, obviously he's on the side of God. One of the chief princes came to help me, for I was left there with the kings.

Now it's plural. It was prince of the kingdom of Persia. Now it's the kings of Persia.

And then a little later down in Daniel 10, it says, now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia. And then I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. Who are these princes? You know what? It appears that what happens is you have angelic beings, namely these are the fallen ones that have designations.

They have allotted areas and spheres and domains which they have power. Rulers, authorities. You know, when we hear rulers and authorities and powers and forces, when we apply that to man, rulers and authorities, what do we think? We think of people that have power and they have certain domains.

They have certain kingdoms. They have certain realms. It's the same in the angelic realm.

And what you see is the good angels, they have designations. They have churches that they have designated to them. They have their angels.

I always see the face of my father. This idea of guardian angels is not necessarily foreign to Scripture, but the whole idea is angels being designated. You can also read about the unclean spirit.

The unclean spirit, he goes out from a person. He passes through waters, places. He seeks rest.

He finds none. He says, I'm going to return to my house. My house.

In other words, there was a place where I used to dwell. You see, this is very specific. When Jesus encountered the man with the legion of demons, he said, what's your name? Legion were many.

But, you know, there was a given group of demons that held possession there. They have homes. There's places where they abide.

But my point is this. My message today is called the anatomy of the conflict. I want you just to think about how all of this works.

And I would say this. I think that just as much as God designates certain angelic beings to guard his people, they're all ministering spirits. And you know what? Sam Storms is right.

We don't like to deal with this. Reformed people do not like to talk about angels and demons. Not a whole lot.

You won't hear it. And yet, Jonathan Edwards, you know, 250 years ago, he had no problem with it. Why didn't he have any problem with it? Well, because he was a pastor that wanted to be biblical.

Folks, angels are all over your Bibles. Have you ever noticed that? And yet, listen for the reformed preachers that do much talking about them. I'm not saying there aren't some, and I'm not saying that you can't find that.

But what we have, very likely, is you have angels that God has designated to you, to minister to you. And I don't know how all that works experientially, experimentally. I don't know what that means.

I don't know how that changes what we experience in this life. But you know they're there, and you know they're ministering, and you know that their angels is very much a biblical concept. I think that angels are probably assigned to churches.

I think that that is what is being said, the angel of the church at Ephesus. I do not think that it would be wrong to think that there is, on the good side of things, the elect angels, that there are forces, there are powers, there are principalities on that side that have been assigned to this very church. I believe that you probably have dominions of power that are specifically assigned to Manchester, on both sides.

I mean, there's a battle here. This is a battleground. And I know that the world no longer believes in such things.

They don't believe in angels, demons, the devil. But you know what? Scripture makes no apology for these things. It just sets it forth how it is.

And it seems that these forces are specifically giving their attention. I think that the reality is that there are probably specific demons that are dispatched to you and to your family and to this church. We see this kind of network in Scripture.

Anyway, the title of my message, The Anatomy of the Conflict. What is the anatomy? Well, you start getting in there and you start looking at the organs. You're looking at the pieces and the parts.

You take a car apart and you look at all the components. You look at all the different. That's what we're wanting to do with this battle right now.

What I want you to do is think. Think what Scripture says. Let's go beyond the veil.

Something is happening around us. We're dealing with the anatomy of the conflict. And what I'm wanting us to really think about is the enemy.

How is it that the enemy works? He's very real. He's very much here. He's very much seeking to do what he does.

And so here's the question that I have. We can talk about the fact that, oh, you know what? There may be demons that are specifically focusing their attention on us right now. Listen, the fact that when I said this before, five to ten years ago, you all had a testimony that reached us.

And basically our church in San Antonio was very evangelistic. But you all had a reputation over here. You're out on the streets and you're preaching.

And I know God used that. And things happened. And you know what? There's a desire on my part to resurrect that and to fan flames into that.

And I'll guarantee you this, that the devil is very aware of this church and has been the whole time this church has existed, very aware that I've come here, very aware of each of you individually. So how does he work? We see Paul is telling us that we wrestle against these forces. And so the question is, what can they do to us? Okay, they're here.

We're told that they're here. We're told even in heavy-duty language like cosmic powers and spiritual forces. That's heavy language.

So they're here. But what can they do to you? I mean, how do they get to us? We know they're real. We know they're here.

We know that they scheme. That's here in the text. You see it right there in verse 11.

We stand against the schemes. We know they scheme against us. We know they're.

But how do they engage us? How do we know that they're there? I mean, what's the difference in life whether they were there or whether they weren't there? What would that look like? I mean, the truth is, Christian, we don't really understand properly our own personal experience apart from this because things happen to us that are precisely a result of these forces. Look, lay it down. If you're a Christian and you walk through this world, you are engaging this.

But what is it? What is it that we engage? What is it that happens? What is it that is real in our experience? See, that's what I want us to recognize. I want us to be. There are some people, you know this.

There are some people, the devil made me do it. The devil this, the devil that. It seems like you get into charismatic circles.

You get into Pentecostal circles. Everything is blamed on the devil. It's like a lot of personal responsibility gets shifted.

But what is it? I'm afraid that in the Reformed community, there tends to be more of a, if not a denial, just kind of an ignoring. So what is it? How can we identify and say, ooh, I think that's devilish and I need to respond appropriately. So what is it that we actually experience? Look at verse 16, Ephesians 6.16. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish.

Now, this is what I want you to see. The flaming darts. These are fiery arrows of the evil one.

A flaming dart. Now, picture this. See, this is metaphor.

It's not an actual fire, and it's not an actual dart or arrow or javelin. It's metaphor. It means something's happening in the spiritual realm that is like a fiery dart.

So imagine the devil. He's hurling something at you with an intent to hit you, to stick you with this arrow that's on fire. This is real.

But what does this look like in real life? What is this? I mean, the flaming dart is not an actual flaming dart. It's something in the spiritual realm that's like that, but it's not physically actually that. An understanding of this is of vital importance to us with regards to spiritual warfare.

It doesn't matter if you're young, if you're old, if you're male, you're female. It doesn't matter if you have an office in the church or you don't. I'll tell you this.

You name the name of Christ, you are a target of this. So if we want to figure out what these fiery darts are, or perhaps it can be helpful for us to figure out what sort of armor protects us from these fiery darts. And we're told.

It's kind of like telling me that. I mean, look, Sam has a World War II bomb shelter out in his side yard. Anybody ever seen that? That's the first bomb shelter, I think.

They didn't bomb the U.S., so we didn't have those. Now, we have tornado shelters is what they have. But OK, if you tell somebody, you know, your bomb shelter needs to have thick walls.

Well, see, that's the defense, right? The bomb shelter is the defense. The offensive aspect is the bomb. If you tell somebody it needs to be thick, that gives you an idea.

Oh, these are things, you know, that drop out in the sky, and they've got the ability to blow things up. And so I need to have it so thick to protect me. It tells me something about what I'm dealing with.

If you simply come in and you say, hey, that sport, you need a helmet. You know what? That immediately tells me something about the offensive nature of what that sport is like. It tells me this is probably a contact sport.

I mean, something's happening here. So if I look at what defends me from these fiery darts, what is it? Well, you see it there in the text. The flaming darts of the evil one.

Pall pictures of the devil are not the shield of faith. The shield of faith is the defensive aspect here. Faith.

Now, here's what I want to ask you. What does faith extinguish? We say from the text, well, it extinguishes fiery darts. Well, yeah, yeah.

I mean, we see that there. But what does faith quench? I mean, ask it another way. What is faith against? What is faith opposed to? What is it that it counters? What does it contradict? What does faith contradict? What is it opposed to? What is it against? Unbelief.

Of course. Unbelief. So if we're thinking about the fiery darts, doubt.

See, this is the thing as you're walking through life. Doubts come in. That's what faith addresses.

That's what it answers to. If there's anything the devil wants to hurl at us, it's doubts. He wants us to question.

I'll tell you what he wants you to question. He often wants you to question whether you're saved. He wants you to question whether Christ has any interest in you.

He wants you to question whether you're a Christian. He wants you to question whether God loves you. He wants to put these doubts in there.

He wants you to doubt God's promises. He doesn't want you to depend on him. He doesn't want you to think you can step out in faith and do this.

He wants you to question God. You know, he came along in the beginning. and put that little spin on who God is.

Oh, God, He doesn't want you to eat the fruit because He's got an ulterior motive. He knows that when you eat it, something good's gonna happen. He's trying to withhold that from you.

You see, God isn't for you. These are the things He wants to put that doubt out there. Let me ask you something.

Where do doubts happen? Do they happen? Yeah, not in your feet. They happen up here. They happen in the head.

Listen to this. You probably know this text. Just hear it.

The Apostle Paul says to Christians, and I mentioned this text in one of the former messages here, but I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, now listen, an apostle to Christians, I am afraid that your thoughts are going to be led astray. Oh, no, you wanna get that because you know what? These doubts that come in, they come into the thoughts. And you know what the devil wants to do with your thoughts? He wants to lead them somewhere.

That's what these fiery doubts. Fiery doubts, when they come, they can be very alarming. They can stagger you.

But I'll tell you what they're always meaning to do. They're always meaning to take your thoughts to the fear, to the anxiety, and make you distrust and doubt God. It is meant to move the thoughts away from God.

And that's how he did it in the garden. Oh, God doesn't have your best interests in mind. God wants to keep you down.

Look, that fruit over there would do you so much good. And you see, subtly, what he's wanting them to do is not think so much about what God said because after all, God can't really be thought so highly of anymore. I can put him out of my thoughts as I'm deciding whether I'm gonna eat from this tree because I've just been enlightened to the fact that he doesn't really care about me.

If he really cared about my greatest good, he'd let me eat that fruit. And the devil just told me so. And you see, this is what he's trying to do.

Move it away from a sincere, a pure devotion to Christ. I'll tell you this. Jesus said, abide in me.

Have you ever considered where that happens? You're not plugged in by a cord. You don't have a rope tied around you that ties you to him. Do you know how you abide in Christ? Right here.

You abide in Christ by thinking on Christ, by gazing at the glory of Christ here in your thoughts, coming off of a page of scripture. You're communing with him. You're keeping him and his promises, his person, his character here.

And you know what the devil does? He shoots these, bang, and he hits you. And as you go through your day, when you find things happen in the thoughts, look, I don't know how it happens, but you see it does happen. You know what scripture says in 2 Corinthians chapter four.

It says he blinds the minds of unbelievers. Now I know that's talking about unbelievers, not Christians, but my point is this. He operates in the realm of the mind.

You say, oh, he comes to attack the church. He comes to attack us as individuals. Even in heaven, a guy come up front.

Oh, there's been times I've had to have people sit down. You wouldn't believe all the things that have happened through the years that I've experienced. But you know what? Things like that, they're suddenly a distraction.

They move you off. They take the mind. This is where his craft is.

He's constantly moving, trying to take us away. Now listen, I wanna show you the subtlety of this. I wanna show you this in action.

Because sometimes it's almost imperceptible. I had Sam read from Matthew chapter four. I want you to turn there because of course this is the temptation of Christ.

Matthew chapter four. Matthew four, then Jesus was led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Now, if I simply asked you this question, of course where we are and what we're talking about, right? At this very moment, this dead giveaway.

But if I said, what was the devil's greatest challenge? It wasn't Adam. It wasn't David we saw last week. He numbered Israel.

What was his greatest challenge? The Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God himself. Greatest challenge because you know what happens when he gets to the end of the ministry and he's getting ready to go to the cross? He said, the ruler of this world is coming and he what? You know what it says? He has nothing in me. In other words, the devil could never even find a crack.

Nothing, nothing. But here's the thing. You can be certain that in trying to bring Christ down, he knew it.

He was not dealing with a lightweight. You know how easy he's gotten us to fall? But when he came up, like you can be certain he brought out his hottest arrows, the most flaming, the most sinister, the most dastardly, the most devious and deceptive fiery darts he's ever produced. And yet, I have a feeling that when you've read these temptations, if you've ever really thought about them, you probably thought, seriously, devil, this is the best you had to throw at him? But see, you only think that if you don't really see

what's going on.

Look here. I'm not only gonna deal with the first one in any depth. But look at this.

Look at verse two. "After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, if you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Now, here's one thing I find interesting.

Both with Adam through Eve, I recognize, and with Christ, he dealt with food. That is interesting. And I'll tell you this, where's the battle take place? Here.

But bodily appetites affect our thought life a lot. And you know that's true. They're tied together integrally.

And notice, so here's our Lord. He's a man. He's fasted for 40 days and he's hungry.

It says he's hungry. He is 40 days hungry. But what's wrong with eating? What's wrong with eating? Certainly he'd eaten.

He'd eaten with tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners. I mean, what's wrong with eating? Now, I'll tell you this, Adam and Eve were strictly told not to eat from that tree. So when the devil comes along, he's like, eat of the tree, you won't die.

But God, we don't really see where God ever told his son, and there may have been some private communication between them, but never told them you can't eat bread. Not even that you can't eat bread that was created miraculously. You know, he did turn five loaves and two fish into enough to feed 5,000 men, plus the women and children.

And undoubtedly he ate of that too. Was there really anything wrong with eating bread? Was there really anything wrong with eating bread that had been made miraculously? Certainly he had done that. But what's going on here? Listen, if you are the son of God, he doesn't say since you are, if you are.

What's happening there? Was Jesus the son of God? Yes, certainly he was. Did he have the power and the ability to turn stones into bread? I mean, the whole universe is upheld by the word of his power, we read in Hebrews chapter one. So certainly he's capable, he's able to do that.

What's the devil doing here? And I'll tell you this, in just a few minutes, the angels come and minister to him. You see that right here in the text. It says that when the devil left him in verse 11, behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

And what is that? I mean, he's hungry. If they came to minister to him, they came to serve him. They undoubtedly fed him.

And so here's the thing, he's fasted for 40 days. Now he's right at the end, in just a few moments after this little ordeal goes on here. Well, it's really a major ordeal.

I say little in probably the amount of time that it took. He's at the end of fasting for 40 days. God, his father is gonna send these angels to minister to him and feed him anyway in just a few minutes.

He is the son of God. He can turn stones into bread and it would be bread that he made. How is this? It's like, I remember as a young believer, I'd read through these and I felt like, wow, I felt much worse

temptations than this.

Yeah, that's only my ignorance speaking. One of the things that I want you to recognize, and you will not grasp what's happening here unless you recognize this. Oftentimes, very well-meaning theologians, they will say, oh look, he calmed the storm.

You see his divinity came out. Well, undoubtedly you've been exposed to this truth, but I'm gonna hammer this again. Just listen to, I'm gonna go through a number of verses.

You don't have to turn to all these, but just listen to them because it's gonna help you see something. In Matthew 12, 28, this is, you remember, they said Jesus casts out demons by the prince of demons, Beelzebul, Beelzebub. Jesus responded by saying this.

If it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. In the Luke's account, he says, if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons. Now, have you noticed this? When Jesus said, you're right, I do cast out demons, but he said, I want you to know this.

I do it by the finger of God. I do it by the Holy Spirit. Now that's key because when Jesus came into this world, it says he emptied himself.

It says he does not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. That doesn't mean that he gave up his deity. It doesn't mean that he stopped being God, but what it means is that he does not take his deity as the prerogative to simply do what God can do.

He emptied himself. He humbled himself in becoming a man. What you need to recognize is he became a man.

In Hebrews 2, it specifically says of Christ that he puts his trust in the father. If you've never read that, you can go there and read it. In Hebrews 5, it speaks to us about his weeping and his tears and his prayers to his father as one who could keep him from death.

I'll tell you, some people take that and they go to the garden of Gethsemane. I think that's only one example. I think what you have is Jesus.

You need to recognize what's happening. The devil's trying to take him down because if he can take him down, he defeats all of us as well. All of our salvation is wrapped up in his being victorious.

Our very souls hang on him winning this battle. Christ lived by faith as a man. And scripture speaks this way everywhere.

He says, remember when the man was lowered down through the roof, he said this, the power of the Lord was with him to heal. It doesn't say the power of God came out of him. The power of God was with him to heal.

It speaks this way in Acts. You know how, this is to Cornelius, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit, with power. It says that Jesus went about doing good and healing for God was with him.

You see how he did his healing? Because God was with him. Because the spirit had been given him. How is it we do miracles? How is it that we do anything? Growth in the Christian life, sanctification in the Christian life, being used as a fish for men, making disciples.

You have to recognize that Jesus came to live just like all the offspring of Abraham, as a man. And he emptied himself of his divine prerogatives to step in. And he said, Jesus himself said, I can do nothing on my own.

He said that in John five. In John six, he says, I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me. Jesus is a man and he emptied himself and he humbled himself.

And what you have to recognize is a man who came taking the position of lowliness, a position of suffering, a position of obedience. He came to do his father's will. And see what the devil's doing is what he always does.

He wants to take Christ off from a full trusting of his father. If you're the son of God, all men cannot take that. All you have to do is take the guy on your, what? City, Manchester city.

They're the second best, right? Take the guy in the team that can kick the ball the furthest. I mean, let's say he's kicked the ball all the way across that football field and you know he can do it. Do you know what men can't tolerate in this world? If somebody comes along and says, oh, I don't think you can do that.

You see, that's what the devil's saying. If I don't think, Jesus, show me your power. Show me what you can do.

You see what he's trying to do? Jesus came and said, I can do nothing of my own. I came trusting my father. I will do nothing.

I do not, I am not laying hold of my deity. I am God, but that is where he let go. He did not lose his deity in doing that, but he definitely gave up his prerogative as God.

Could he have turned those stones? Yes, but he came. Do you know what the devil's doing? The devil's saying, do what you can do. It doesn't matter that the angels, it doesn't matter your father's gonna send that angel in a little bit to feed you.

Do what you can. If you're the son of God, if you're really this, I mean, come on, come off that path of lowliness and suffering and obedience. I mean, God's gonna understand.

You're hungry, you've been fasting for 40 days. Certainly your father will approve of this. I mean, he's gonna send food in just a little bit anyway.

What would be wrong with you doing this? And I, after all, I have doubts you can even do it. You see, if you said that to a guy in Manchester United or Manchester City, you said to them, I don't think you can really kick the ball that far. You know what, what's he gonna do? He's gonna go, you know, we've got this, they do this thing over in the US.

I don't know if they do it here. Let's take a really famous and very gifted basketball player. And they'll put one of them, they'll stretch, you know, bald heads on him.

And they'll put wrinkles all over his face and they'll do them all up and they'll make him look like he's a 60-year-old man. And you know, he kind of walking hunched over and he kind of, he's taking short steps and he comes out on some neighborhood basketball game. He's like, I wanna play.

And you know, everybody's laughing because they're filming this thing secretly. And they make commercial, they've done different things like this. Well, you know what? That professional basketball player that's now made himself look old.

Do you think they could possibly, he could go out there and act like an old man the whole time? Of course not. He would never do that. Men wouldn't do that.

They're gonna go out there and what's he gonna do? He's gonna start dunking. He's gonna start out dribbling all the other guys. He's gonna put on a show because that's what men do.

You come along and now Christians I recognize are in a different category. There's a humility that God has breathed into it. Still, we're very vulnerable to this, but you have to see this for what it is.

In every single one of these, he is trying to very craftily move Christ off even at just the slightest from trusting his father. Now look, we're talking about the battle. We're talking about the anatomy of this thing.

Where does it happen? It happens here. How does it happen? It happens through fire darts. What are we supposed to respond with? We respond with faith.

I'll tell you this, the Lord Jesus Christ, he answered three times from the book of Deuteronomy. And if you have eyes to see, every answer brought his father squarely into focus. In other words, devil, I am not going to let my mind be led astray from full devotion to my father.

Now, this is key. This is one of the reasons why you've got to be in the word of God on a regular basis, because you've got to keep what's in this book and these promises and the character of this God going through your head. If you fail to get in this book on a regular basis, you know what's gonna happen? We're forgetful people.

We're slow, we're forgetful, we're backward oftentimes, and you know what happens? We forget. It is so helpful for you to be reminded over and over and over, you do not have a God that's trying to keep you down. The devil wants you to think this.

He wants to put, oh, those fiery darts, they can come at us, lust, jealousy, murderous, vengeful. It just, and you know the thing is, a thought can come in the mind that is, it does nothing else, but it just distracts. It's like a thought comes to your mind and you find that your mind begins to follow it.

You may have been praying. You may be reading scripture. You may be reading scripture and all of a sudden a thought comes in your mind and you just read 14 verses and you recognize, I don't know a thing I just read because I've just been thinking about something else.

Where'd that thought come from? You see, in our practical experience, you may think, oh, it was just me. And you know what the devil's always right there to say, it was just you. It's coming out of your own heart, these wicked thoughts, that vile thought you just had.

It can be amazing. It's like, Lord, I've walked with you for 30 years. How could a thought like that even come into my head? And he's right there to say, yeah, that came from you.

And you know what? Because you're thinking things like that, you're too dirty to go to Christ. In fact, you probably not even see it. You see, it's in the thoughts.

And so what happens, brethren, you have to recognize that what's happening when you go into the word of God on a regular basis, and when you gather with God's people, where you're speaking to each other, exhorting each other, comforting each other, encouraging one another, stirring up one another from the promises of this book and from the character of God. Do you recognize that when we gather together, you don't wanna just shoot the breeze. We need to be talking about things that are profitable.

One of the things you want, you want to find out where people are at. You wanna try to encourage them. You wanna try to get people's minds on the right things.

You see, if you drift from this book, you open the door to all manner of worldliness. You open the door to your thoughts being distracted. And when those, don't you see, your strength is found in your God.

And the way we connect is by faith. It's the shield of faith. And that shield happens here.

Where do you believe? You believe here. It's taking God at his word. That's what faith is all about.

That's how this thing works itself out in all practicality. We know the schemes of the devil. The devil hurls these fiery thoughts at us.

And they, look, they do great damage. And as much as they do distract, he tries to make you fear. He tries to fill you full of anxieties.

He tried, you know what he likes to whisper in your ear? Look how God's blessing those people over there. How come he's not doing that for you? Oh, his craft and power are great. Armed with cruel hate, he comes in.

And I'll tell you, you've got to take all these anxieties. You need to read on a regular basis. You need to hear Peter say, cast all your anxieties on him.

Because he's going to come, he's going to constantly try to unsettle. That's what these thoughts are meant to do. Unsettle you, fill you with doubt, distract, move you.

It was so subtle with Christ. If you're the son of God, I mean, prove it. I don't think you are.

Oh, he knew full well. Those demons said, we know who you are. They knew full well.

It's, see, he knows full well who we are. He comes in. I want you to turn to Romans.

Well, this will be the last primary portion of scripture we'll look at as we wrap up. You know, things have gone a bit long today. Romans chapter four.

Because we're talking about a shield of faith. And so I'm just going to think about faith, faith. Romans chapter four, verse 18.

This is where we hear about Abraham's faith. I love this portion of scripture. Christian, faith takes the fire out of these arrows.

You've got to hold that shield up so that those fiery darts hit there. Because the whole point is, if you don't have the shield, if you don't have the faith, they hit you. And if they hit you, they're meant to do damage and they're meant to take you down.

They're meant to take you out of the fight and out of the race. And these kinds of arrows, they can burst upon us and they can do tremendous damage to us. We've got to be ready to meet these arrows.

And they'll come at us from every single direction imaginable. Biblical faith. You know what scripture says? Faith is the assurance of things that are hoped for.

It is the confidence or the conviction of things unseen. Now think with me about this. Where is faith aimed? What is the object of faith? Faith, things unseen.

Okay, what is it that I can't see that my faith should be directed at? Well, looking at this account of Romans of Abraham is very helpful, very useful. Romans 4, verse 18. Now, what I want you to ask yourself this, where is Abraham's faith directed? Look, by faith we're saved.

But scripture doesn't just say that. Scripture also says that we are saved. This is found in 1 Peter 1. It says that we are kept by the power of God through faith.

You see, this is how we make it to the end. This is why this young man isn't right. Because this is what we're told in scripture.

I am kept by the power of God. Okay, I defy anybody to be stronger than that power. Scripture says I'm kept by the power of God.

How? Through faith. You see, God keeps me believing. But who do you say I am? Well, you're the Christ, the son of God.

Peter, flesh and blood did not teach you that. My father taught you that. You see, when God teaches us this, he upholds the faith.

And you remember what happened to Peter? The devil's commanded to sift you. He wants you, Peter. And I prayed for you that your faith not fail.

You see, we have a God and we have an intercessor, a Messiah, who's praying for us, keeping us, upholding us in this faith. And I want you to see this faith. I want you to see where it's anchored, where it's directed.

In hope, Romans 4.18, in hope, he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations as he had been told. So shall your offspring be. And look at this.

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body. In other words, where was his eyes? His eyes would look on self sometimes when he considered his body, that's looking at yourself. And he said his faith didn't weaken.

Well, what was so interesting about that was he was 100 years old and he'd look over at Sarah and she's 90. And you know what? 100-year-old men, 90-year-old wives don't have babies. Plain and simple.

It doesn't happen. It doesn't happen here. It doesn't happen in San Antonio.

There's no secret place where that happens. It didn't happen back then. I mean, you go back to the days when people lived to a thousand years old, maybe it happened, but here's... So he didn't weaken in faith when he considered things that you would think would weaken him in faith, which things that physically

speaking would say, Abraham, this isn't possible.

Which what was wrong with his body? It was as good as dead since he was about 100 years old when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. Of course it was barren, 90 years old. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God.

Look where it's directed. No unbelief. In other words, there's faith.

It didn't make him waver. That's what unbelief does. It makes you waver.

That's what the devil's trying to get you to do. Waver. Waver off your confidence.

Waver off this assurance of this thing that is hope for this conviction of what you can't see. He's trying to make you waver or go astray. This is the idea, take you off course.

So it hits you with that arrow, flaming javelin, sticks you. Suddenly you're disrupted. You're distracted.

It's meant to frighten. It's meant to disrupt our thinking, take our thoughts. But look, no unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.

This is key. I'll tell you what the devil doesn't want you doing. The devil doesn't want you glorifying God.

He doesn't want you close to God, plugged into God and trusting God. He hates that. Fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised and you know what the devil wants to do too? He wants to put a different weapon in your hands.

So he'll come along and he'll say, oh, let me tell you what faith is. Don't take the devil's definitions of faith. And he loves to do that.

Faith, you know how often I find people who begin to think faith is believing that you're saved. Faith is believing that I believe. No, true faith never turns in upon itself.

True faith doesn't keep its eyes on itself. That's where the devil wants your eyes. Oh, look at your condition.

Look at your weakness. Look at you. Putting the eyes anywhere.

So you know what? Some people say, I've heard this. Maybe you've heard this too. Faith, faith is like sitting in that chair.

You just need confidence to sit down there. It's just the same way you trust that that chair holds you up. You need to trust Christ.

Reject that. You know what? That's just not even true. None of you sat down in the chair thinking, oh, you know, oh, I'm sitting in this chair.

What does it say here? It says, in hope, he believed against hope. Because he looked at his body and said, uh-uh, my body's as good as dead, I'm 100 years old. You see what this is like? This is like looking at that chair and the thing is on one leg.

And you're like, uh, hope against hope. Nobody sat down in the chair you're in right now and said, you know, hope against hope, I'm gonna sit in this chair. That's not it.

You know what? The reality is people sit in chairs all the time and they don't collapse. Human observation tells you, hey, you know, there's sufficient wood there. This is not a matter of faith.

It's no more than you get in your car and you're not walking by faith that it won't blow up on you. Oh, you hope it won't blow up on you, but you know they typically don't blow up. I mean, it's a statistical thing.

You can hit it with mathematical analysis that you know what, the likelihood that my chair's gonna collapse when I go down after the service to sit down or the car that whoever takes me home blows up. It just doesn't happen. Well, it could happen and it does happen.

I've seen chairs, but listen, that's not what we're dealing with. We're not talking about some statistical analysis. We're talking about, look, I am faced with something that is going to fail 100% of the time unless God and what He promised comes through.

You see where the eyes are? And I'll tell you this, faith. If you really wanna bolster that faith, that shield, faith in Scripture is an active thing. Faith, you know what you read about in Romans? The obedience of faith.

You know what James said? Faith without works is dead. Here's what I want you to recognize. The more you seek to live a life where you're seeking to do what is humanly impossible, but you've got some promise of God to go on to do this thing.

The more you live in that realm, the stronger and broader your shield will be. You know what, brethren? People who are passive and don't put God to the test. Have you ever read Malachi 3? He says, put me to the test.

That's what we wanna do. We wanna put them to the test. The more we are involved taking God at His word, keeping our eyes fixed on Him, the more we do that.

This is the very thing the devil hates. He wants you to doubt. Faith points to God, it doesn't point to self.

Faith never turns in that way. Faith keeps the character of God. You know what? When the devil comes along and says, oh, you know, God's got ulterior motives.

He knows if you eat that fruit, it's like, no, don't devil away with you. You know what? When I was yet a sinner, He didn't spare His own son. You're gonna tell me now He's not gonna give me the greatest things for my making it to the end when He didn't spare His son? You see, we need to be reminded.

In this recent study I did in Isaiah, it's like God's kindness, God's, do you recognize in scripture after the things that we've done, God literally invites? It's God, God expresses Himself in some places, like, you know how He does, that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. It's like His appeals, come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden. Christ in John 5 just blows me away.

I have these different things that witness, my work's witness, my father witnesses, I witness, John the Baptist witnesses, Moses witnessed, scripture's witness to me. John the Baptist witnesses to me, and he said, I don't need man's witness, but I say these things to you that you might be saved. I think He came with such condescension to man, and you begin to read these, cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares

for you.

Don't be anxious. He says, your father, He knows what you have need of before you ask. Consider the grass and consider the animals, consider the birds.

I mean, see, you have to be frequently looking at that, the character of the God of scripture. And so when the devil comes along, I can tell you this, it's who's gonna condemn, for it's God who justifies. You know what, no matter what thought comes into your head, no matter how wicked, how murderous, how vicious, how malevolent, how lustful, how dirty, how filthy, how backward, I want you to know this.

You have a God who says, come. I'm a God who cleanses. He says, you simply, you confess these things, and He's faithful and just to forgive.

And we have a God that says, the door's open. We have been given access to boldly approach His throne. He bids us come.

We have confidence, boldness, to be able to approach and the door is open. The devil's gonna be right there to tell you it's not the case, and the door is not open to you. Brethren, God help us.

I just wanna encourage you, live in the realm of texts like God is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond what we ask or think. He tells us things like that, God of the impossible. He tells us things like that because He wants us to know we can venture on Him.

He's the God of the impossible. We wanna live in realm like Abraham. I'll tell you what happens when you cast yourself upon the Lord in ways, I mean, you come up against sin.

I can conquer this. Why? Because the God of scripture is my God. I can put to death the deeds of the body.

Why? Because I have the Holy Spirit. I can cleanse myself from every defilement of the body and the spirit. Why? Because scripture tells me to do so.

And wherever God tells me to do something in scripture, it's a promise. There are promises and there are commands. And I'll tell you this, every command is a promise.

Because if He tells me to do it, certainly He says without me, I can do nothing. And yet He's telling me to do it. So that means that in Christ, I'm gonna be able to pull this off.

And so brethren, we wanna live in that realm. We wanna constantly be saying, what are the promises of scripture? If God promises me this, I wanna live on this promise. And I want there to be obedience.

I want there to be works. Faith without works is dead. I wanna put this thing in action.

Because the more we're in situations where we're having to trust Him, just like with Abraham. You know what? We wanna bring forth children too. Two of the things that I've specifically asked for, and I wanted the church to pray for over in San Antonio.

They said, I said, pray that God give us souls and pray that God give us labors. Neither of those I can produce in myself. Now there are things I can do to try to help produce them, but it'll never happen unless God works through us.

We wanna put ourselves there. We wanna step out. Even when it comes to things like buildings.

We wanna live in that realm where, now we're not trusting the checkbook. You know what? The devil's gonna come along and he sticks those fiery darts in your mind to distract you away from trusting the God of scripture to take you off of his promises. This is the anatomy of the deal.

This is how, I don't know how he speaks. In the garden, he spoke audibly to Eve. In the wilderness, he spoke audibly to Christ.

How does he speak to us? I don't know. How does that thought just jump into my mind? I don't know. It's not audible, but you know it happens.

You know it happens. There may be mystery in how it happens, but it's safe to say this. The devil has access to our thought life.

I'm not saying he knows everything you think. I'm saying he's got the ability to interject thoughts into what you're thinking. He's not omniscient.

God knows everything you think. I don't know what the devil knows. I'll tell you this.

He only knows what God gives him permission to know. But this is how this thing works. And so you can see, he's gonna subtly come, he's gonna put thoughts there to distract you.

Brethren, this is the battle. This is the great battle. That we're walking and not allowing the thoughts to be led astray from that pure and focused devotion to Christ.

Christ is our savior, not just in the beginning. Christ saves us day by day. Every day, he intercedes for us.

He saves us to the uttermost because he lives forever. We need saving. We need saving yesterday and we need it today.

We need it tomorrow. If you're abiding in him, remember that's where it happens. It happens here.

He says, abide in me. My word abides in you. I mean, that's the secret to the prayer life.

Then you ask whatsoever you will, it'll be done to you. Abide in Christ. It means we live there.

We live. Yes, there are times when we need R&R in this world. We need rest.

We need relaxation. But I'm telling you, be careful. Be careful with your social media.

Be careful with TV. Be careful with movies. Be careful with YouTube.

Be careful with these things. Because if you find that you are allowing yourself, oh, you know what? I deserve a little bit of rest. If you're allowing some kind of rest, some kind of relaxation, something to come into your life where it's almost like you're allowing this protected reserve portion of your life where you can step into it and it kind of clears your thinking about the Lord and his Christ and the promises of God out of your mind and scriptural truth.

I mean, we really need... Listen, if you're watching a documentary, it ought to be able to take you back to what God's doing in Providence, what God's doing in the world. If you're watching one on animals, it ought

to, you know, what's God doing in creation? Everything that you allow in your life needs to be some channel to keep you focused on God, to be God-sensitive, God-mindful. You're seeing him in the way the world works, even in governments, even in who he allows to be put into.

You know, you can consider these things. You can see what's happening in the news, but you've got to recognize God is central. This whole history is working out because God is bringing things to pass exactly as they are.

You have those in positions of power and leadership because God is bringing all this to pass and things are happening. Things happen in the creation as he's made them and designed them. But in everything, there's got to be an abiding.

There's got to be a staying central and staying focused. And I'll tell you, I'll say it again. As soon as he interjects those thoughts, he's gonna tell you, oh, look what you just thought.

You can't go to Christ like that. You've got to do penance. You've got to clean up your life before you can go.

Just recently, I asked a young man that I know he's in the family. And I said, so I hear that your parents, he was going to his parents' church, but he's wanted to come to our church. And his parents gave him liberty, gave him license to come.

And I asked him about that and he said, well, there's certain things in his life that he's got to clean up before he thinks he can come. And that's just coming to the church. But how much the devil puts that in our minds about even going beyond that to Christ.

You felt it. If you're genuine, you felt that. I can't go to him after what I just did.

No, that's when you need to be running to him. And the devil's gonna be right there to tell you not. And you know what? He may have been primarily responsible for even introducing the thoughts that so, ah, some things just come in and they're so dirty, they're so ugly, they're so filthy.

You get these thoughts, it begins rambling off. Your mind, this is where the battle is. So you know what scripture talks about? The fact that we need to guard our hearts.

The issues of life. You be careful. The heart, we only think here, but the heart is so much about the inner man.

You protect it, brethren. Because you have an enemy and he's looking for chinks in your armor and he's shooting and he's throwing. And he's gonna try to take you down, knock you out of this race, make you ineffective.

Father, help us in this place. Lord, we want our minds, we want our lives to be absorbed with the right things.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/l85oV7Hs4ow.mp4>

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