

Ephesians 6:10-18 Part 2

Last week we thought about how Paul starts this passage by calling us to stand-to stay in one place and fight an invisible enemy. We looked at our spiritual PPE and the 'clothing' that we should wear as we prepare to stand and fight: the belt of truth wrapped all the way around us to hold us together and keep all that we do and say in the right place; the breastplate of right relationships with God and man to protect our hearts; and our footwear, ensuring that we can stand for a long time by becoming comfortable in our knowledge and use of the gospel of peace.

Now we turn our attention to the equipment that God provides for us as we face the devil.

The first two things are defensive, the shield of faith to quench flaming darts and the helmet of salvation.

In ancient times a shield was something each soldier would have strapped to his arm moving it around to ensure the enemies attack didn't get close to him - shifting it up, down and from side to side as flaming darts, or spears or swords were launched towards him from different places. Our faith should be like that, not something that we bring out just on Sundays or special days, but something we can use flexibly shifting it to protect us. Our faith may be summarised by saying the creed, or another statement of faith but we need to know what it means to us, how to answer the comments and questions that are fired at us - *how can we say God loves people when he allowed the pandemic? Why do you waste your time going to church? Why read the bible it's full of contradictions?* Those are the kind of flaming darts that we face, they are not full blown attacks, and are more likely to irritate or frustrate than seriously injure us but they can still distract us from doing what we should do and being who we should be and they cant be ignored because they might be the first wave of a more serious attack on our faith or of someone looking to find out about it. So we need to stand firm and hold on tightly to the shield of faith ready to use it when attacks come.

The helmet of salvation - or as Paul describes it more fully in 1Thessalonians chapter 5 'our helmet the confidence of our salvation' protects our heads - a blow to the head in battle can be instantly fatal so its pretty important to wear it! We need to have confidence in our salvation and know deep down that we are saved - all our sins are forgiven, God the heavenly judge can find no reason for condemning us! If we don't have that confidence its as if we were going into battle wearing a sun hat - it might look good but it isn't much use in a fight.

Finally we come to the one attacking weapon that we have, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Most of us will probably have a bible or two that we can put our hands on easily, but how well do we know it and what it contains? How often do we open the unfamiliar bits of it, or spend time talking to others about what's in it? Many people think that like a real sword the bible is big and heavy and you get tired after trying to use it for a bit. But if you start to read it more often and through notes and sermons and study groups get to know your bible you will discover there are passages that are relevant however you feel and whatever situation you find yourself in - its an amazing book! Keep it to hand, use it to defend yourself just like Jesus did when he was tempted in the wilderness.

The whole of this passage has been about learning to understand and use the things that God gives us. Some of us who have been Christians a long time might need reminding how well we have been equipped and how effective that equipment can be. I suggested last week that the armour of God was our PPE and just as medical staff need to use their PPE every day and be comfortable in it, we put on all of God's armour and make sure we are really familiar with it so we can use it to stand firm against all the strategies and tricks of the devil.

Those of you who are familiar with the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe might remember that Father Christmas makes an appearance handing out gifts and heralding the weakening of the White Witch's power. He gives Peter a shield and a sword with these words "These are your presents and they are tools not toys. The time to use them is perhaps near at hand. Bear them well".

May we bear our armour well!