

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## Sit, Stand, Walk and Run: Standing

The apostle Paul knew all about taking a stand. He was not afraid of preaching the gospel whenever he could and this had often got him into difficult situations. He had been beaten and imprisoned many times. Yet these sufferings far from undermining his faith provided fresh opportunities to share the Gospel. We often talk about taking a stand or standing up for what we believe. Paul's whole life was about taking a stand for Christ. So, it is no surprise that this morning we should look at what he wrote, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, about the subject of standing.

In Acts 24 Paul had taken a stand against his Jewish accusers and, as a Roman citizen, he had appealed to Caesar. When he wrote his letter to the Ephesian Church, Paul was a prisoner in Rome. In the letter he refers to this in chapter 4 verse 1, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." Then in chapter 6 verse 20 he writes, "I am an ambassador in chains." This, of course, was part of the fulfilment of what the Lord Jesus had told Ananias about Paul in Acts 9:15, "...for he (Paul) is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." Paul's life was all about standing for Christ and advancing the Gospel of God's grace. Standing means confronting opposition to what you believe. Sometimes you need to stand your ground and not retreat - defending your faith and living a life consistent with your faith. But standing also prepares you for advancing and moving forward. The Christian faith although often attacked is about overcoming and eventual victory. In fact, Christ is presented as the One who is already victorious, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.' (Now this, 'He ascended' - what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things)." Ephesians 4:7-10.

In the last chapter, of his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 6, Paul writes about the Christian warfare and what it means to stand for Christ. This section begins in verse 10 where he writes, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

Paul opens the subject of standing by establishing that the Lord Jesus is the Christian's source of strength. This reminds me of the Lord's own words in John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." Paul starts by presenting the greatness of Christ and the greatness of His power. The power of Christ is greater than any other force. This power is linked to the indwelling Holy Spirit of whom John later wrote, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Christ is the source of the power which enables us to stand as Christians in today's world.

Paul then goes on to describe the spiritual armour needed by the Christian to stand, first of all, against the schemes of the Devil. "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (verse 11). As a prisoner Paul was often close to Roman soldiers perhaps even chained to them. He would have been very familiar with the armour they wore and the weapons they used. You can imagine him looking at the armour of the Roman soldier and thinking what a good illustration it could be of the greater spiritual armour available to the Christian.

But armour is useless unless we wear it. It is interesting to recall the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, "So Saul clothed David with his armour, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. David fastened his sword to his armour and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them." So David took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine" (verses 38-40). David could not use Saul's armour but he had a different sort of armour - a complete faith in God. It was a faith he had proved against the lion and the bear when he was shepherding his father's sheep. It was a faith developed by his personal experiences with God. It was a faith that equipped him to face the greatest giants. It is the same for us. For faith to grow it has to be developed in our personal experiences with God. It has to be tested in all the varied circumstances of life. We have to learn to stand up and be counted. David could have argued that it was not worth risking his life against a wild animal for the sake of a lamb especially as no one was looking anyway. But he learned how to trust God in secret and was ready to

stand for God in public. If we don't stand for God in the hidden battles of life we will not be able to stand for him in the public battles.

Paul makes the reason for wearing the armour crystal clear - so that we can stand against the schemes of the devil. Paul highlights the devil's ability to deceive. The devil is described, right at the beginning of the Bible, as being cunning. He is able to get close to Eve then to deceive her. Evil is not always obvious. Satan can appear as an angel of light, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Billy Bray, tells the story of how he was walking home on a dark night through a wooded area. Some men thought they would try and frighten the well known Cornish Christian and started making strange noises from amongst the trees as Billy passed. It had no effect upon Billy. Then one of them shouted out, "Billy, I'm Satan, I'm over here!" Billy, shouted back. "It can't be Satan you are too far away!"

Paul describes the nature of the battle we are in, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Paul presents a spiritual battle between good and evil. He identifies Satan as the leader of these forces and as being opposed to God and His goodness. Satan is variously described in the scripture as the wicked one, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19); as the Ruler of this world, "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30); and as the prince of the power of the air, "in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). Also, at the beginning of the book of Job we find Satan has access into heaven. Paul describes a spiritual warfare energised by Satan at the head of forces of darkness influencing the thinking and actions of the human world and evidenced by the presence and effects of evil. Peter had a very real experience of this battle when the Lord told him that, "Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you," (Luke 22:31-32). Later in the New Testament Peter gives us this advice, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith," (1 Peter 5:8-9). The evidence of the presence of evil is all too apparent in our world. The Christian's responsibility is to resist evil and overcome it, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," (Romans 12:21).

Paul then explains that in order to stand and fight in such a battle we need the "armour of God". So he writes in verse 13, "Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

There are two great examples in the Old Testament of men who stood their ground in the face of enormous pressure. Their faith shines out but the outcomes of their stories are different. The first is Shammah who, when everyone else fled, stood in the middle of a field of lentils and defeated the Philistines (2 Samuel 23). The second example is Naboth who lost his life because he refused to sell his inheritance to the wicked King Ahab (1 Kings 21).

To take a stand is often a costly business and many Christians have paid with their lives because they stood their ground in an evil day. An evil day refers to times when the Christian appears particularly under attack. Peter refers to this when he writes, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Paul goes on in verse 14 to write, "Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness." He visualises a soldier preparing to put his armour on. First he puts on a belt which supported him and held his sword. It is interesting to watch weightlifters at the Olympics. They often wear a belt to support them as they lift enormous weights. The revelation of the truth in Christ is fundamental to the Christian faith. Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6) and in the fourth chapter of this letter and verse four he writes, "if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus." It is this truth which supports and sustains and which has to be applied to our lives. It is at the foundation of all we are and do.

The breastplate protected the vital organs. The breastplate of righteousness illustrates how we apply the word of God to our daily lives so we can live according to the mind and will of God. I do not think the breastplate represents the righteousness of Christ. I say this because the righteousness of Christ is not something we put on ourselves but rather something which God puts on us. The clearest illustration of this is when the prodigal returns to the father's house in Luke 15. We read, "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry." (verses 22-24). The father has the robe placed on his younger son as a picture of the way God covers us in Christ's righteousness. This represents our standing in Christ before God, which nothing can change. Our state, on the other hand, is the quality

of our daily life as a Christian living in the world. This can vary and is dependent on applying the truth of God to our behaviour and living godly lives. One of the great aims of Paul's writing was to ensure that Christians lived lives that were consistent with their faith in Christ and the indwelling Spirit. He writes to the Galatians, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (5:25). If we understand and appreciate the standing we have before God in Christ it will help us to stand for Christ in today's world. The consistency of the Christian life is a powerful witness to the world. It was Gandhi who said, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." He also said, "If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today."

Shoes are a great help when it comes to standing up and walking. "And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (verse 15). Shoes come in twos. In the Old Testament the boards, which formed the tabernacle, stood on two sockets of silver, rather like two shoes. We can think of these two shoes as two important aspects of the Christian's standing. First we stand in all the security of the Gospel of peace. We have peace with God, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," (Romans 5:1). We can know the peace of God, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus," (Philippians 4:6-7). And we can know the God of peace, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you," (Philippians 4:9).

Secondly, there should be readiness to communicate the Gospel. "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Romans 10:15. These two aspects of standing are very important. We live in this world as both the recipients and the communicators of the love of God. And the greater our understanding of the love of God to us, the greater will be our desire to communicate that love to others.

The next piece of armour is the shield, "above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."

The Christian will only ever stand by faith. The Christian life begins with faith, continues in faith and ends in faith. Here Paul reminds us about trusting in God - the simplicity of a daily faith. This faith is not just for the crises of life but also for each normal day - for the ordinary as well as the extraordinary. Two things can undermine our faith. First, the big problems we sometimes face and which can overwhelm us. Second, the daily routines of life which can wear us down and embitter our lives. We need protection from both. Paul highlights the fiery darts of the wicked one. Earlier Satan is described as cunning and deceptive here he is described as aggressive and destructive. The Roman shield Paul mentions was the one used to protect the whole body. It was a key piece of equipment for the Roman soldier. It could be locked together with other shields to form a protective cover. When the flaming arrows of their enemies were flung at them it was this shield they sheltered beneath. I think Paul uses this vivid picture to illustrate both personal faith in God and a communal faith in God. There are times when our faith is personal and expressed in individual circumstances. At other times Christians come together and express a unified faith. There are times when we give in faith personally and others when we give in faith collectively. The shield of faith can protect me as an individual and it can be joined together to protect many. But we all need to have a daily living faith in God, which enables us to stand up against all different types of obstacles, and problems, which may have to face. And we need a faith which can neither be gradually worn down nor suddenly struck down.

In verse 17 Paul writes, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." If the breastplate protects the heart, the helmet protects the mind. The Christianity is about the heart and the mind. Earlier I referred to Goliath - his helmet did not protect him from David's precise attack. Our minds are continually bombarded by a bewildering range of ideas, images and sounds - TV, video, the internet, texts, films, advertising the list goes on. It is important for the Christian to be perceptive and discerning in regard to this onslaught of information. Paul writes in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." The Lord expected his disciples to be, "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," (Matthew 10:16). We will not stand for God in today's world by absorbing its thinking and copying its behaviour but by thinking and acting like the Lord we serve - "But we have the mind of Christ," (1 Corinthians 2:16). And think like someone we have to spend time with that person. The stress and busyness of today's world often rob us of the opportunity to be in God's presence. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Psalm 46:10).

The word of God, described as the sword of the spirit, is vital to Christian. When Jesus stood against Satan in wilderness at the beginning of his ministry he defeated him by the word of God. Earlier, I referred to the belt which held the sword. If the word of God is at the centre of our lives it is a simple process to draw upon it and apply it to every circumstance we face. It will guide, encourage and keep us and through it we can witness effectively.

In verse 18, Paul encourages us to pray, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." Pray helps us to stand alone and also to stand

together with others. Daniel prayed with his friends and by himself. Prayer links us to God and to one another. Earlier I mentioned the boards of the tabernacle which stood on sockets of silver. These boards were linked together by five rods. One was invisible connecting the boards through the centre - a striking picture of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The other four could be seen linking the boards on the outside. Prayer links us together and helps us to stand united in our witness for God in an increasingly hostile world.

Standing can be a lonely business. Sometimes we are put in circumstances where we stand for what we believe to be right and find that even our fellow Christians can distance themselves from us. This can be very painful and challenging. Paul had this experience when he wrote at the end of his life, "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion," (2 Timothy 4:15-17).

As we seek to stand for Christ in our circumstances may we always know that He stands with us.

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