

The Breastplate of Righteousness (v. 14b).

We've talked over the past few weeks about what Spiritual warfare is, the unseen battles that rage on in the backgrounds of our lives, how to recognize and deal with attack's from the devil in our lives, and we started week before last with the whole armor of God.

Ephesians 6:14

- 10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.**
- 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.**
- 12 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.**
- 13 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.**
- 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,**

The first piece of God's armor that's mentioned is the "Belt of Truth". This is the very first thing you must put on. The belt on the Roman Soldier's armor would hold his sword & dagger, and the breastplate would fasten to it as well.

We know that Christ is the truth. The belt represents the acceptance of Christ and His truth. You **MUST** have this **BEFORE** you can wear any other part of the armor.

The next piece of armor is the Breastplate of Righteousness. The "**breastplate**" was a vital piece of armor that covered the chest and the back, like a modern policeman's body armor. Its purpose was to defend a soldier from arrows and spear or sword thrusts to the vital organs... namely the heart. The Christian's heart is the primary target of the devil. That's why Pro.4:23 says, "**Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.**" What protects our hearts from the attack of the enemy? Righteousness!

What is righteousness?

Righteousness defined: The root word means "straightness" or "conforming to a standard or a norm".

In Washington D.C. there is a building called the "National Institute of Standards and Technology." This facility is responsible for storing perfect samples of weights and measurements. They have what are called "prototypes" of pound weights and kilograms and measuring rods for feet, yards and metric measurements like meters. For example, they have a "Meter Standard" a reinforced bar of platinum alloyed with exactly 10% iridium. When they want to know the exact measurement of a "meter" they cool this bar down to 0 degrees Celsius at a sea level of 45 degrees latitude then they know they will have the exact tip to tip measurement of a meter.

When it comes to righteousness, that authoritative standard is God Himself. Therefore Biblical righteousness means to live a life that conforms to the holy character of God. The one man who could be called righteous according to this

definition then is Jesus Christ. 1 John 2:1 calls Him, "**Jesus Christ the righteous.**"

To what righteousness is Paul referring? – Three possibilities:

1. Personal (individual) righteousness

This is our own self-righteousness – trying in my own power to live in a way that is pleasing to God.

2. Positional (imputed) righteousness

This refers to the righteousness that has been given, or imputed, to us by Jesus Christ that makes us positionally righteous before God.

3. Practical (imparted) righteousness

This third type of righteousness describes living out, or imparting, the righteousness that Christ has given to us.

Most of you have probably already made some fairly accurate guesses about which of the three Paul is referring to here in Ephesians 6, but let's make sure we put some Biblical backing behind our assumptions.

1. *This does not refer to self-righteousness.*

There are a couple great examples of self righteousness and how it fails to protect us. One comes from a story that Jesus told in Luke 18.

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Pharisee was full of self-righteousness. He was all about the keeping of legalistic do's and don'ts. This kind of righteousness only separates us from God. Before the Apostle Paul was saved, he had that kind of righteousness. Listen to what he says about it in Philippians 3:

If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

In Zechariah 3, the prophet Zechariah records for us a vision that he is given by God in which Joshua, the high priest, faces the accusations of Satan. Since this is one of the few passages in Scripture where we are given a direct look at how God deals with Satan, and because it also addresses all three aspects of righteousness, I'm going to use this passage to help us determine which aspect or aspects of righteousness Paul is writing about in Ephesians 6. Zechariah 3:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. 2 And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?"

3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.

4 Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

5 And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head."

So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the Lord stood by.

Joshua cannot stand in his own righteousness. His sin is plain to see. Verse 3 says he was clothed with filthy garments. And so Satan, the accuser, stand against him. Joshua's filthy garments are a picture of self-righteousness. In fact Is.64:6 says, "**All our righteousness is like filthy rags.**" Self-righteousness is one of Satan's greatest deceptions.

Sometimes Satan tempts us to be proud or self-righteous by thinking we've worked our way into God's good graces... that our efforts and works have lead to our present acceptance by God. We feel proudly righteous and view others who do not measure-up to our maturity level or amount of good deeds with contempt as being inferior. This is the Pharisee-ism that Christ frequently condemned.

2. This does refer to imputed righteousness.

In our passage from Zechariah, we find that although Joshua was unable to remove his own filthy clothes in order to stand firm against Satan's accusations, God did it for Him. God not only took away his sin, but he also clothed Joshua with rich garments. Joshua didn't deserve that or earn that in any way. It was completely an act of grace on God's part. And then it was God, not Joshua, who rebuked Satan for his accusations.

In this account, it was God's own righteousness that was imputed, or given to Joshua. And as a result, Joshua had positional righteousness before God. That is exactly what Jesus Christ has done for every one of His followers. He has taken away our dirty clothes, our own self-righteousness, and clothed us with His righteousness.

Paul describes this process very clearly in a number of his letters. When a person is born again, God removes from him all his sin – past, present and future and imputes to him the perfect righteousness of Christ. 2 Cor.5:21 says, "**For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the**

righteousness of God in Him." God put that righteousness on us the moment we were saved. Imputed righteousness is so important because it is the basis for our imparted righteousness. Imputed righteousness not only saves us from hell, but it protects us from Satan here and now.

How does it do that?

When we do something wrong or when we remember past failures, Satan is quick to condemn us by saying something like, *"Do you really think God would accept someone who did something like that? God is holy, and you are bad. God is pure, and you are rotten. Look at the sort of person you are! Look at the things you've done! You might as well forget about God accepting and blessing you."*

I have seen so many Christians fall because they fell victim to this Satanic attack and did not know how to repel it. This is because their heart was not protected by a knowledge of and faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ.

When we have the breastplate of imputed righteousness in place, we can tell Satan, *"I know everything you're saying. I am not perfect. But I look to Jesus, not to myself. I don't count on my own ability to measure up. I count on Christ and God imputes to me Jesus' perfect righteousness. Satan, before you can slay me with despair and fear, you will have to find something unrighteousness in Jesus, for his imputed righteousness is my breastplate."*

Satan can't handle that because he can't find even one tiny weakness in Jesus' righteousness. Our heart is safe from spiritual despair if it is protected by the imputed righteousness of Jesus.

1 John 2:1 says, **"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."**

When we sin and Satan tries to accuse us before God, Jesus is our advocate who intercedes on our behalf. He is our righteousness.

3. *This does refer to practical righteousness.*

Let's return to our passage from Zechariah one more time. After God removes Joshua's filthy clothes, replaces them with rich garments and rebukes Satan, we might expect that would be the end of the story. But before He dismisses Joshua, God gives him this command in verse 6:

Then the Angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, 7 "Thus says the Lord of hosts:

**'If you will walk in My ways,
And if you will keep My command,
Then you shall also judge My house,
And likewise have charge of My courts;
I will give you places to walk
Among these who stand here.**

The command to walk in God's ways and keep His requirements is what I have described as practical righteousness. Although God had already provided Joshua with his imputed, positional righteousness, there was one more thing that Joshua needed to do. He needed to apply that righteousness in his everyday life. Once he was clothed with the righteousness of Jesus, it put him in a privileged position

that required him to practice that righteousness in every area of his life. He was to impart that righteousness to others in all of his relationships.

"The breastplate of righteousness" means living a life of holiness and obedience to God. As Paul has explained (Eph. 4:24, NASB), the new man was **"created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."** Thus as new creatures in Christ, we are to **"Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit[b] is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth)"** (5:8b-9, NKJV). In other words, as we walk as God's children in this world, as new creatures in Christ, we will be growing in conformity to God's holy standards as revealed in His Word. Fruit takes time, but there should be evident progress in holiness and obedience. If there is a gap between our profession of Christ and our practice, the enemy will use it to attack us.

How do we put on the Breastplate of Righteousness?

By living in a minute by minute obedience to the Father. God dresses us in imputed righteousness (like we dress a child) but we must put on our practical righteousness everyday. 1 Pet.1:15-16 says, **"but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy."**

That will bring great joy. Speaking of the gospel, John wrote, **"These things we write to you that your joy may be full"** (1 John 1:4). John MacArthur writes: *"Many if not most of the emotional and relational problems Christians experience are caused by lack of personal holiness. Many of our disappointments and discouragements do not come from circumstances or from other people but from our own unconfessed and uncleansed sin. And when circumstances and other people do manage to rob us of happiness, it is because we are unprotected by the armor of a holy life. In either case the cause of unhappiness is our own sin... Unholy living does not rob us of salvation, but it robs us of salvation's joy"* (p.353).

Ill of Terry Schafer - young wife living with her husband in the small city of Moline Illinois. She had a special gift she wanted to give to her husband for Christmas but was afraid that they would not be able to afford it. She started shopping for it in Sept. knowing it was a specialized piece of equipment and not every store would sell it. She finally found it – and to her dismay it was way beyond their budget. But she came up the idea of laying it away and making payments to the store keeper. She pitched her idea to the store manager. The business man sympathized with her situation and said, "Since your husband is a policeman, I doubt that you're going to take advantage of me. Why don't you give your first payment today – and I'll let you take the gift home. Make sure you make the other payments and pay it off before Christmas." She agreed. The only problem was she was one of those people who couldn't keep a secret. She couldn't wait till Christmas to give the gift to her husband. That September night she stood there beaming with a wrapped present on the table of their small home. She said Merry Christmas and gave her husband a peck on the cheek.

Neither one of them realized at that moment how significant that gift would end up being. In fact in the not-to-distant future it would mean the difference between life and death for her husband. On Oct. 1 of that same year Patrolman David Schafer was working the night shift and got a call on his police radio. A drugstore robbery was in process. Racing to the scene he arrived just in time to observe

the suspect getting into his car, starting the engine and speeding away. Quickly David switched on his siren and began the pursuit. Three blocks later the getaway car suddenly pulled over the side of the road and stopped. The suspect was still behind the wheel of his car as David cautiously approached. He got about three feet from the window when the suspect fired an automatic pistol sending a .45 caliber slug into David's abdomen.

7:00 AM the next morning – Terry answered the door of their home to face a police officer telling her that her husband had been shot trying to apprehend a robbery suspect. As he detailed the news, he said he had bad news and good news. As she listened, she was glad that she didn't wait till Christmas to give her husband the gift. David had been shot point blank with a 45 caliber pistol and survived. She was very glad the shopkeeper had let her take that gift home that day. The gift Terry had purchased for her husband was a bullet proof vest – and it had saved his life. He was in the hospital with deep bruised to his chest not a bullet wound. She had given her husband the gift of life.

The reason Christ came – was to provide for us a vest of righteousness. He paid the price with His blood that he might protect us with a shield that sin could not penetrate. Put it on. The only way you can loose is if you take it off.