



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Eph. 6:10-16; 1 Jn. 5:4-5, 19

“Finally, be strengthened by the Lord & by his vast strength. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh & blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. ¹³ For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, & having prepared everything, to take your stand. ¹⁴ Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, ¹⁵ & your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In every situation *take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*” (Eph. 6:10-16 CSB)

“Everyone who has been born of God conquers the world. This is *the victory that has conquered the world: our faith*. Who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?...We know that we are of God, and the whole world is under the sway of the evil one.” (1 Jn. 5:4-5, 19 CSB)

“The world is around us, the flesh is within us, the devil is against us—all conspiring to defeat us in our Christian walk...How can we appropriate the victory...that Jesus has given us...? The foundation is *faith*.” [Rankin, *Spiritual Warfare*, p 235]

SUMMARY: Paul charges us to ‘take up the shield of faith’ in order to repulse the devil’s attempts to distract, deceive, & discourage us. But, what is this ‘faith’? Christians are not just generic ‘people of faith,’ nor vaguely ‘spiritual.’ Biblical faith is not mere assent to church creeds, nor simply passive trust. The bedrock of Christians’ belief is Jesus Christ; he’s the ‘capital’ for their lifelong commitment. The Bible’s term for ‘faith’ (Greek: *pistis*) encompasses belief, trust, & loyalty (faithfulness), issuing in action. This key word describes the faithfulness of God & Christ, the believing that unites us to Him,

plus the fruit of faithfulness in our lives. When we respond to the Lord's leading with believing obedience we build our faith and faithfulness; faith's 'shield' is enhanced. Faithful following enrolled the OT saints in God's 'Hall of Faith,' where each record starts with the words, "By faith..." May we leave a similar mark!

1. "Shield of Faith" (Eph. 6:16)—Preliminaries

a. In the OT God & his faithfulness are a "Shield" (Gen. 15:1; Ps. 18:2; 91:4, etc.)

- "The...LORD told Abram: 'Don't be afraid, Abram. *I am your shield...*'" (Gen. 15:1)
- "The LORD is my rock...my *shield*...my stronghold." (Ps. 18:2) God's "faithfulness will be a protective" (Ps. 91:4)
- "In the Bible, God is often described as 'the shield' of his people (Gen. 15:1; Ps. 18:2...) & in Ps. 91:4 God's faithfulness is described as a shield. In urging his readers to take up the shield of faith, Paul is summoning Christians to believe firmly in God & his word, especially when under attack. The '*flaming arrows of the evil one*' refer to the devil's assaults, whether external (persecution or trial) or internal (e.g. temptations to doubt, despair, or fear)." [Peter S. Williamson, , p. 196]

b. Faith as a Shield

- Is "Paul...referring to the believer's [subjective] faith [our believing] or an objective reality ['the faith'—what we believe?]. Most scholars...favor the subjective reading. The defensive imagery...[of] '*you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one*' (Eph. 6:16b) gives a measure of support...However...the definite article...[Greek: '*shield of the faith*'] may suggest...the body of truths associated with the Christian faith...[Perhaps here] subjective application & objective reality need not be separated." [Mark D. Owens, "*Spiritual Warfare...Eph. 6:10-17*," Tyndale Bulletin, V. 67.1, (2016) p. 100]
- "Most commentators see this '*faith*' as the subjective faith of the believers...If so it refers to human 'faithfulness.' Not just to the idea of 'faith'...But...a 'shield' in the Psalms is related to Yahweh...Ps. 84:9...The same 'shield' which Yahweh is asked to take up in Ps. 35:2 is to be seized by all the saints [in] Eph. 6:16." [Walter D. Zorn, *Faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah*, p.]
- "The 'shield of faith'...refers us not to our own faith, but to God, our refuge; faith [is] the means [to] cling to Him for protection in our struggles...For our faith to function in this way, we must...know that God is powerful...[&] that He's our friend...not on the basis of fluctuating feelings, but on what His Word reveals...We deploy the shield of faith by reminding ourselves of the promises of His faithfulness...not of the strength of our faith." [Iain M. Duguid, *Whole Armor of God*, pp.]

c. "In all situations take up the shield of faith" (Eph. 6:16a)

- We "'Take up' the shield of faith by doing what God asked [us] to do, no matter how risky or intimidating the circumstances [This] is the key that not only unlocked the door of spiritual vibrancy, but also keeps [us] from falling prey to the enemy's attacks to distract, dissuade, & discourage [us]." [Priscilla Shirer, *Armor of God*, 126]

d. The shield "extinguishes the devil's fiery arrows" (Eph. 6:16b)

- **Note:** The outer part of the Roman shield was made of leather & when dipped in water, it would extinguish flaming arrows flung by the enemy. "Fiery darts are meant to dismantle things in your life so that you become open for any other form of attack Satan wants to send your way." [Tony Evans, *Victory in Spiritual Warfare: Outfitting...for...Battle*, p. 94]

2. What Counts: Not your Faith's Strength, but its Object

- "It's not the strength of your faith, but the object of your faith, that actually saves you. Strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch." –Tim Keller

a. Faith is produced by the Message/Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17)

- "Faith *comes* from hearing & hearing [*comes*] through the word of Christ." (Rom. 10:17 ESV) **Note:** "The 'heard word' saves. Paul explains how faith is produced: 'Faith *comes* from hearing...the word of Christ.'" –Everett Ferguson

b. Christian Faith is Faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:22; Eph. 3:12)

- "We have boldness & confident access through *faith in him [Christ]*." (Eph. 3:12)
- In the phrase 'faith in Christ' (e.g. Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:22; Eph. 3:12) "the emphasis...falls on the second term...*The emphasis falls not on 'faith,' but on the Christ* on whom faith is founded...*What matters is not*

the subjectivity of belief, but *the focus and basis of that faith*: the unconditional gift of God in Christ.”
[John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift*, 379, 382]

c. Not Faith’s Strength, but its Object

- “The faith that changes the life & connects to God is best conveyed by the word ‘trust.’ Imagine you are on a high cliff & you lose your footing & begin to fall. Just beside you as you fall is a branch sticking out of the very edge of the cliff. It is your only hope &...more than strong enough to support your weight. How can it save you? If your mind is filled with intellectual certainty that the branch can support you, but you don’t actually reach out & grab it, you are lost. If your mind is instead filled with doubts & uncertainty that the branch can hold you, but you reach out & grab it anyway, you’ll be saved. Why? It’s not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that actually saves you. Strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch.” [Tim Keller, *Reason for God*, pp.]

d. Christians—the ‘believing ones’ (Gk. *pisteuon*) (Rom. 1:16)

- “The gospel...is God’s power for salvation *to everyone who has faith*” (NRSV) “...to everyone who *keeps on trusting*” (CJB)
- “Paul...is talking not just about initial acceptance...but...that together with the life that follows from it as the whole process...The present tense—‘to all who believe & go on believing’...whose life is...trustful acceptance &...commitment” –J. Dunn

e. Christian life—a life of faith —“*We walk by faith*, not by sight.” (2 Cor. 5:7; cf. Gal. 2:20)

- “Faith is...the basis of the whole Christian life. ‘We walk by faith’ (2 Cor. 5:7): faith pervades the whole of life of the Christian. (Gal. 2:19-20)...Paul can say that his whole life is lived ‘by faith in the Son of God.’ Faith is central to all of his life.” [G. F. Howthorne (ed.), *Dictionary of Paul & His Letters*, p.]

3. Going Deeper— what’s meant by the Gk. *Pistis*—Faith, Faithfulness...?

a. Armor of God—God’s own Attributes

- In Eph 6:11–17 “allusions to Isaiah 59:17...reveal *that divine attributes are in mind*.”—Walter Zorn God’s “armor is described in terms of God’s attributes (righteousness, zeal) & actions (salvation, vengeance)...In Eph.6:10-20...Paul calls the armor ‘the armor of God’ because it belongs to God in Christ...By virtue of their union with Christ, Christians benefit from his armor, but the armor does not derive from or belong to them in any sense apart from Christ.” [Joshua M. Greever “Armor of God... Standing Firm against the ‘Powers’ (Eph. 6:10–20),” JBTS, V. 5.1 (2020) pp. 85-86]
- The Armor Items – ‘truth & righteousness’ are God’s attributes; what about faith?

b. What’s the meaning of the Greek word for Faith—*Pistis*? (Eph. 6:16)

- “‘Faithfulness’ might be the most appropriate translation of *pistis* in Eph. 6:16”– Thomas Yoder Neufeld
 - Faith = Belief + Trust + Loyalty = ‘Believing Allegiance’
 - “Faith for Paul is the appropriate response to the gospel...[It’s] a comprehensive response, having both cognitive (belief) & relational (trust) dimensions. But it is more than either...Faith is... a posture of...commitment to God...[It] is really *fidelity* or That is why Paul can speak of the ‘obedience of faith’ (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). *Faith...entails faithfulness*; [so] some have translated *pistis* as ‘believing allegiance’...‘Faith’ is...a covenantal term that implies *not merely intellectual assent, but faithfulness—a total commitment* of the self... akin to loyalty, obedience, & devotion.” [M. Gorman, *Apostle...*, pp 148, 246]
 - “The gospel is not mere information; it’s a summons...to...obedience...For Paul, this *pistis*, this faith/ faithfulness, is a faith which obeys that summons, not merely an assent to a doctrinal formula.” [NT. Wright, *Paul & the Faithfulness of God*, p.]
 - “*Pistis* [Gk.] as ‘faithful performance’...comes closest to the identification of *pistis* [‘faith’] as part of the arsenal of the Divine Warrior in Eph. 6:16... ‘Faithfulness’ might be the most appropriate translation of *pistis* in Eph. 6:16 (as is also generally the case in the [Greek OT]).” [Thomas Yoder Neufeld, *Put on the Armor of God: Divine Warrior*, p. 139 & #140]

c. Faith issues in Action—“We recall...*your work produced by faith*” (1 Thess. 1:3) “*By faith...*” (Heb. 11:4, 8, 11, [etc])

- “Faith is acting like God is telling the truth. The key thought is *action*....Faith is not talking about or thinking about or even celebrating God’s truth. It’s the process of adapting your behavior, your decisions, & ultimately your whole lifestyle so that it accords with what God has asked you to do—

without needing...evidence that it will all work out in the end...The[se] act[s] of faith...become a shield of protection to guard against the enemy's attacks." [Priscilla Shirer, *Armor of God*, p. 127]

4. The Faithfulness (Gk. *pistis*) of God, Christ & the Believers

a. The Faithfulness [Gk. *pistis*] of God (Dt. 7:9; Rom. 3:3)

- "Know that the LORD your God is God, *the faithful* (Heb. *Emet*) God who keeps his gracious covenant loyalty." (Dt. 7:9)
 - "If some [in Israel] were unfaithful, will their unfaithfulness nullify *God's faithfulness [pistis]?*" (Rom. 3:3)
 - "When Paul speaks of the 'faithfulness of God' he means that God is trustworthy because he is true to his promises, the... purposes announced to Abraham. But when he talks about the ['faith of Abraham'] (Rom. 4:12, 16) he does not mean that
 - Abraham was trustworthy, but that he trusted God, relying totally on Him who was able to do what he had promised (Rom. 4:21). (Williams)...This observation...demonstrate[s]...that our strict distinction between 'faith' and 'faithfulness' is not applicable to the Greek word *pistis*, which contains both ideas." [Richard B. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, p. 157 #133]
 - To "the one who lives under the Most High's protection...[the LORD's] *faithfulness will be a protective shield.*" (Ps. 91:1, 4)
 - "But *faithful* [Gk. *pistis*] is the Lord who will strengthen you & protect you from the evil one." (2 Thess. 3:3 Lit.)

b. The Faithfulness [Gk. *pistis*] of Christ (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 3:2)

- "...Fix your thoughts on Jesus...² He *was faithful* [Gk. *pistis*] to the one who appointed him..." (Heb. 3:1-2)
- "The death of Christ can be characterized as *pistis* ['faithful'] for at least two reasons: [1.] Jesus Christ is the one human being who embodies radical obedience by remaining faithful to God to the painful end. [Phil 2:8]. His fidelity overcomes Adam's rebellion & he constitutes...a new faithful humanity (Rom. 5:19). [2.]...The death of Jesus is...also an act of divine *pistis* m[faithfulness] embodying & revealing the faithfulness of God (Rom. 3:3, 21-22)...[Here] we see God's fidelity to the promises made to Abraham...The expression 'the faith of Jesus Christ' signals that the death of Jesus is simultaneously an act of human fidelity to God & an act of divine fidelity to humanity." [Richard B. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, pp. xxx-xxxii]
- Christ's "obedience (Rom. 5:19; 3:8 [Phil. 2:8b]) cannot be separated or clearly distinguished from his *pistis*. Therefore *his faith is his faithfulness.*" [Markus Barth, *Philemon*, 274]

c. Believers share Christ's faithfulness [*pistis*] (Gal. 2:16, 20; Eph. 3:12 ISV/NET)

- "The life...I'm now living...I *live by the faithfulness of the Son of God*, who loved me & gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20 ISV)
- *Pistis Christou* ['faith of Christ' Gal. 2:16] should be "understood as *simultaneously Christ's faithfulness to God & human faith in Christ*...Trust...trustworthiness & faithfulness are all always implicit in it. It is precisely that fact that Christ is both faithful to God & worthy of God's trust, trustworthy by human beings & trusted by them that enables him [Christ] to take those who *pisteuein* [believe] into righteousness." [Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith & Christian Faith*, 273-274]
- "In Paul's view, Christians...have nothing, except by virtue of being in [Christ]...They need the faithfulness of Christ... Christ is faithful as Son of God, he shares the [faithfulness of God]. But [also] as...exemplar of restored mankind he must be faithful. And mankind's faithfulness must depend on his [faithfulness]...'Christ became what we are in order that we might become what he is' [righteous, faithful, etc.]" [Morna Hooker, *From Adam to Christ*, pp. 181-182]
- "All who are baptized into [Christ] share his...character...His fidelity to God is the pattern for the new life...he inaugurated. [So.] Paul...equate[s] the coming of Christ with the coming of *pistis* [faith, fidelity, faithfulness] (Gal. 3:23-25)...He has now instantiated *pistis* as a historical reality...Jesus is the creator of a new domain or 'power field' characterized by faith... As a result of Jesus' faithfulness, the life we now live in Christ is 'by the faith [faithfulness] of the Son of God' (Gal. 2:20). We're taken up into his life, including his faithfulness and that faithfulness imparts to us the shape of our existence." [Richard B. Hays, *Faith of Jesus Christ*, pp. xxxi-xxxii]

d. The Fruit of the Spirit is "Faithfulness" (Gal. 5:22)

- “But *the fruit of the Spirit is* love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness [Gk. *pistis*]...” (Gal. 5:22)
- “Most scholars translate *pistis* ‘faithfulness’ here [Gal. 5:22] (but...‘faith’ everywhere else in Gal.)...‘*Pistis*, though used repeatedly elsewhere in Gal. to signify a person’s...trust regarding God’s salvation provided in Christ Jesus, here undoubtedly means *the ethical virtue of ‘faithfulness.’* Here the subject is the believer [it’s their ‘fruit’] & the context is determinative...Amid 8 other nouns...human virtues, *pistis* must...[be] the human virtue of faithfulness...produced in the believer’s life by the faithful God through his Spirit.” (R. Longenecker).” [Nijay K. Gupta, *Paul &...Language of Faith*,]
- “*Pistis* is most often translated as ‘faith’...in this context most translate it as ‘faithfulness’...[Since] the other 8 virtues are ethical qualities...‘faith/faithfulness’ should be as well...The person who...partake[s] of the divine nature will be faithful & loyal...God requires this virtue in those who serve him (1 Cor. 4:2) [&] reward[s it] (Mt. 25:21).” [K. L. Boles, , p. 152]
- Jesus: “Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees...You pay a tenth of [herbs] & yet you’ve neglected the more important matters...justice, mercy, & faithfulness [Gk. *pistis*]. These things should have been done, not neglecting the others.” (Mt. 23:23)
- Jesus: “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes & Pharisees, you’ll never get into the kingdom...” (Mt. 5:20)
- “‘Faithfulness/faith’ here [Mt. 23:23; cf. Gal. 5:22] cannot mean faith in Jesus, nor can it mean the faith of prayer, or the active faith that performs works of love...Faith is never for Matthew the essence of...the Law. Instead, we are to understand [*pistis*] in the tradition of biblical language...as ‘faithfulness.’ (U. Luz)...[Hence] there is an ethical core of how *pistis* is being used...[as] ‘obeying faith’ something one does.” [Nijay K Gupta, *Paul & the Language of Faith*,]

e. God Values & Rewards Faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:1-2; Mt. 25:21, 23; 1 Tim. 1:12)

- “Think of us...as Christ’s servants & managers of God’s mysteries...² It’s required that *managers be...faithful.*” (1 Cor. 4:1-2)
- “‘Well done, good & *faithful servant!* You were *faithful* over a few things; I’ll put you [over] many things...” (Mt. 25:21, 23)
- “I give thanks to Christ Jesus our Lord...because *he considered me faithful...*” (1 Tim. 1:12)

5. The Shield of Faith & Faithfulness (Eph. 3:12; 6:16)

- “Christ and *his faith [faithfulness]* can be meant by the ‘shield of faith’—Markus Barth
- “In him [Christ] we have boldness & confident access through *faith in him* [or ‘*through his faithfulness*’].” (Eph. 3:12 CSB)
- “In whom we have boldness & confident access *through his faithfulness.*” (Eph. 3:12 ISV)
- “In whom we have boldness & confident access to God by way of *Christ’s faithfulness.*” (Eph. 3:12 NET)
- Paul “makes use of the metaphor of armor a number of times and sees ‘the shield of faith’ as important; with it believers can ‘quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one’ (Eph 6:16)...The adjective *pistos* signifies ‘faithful’ and is used to make the point that God is faithful (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13).” [Walter D. Zorn, *Faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah*, p.]
- ‘Shield of faith’ (Eph. 6:16) “Most commentators see this ‘faith’ as the subjective faith of the believers...If so it refers to human ‘faithfulness.’ Not just to the idea of ‘faith’...But...a ‘shield’ in the Psalms is related to Yahweh...[e.g.] Ps. 84:9...The same ‘shield’ which Yahweh...take[s] up in Ps. 35:2 is to be seized by all the saints [in] Eph. 6:16...Markus Barth explains ‘The congruence of the terms ‘putting on the armor of God,’ ‘putting on the new man,’ ‘putting on Christ’ in the Paul[’s] exhortation (...Eph 4:24; 6:11–17, etc.) suggest that *Christ & his faith [faithfulness] can be meant by the ‘shield of faith’*...The allusion to Is. 11:4-5...[&] the allusions to Is. 59:17 [etc.]... reveal *that divine attributes are in mind*’ (M. Barth).” [Walter D. Zorn, *Faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah*, p.]
- “In Eph. 6:16...Paul is speaking more...on fidelity (faithfulness) than on belief.” [V. Wisniewski, *Passionate Armor*, p. 14]

QUESTIONS:

1. Many people today identify as “people of faith.” What (if anything) distinguishes Christian believers from those who identify as “people of faith”? Discuss.
2. Tim Keller says, “It’s not the strength of your faith, but the object of your faith, that actually saves you.” What do you think he means by this statement? So, what should be “the object of our faith”?
3. The term “believers” applies to Christians. In Rom. 1:16 Paul calls Christians ‘*believing ones*’ (present tense), not merely, “*those who have believed*” (a past historical event). What does this imply about the role of faith/believing in our lives?
4. The Greek word rendered ‘faith’ in the NT –*Pistis*— has a wider range of meanings, including ‘belief, trust, loyalty, faithfulness, allegiance’ (depending on the context). How does this help us understand the following concepts:
 - a. Shield of *faithfulness*—“‘Faithfulness’ might be the most appropriate translation of *pistis* in Eph. 6:16”—T. Y. Neufeld
 - b. Priscilla Shirer’s assertion: “Faith is acting like God is telling the truth. The key thought is *action*...”
 - c. How would you relate this to statements like, “*By faith* [Abraham...did something]” (Heb. 11:4, 8, etc.)
 - d. The *pistis* of God (does that mean God has/needs ‘faith’?)
 - e. The *pistis* of Christ (does that mean Jesus Christ had/has/needs ‘faith’?)
 - f. Christian’s *pistis* is not merely a subjective inclination towards (confidence in) God/Christ, but includes action
 - g. The ‘fruit of the Spirit’ includes *pistis* (Gal. 5:22)
 - g. “*Pistis* is being used [here (Gal. 5:22) as] ‘obeying faith,’ something one does.”—Nijay Gupta
5. The “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11 has statements like: “*By faith* [Abraham...did something]” (Heb. 11:4, 8, etc.) Do you have an experience of taking some action “*by faith*,” in response to the Lord’s leading to you. (If so, share). How did that experience help build up your confidence (faith) for the future? Can you relate this to “building a better shield (of faith)”?