

Sunday evening 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020  
Ephesians 6:10-18

Did you notice how many times the word stand was used in the passage that was read? At a time when we can't move about freely the idea of standing may not seem as challenging as at other times and by staying where we are, we are playing a really important part in reducing the spread of covid-19. Staying where we are is an important part of our national and international defence against the invisible! In just the same way hundreds of years ago Paul told Christians that they needed to stand, to be comfortable in the place where God puts them so they could resist what the Devil threw at them.

Standing firm spiritually can be harder than physically staying in one place. It requires us to face up to the places where we know we are spiritually weak or vulnerable, even when our movement is limited can avoid this by reading a book, doing housework or watching tv - washing our hands is much easier than looking at the lazy or murky bits of our minds and facing up to the things we need to sort out and strengthen so we can resist the attacks by the devil, the powers and principalities that Paul talks about. If you haven't thought about your Christian life in this way, I recommend that you read of C S Lewis' The Screwtape Letters, although it was written during world war 2 this is a brilliant book about how the devil looks for and plays on our weaknesses.

Paul goes on to say that we can use God's armour to ensure that we stand firm against the devil, we need to think about how we equip ourselves, to use the language of the moment we need to make full and effective use of our Personal Protective Equipment, our Christian PPE, the whole armour of God.

Before picking up our weapons and defences, we need to dress ourselves for the fight, putting on the belt of truth. Isn't that a great image, the idea of wrapping truth all the way around us to hold everything else in place. Making sure that we are honest in **everything** we do and say, not most things, **everything** all the time.

Then Paul tells us to put on the breastplate of righteousness, a soldier's breastplate protects the most vulnerable organs his heart and lungs, in the same way being righteous, living in right relationships with God and with other people protects us. We need to make sure our relationships don't have grey areas and subjects that are avoided, that they are filled with honesty and truth so there is much less risk of us getting hurt.

The last piece of clothing that Paul talks about is our footwear, the gospel of peace. If what we are aiming to do is to **stand** then our footwear needs to be comfortable and supportive. We need to take time to get used to it, standing all

day in an uncomfortable pair of shoes is never a good idea. When we first start or when we restart to let the Good News and the peace of Jesus into our lives we need to take things gently - find out a bit at a time, read and re read passages in the bible and let them sink in and bring peace. Peace that is not simply the absence of conflict, but in the sense of the Hebrew Shalom, which means fullness - having everything you need to be wholly and happily yourself - not the absence of struggle but the presence of love.

Once that shalom, God's peace becomes familiar and comfortable then its not something we want to take off. We will find that with our feet firm in God's peace we are able to stand and to stand for a very long time.