

How to Put on the Breastplate of Righteousness

By Matthew Black, Pastor

Text: Ephesians 6:14

Date: Sunday, August 23, 2009, 11am

Series: Ephesians

Tabernacle Baptist Church

7020 Barrington Road

Hanover Park, Illinois 60133

Website: www.GodCentered.info

Introduction: Open your Bible to the book of **Ephesians 6:10-17**. This morning we are studying again about spiritual warfare. We learn that if you are a Christian, your ultimate battle is against a wicked angel named Satan and all his demon armies. The difficulty is that our enemy is unseen. This is why we need to "be strong in the Lord" and rest on his power and strength. God has promised to fight for us by our side.

Fighting in the spiritual realm is not at all like what we are used to. Paul describes it in 2 Timothy as a "fight the good fight of faith". Faith is trusting in Him who is invisible, in our Lord and God.

So Paul says here, be clothed with the full armor of God so that we can stand against the deceitful schemes and ideas of the devil.

There are six pieces of armor Paul lists here, the first of which we said was the "belt of truth". The belts the Roman soldiers wore had the purpose of girding up the long garments all the people, including the soldiers wore. You knew if the soldier had his tunic rolled up under his belt, he was on duty and ready to fight if called upon. The belt would have leather flaps that hung down above the knees. In the same way, the Bible tells us we are to "gird up the loins of our mind". We are to take "every thought captive" and put it under the power of the Word of God".

The armor begins with the belt of truth, and in many ways, this is how the Christian life begins. There is an awakening—an enlightenment of the mind that is radical. The etymology of the word "repentance" means a "transformation of the mind". That's how salvation begins. Through the Spirit of God enlightening the human mind to the real meaning and urgency of the Word of God comes conversion, or repentance—this transformation of the mind. The person for the first time understands and turns from his life of sin to Christ. His thought are stopped from flowing freely, but now they are captive to the Word of God. So we need to put on the Belt of Truth.

Last week we answered the question: what is the "breastplate of righteousness"? We said it was to be assured that our righteousness comes from Christ and not from ourselves. It is the most important piece of the armor. When a soldier puts on the breastplate, he feels better the moment he puts it on. He feels protected. The illustration of the breastplate of righteousness is the assurance that Christ died for us, and we are now therefore declared righteous before the holy God of heaven. We are now accepted by God. We feel protected from His wrath. We are also protected from the devil's accusations. But understand it is because of Christ's righteousness.

Today we are going to explain how we are to put on this breastplate of righteousness.

As we begin, let's stand and read **Ephesians 6:10-17**, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to **stand** against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand**. 14 **Stand** therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God".

[Prayer for Guidance]

How do we put on the breastplate of righteousness practically speaking?

Main proposition: We need to meditate and think and dwell on what Christ has done for us.

Explanation: Our former life was designed to get us away from our thoughts of eternity. We were either trying to save ourselves or numb ourselves. We didn't want to think of eternity. We either were self-righteous, and we thought ourselves good enough for heaven. We had no idea of the sinfulness and ugliness of sin in God's sight. So there are some who are consumed with the false, self-righteousness found in the religions of this world. All false religions give the person the ability to save himself. Or there are some that think they are so wicked, they don't want to think about eternity. They might drink themselves away through alcohol. They might fill their life with lust for money or pleasure. Some use drugs or movies. Others live for constant entertainment and distraction and laughter to forget. Almost all people want something to numb the many pains of this life.

I've got good news for you! You don't have to save yourself. Neither do you have to numb yourself. You can come to Christ just as you are, and this is the only way you may come if you are to be accepted. You must come as a wretch, a sinner, no better than a demon or the devil himself. You come as you are, not trying to save yourself. You come face to face with who you are, not trying to numb yourself.

If you give your life to Christ, then you are righteous in Him. How do we know we are righteous in Christ? The Bible gives us several terms that explain how Jesus Christ is our righteousness. By meditating on them, we will be putting on the breastplate of righteousness. They are: imputation, justification, and regeneration.

Imputation tells us of the **transfer** of my guilt for Christ's righteousness. It tells us how we can be accepted by a holy God even though we are sinners. It answers the question, how can God remain just and allow unjust people in His presence. Therefore, imputation is an exchange of my sin for Christ's righteousness.

Justification tells us of our **title or position** before God. It is the legal declaration that I am righteous before God based on Christ's righteousness. I am declared righteous!!

Regeneration is the **transformation** of my nature. This is Christ's righteous nature being united to my soul.

To put on the breastplate of righteousness, you need to meditate on the promises of Christ's righteousness.

- I. The first promise tells us of the **transfer** of righteousness, called **Imputation**. How many of you know the ten commandments? Most of us do. Knowing them doesn't help us. God says we must keep them all perfectly. How many of you have done what God requires? We do not have our own righteousness.
 - A. Consider God's perspective on **Human** performance. **Isaiah 64:6** says shockingly that all our righteousness is filthy rages, literally translated that would be "a used menstrual cloth". That's literally what the words "filthy rags" mean in that verse.

Look over at **Romans 3:10, 12**. Paul tells us that "There is none righteous, no, not one...12... there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (**Romans 3:10, 12**).

The summary of the entire law is to love God with your whole heart and being and to love your neighbor perfectly. No one has loved God with all his heart since being born. That's why we are not righteous. We've not done good. Paul's conclusion is that we all need to realize that we are "guilty before God" (**Romans 3:19**).

A few verses later in **Romans 3:23**, Paul says the debt for our bad performance is eternal death. "The wages of sin is death" (**Romans 3:23**). A paraphrase of this verse would be: "the debt you have to pay for sinning is death!" Your guilt means that you will die. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (**Ezekiel 18:20**). The Scripture says that "death and hell will be cast into the Lake of fire" (**Revelation 20:14**). For those who die without Christ, the Bible says, "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night" (**Revelation 14:11**).

All mankind is in a dilemma. If sin were money, then you are infinitely in debt to God, and the only way to pay your debt off is through eternal punishment. All people know that true and divine justice demands that we pay for our wrong doing. On earth we have jails. In eternity there is hell. You have a debt that you can never pay off. But there is one who can pay your debt!! You need to have Christ charge all your sin to your account.

- B. Consider God's perspective on **Christ's** performance. **2 Corinthians 5:21**, "For he hath made Him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him".

Christ substitutes and exchanges His righteousness for your sin. This is imputation. It is an accounting term that means to charge something to someone else's account.¹ Christ charged all our sin to his account. God accepts it on our behalf. He paid in full for our sin. And Christ puts a positive charge onto your account. The other day I got a refund and they put a positive credit on my account. Christ credits my account with his perfect righteousness.

1. Christ went down that via Dolorosa, the way of suffering, the procession with his cross, like a criminal, and some mocked Him. But He gladly went, bearing the sins of His church upon Him. Consider that the One who inhabits eternity came to inhabit a human body so that He might take not some of your sins and sorrows upon Himself, but ALL of them. How did he do it? In order to be our

¹ W. A. Elwell & B. J. Beitzel. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1024.

righteousness, Christ had to be perfectly righteous. Christ took on our human nature, yet without sin. **Hebrews 2:17**, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation [PROPITIATION] for the sins of the people."

2. **Hebrews 4:15**, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

This is a fulfillment of OT prophecy. Check out **Jeremiah 23:5-6**, "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. 6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

The title is in all caps because it is referring to the everlasting God, Jehovah. Who is this Jehovah our Righteousness? The title in Hebrew is JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU.

Jesus Christ, Yahweh our Righteousness, perfectly fulfilled the moral law in our place. He lived an absolutely perfect life. Christ not only died to take away your sin, He lived that you might be made righteous!

3. **Galatians 3:10-14**, "For as many as are of [rely on] the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. 11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. 12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. 13 **Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us:** for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: 14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; [so] that we might receive the promise of the Spirit [or the promised Spirit] through faith".

A curse has been inflicted by God upon us because we have broken God's law. What is this curse? According to Webster, a curse is "sentence of divine vengeance on sinners". In other words, God sentences you to eternal harm and punishment. This is the same curse given to Satan himself. Remember the words of Jesus as He spoke of Judgment Day in **Matthew 25:41**, "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, **Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels**".

We are under God's curse and condemnation as a result of breaking God's law. God as our Creator rightly has the authority to tell us how to live, and we have not lived that way. We have continually defied Him, mocked His holiness as if it were ok to live the way we have lived. We rightly deserve His curse.

Now if I were to wish you harm and curse you, it wouldn't mean anything. But this is the righteous, holy, loving, just God of the universe. He is omnipotent and His curse is eternal and infinite.

All who are not saved by Christ are under a curse. Here we have the meaning of the Cross of Christ. Here we have the blazing center of God's glory.

For twenty years I have been saved. In that time, I have thought deeply on the meaning of the Cross of Christ. Yet I expect that when my eyes open in heaven, in the first five minutes of my beginning of eternity there, I will be absolutely breathless by the sudden increase of the understanding that will come to me when I behold the Lamb that was slain and hear angels and archangels singing in my ear, "with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (**Revelation 5:11-12**).

The breastplate of righteousness will absorb all the accusations of the devil. The Scripture describes him as our "adversary" and the "accuser of the brethren". He will constantly tell you that you are condemned as he is because of your sin. He will remind you of your unworthiness. He knows about your past and about your present. When the devil hurls accusations at you let the Word of God's promises protect you. Be assured in your redemption.

What is the result of imputation? This brings us to our second point. The first promise tells us of the **transfer** of righteousness, called **Imputation**.

- II. The second promise tells us of the **title** of righteousness, called **Justification**. Romans 3. You are justified, declared righteous in the sight of God! You are "accepted in the Beloved" (**Ephesians 1:6**).

We need to focus on Christ and all He has done, and how we are accepted by God through Him. We can "have boldness in the day of judgment". Turn over to **1 John 4:17**, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world." In other words, Christ dwells in me while I dwell in this world.

Go to **Hebrews 4:14-16**, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession; for we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore **come boldly unto the throne of grace**, that we may find mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Christ is our high priest. Another place in **1 John 2:1**, God describes this one who is "without sin" and "the Righteous" as "our Advocate".

Romans 3 is clear that our justification is by FAITH. **Romans 3:20-25**, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²² Even the righteousness of God *which is by faith* of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵ Whom God hath set forth *to be a propitiation through faith in his blood*".

Consider also **Ephesians 2:8-10**, "For by grace are ye saved **through faith**; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them".

We are saved by faith, and not by works, but we are saved unto good works. Is this a contradiction. Not at all! We do not merit our salvation through works, but because we are saved God has so transformed us that our life will consist of good works. That brings us to our third point concerning the breastplate of righteousness.

- III. The third promise tells us of the **transformation** that Christ's righteousness works in us, called **Regeneration**.

John 3:3, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

In **Ezekiel 36:26-27**, the prophet promises that God will take out our heart of stone and replace it with a tender, living heart of flesh. What a difference! This is the transformation of regeneration.

Paul says in **Galatians 2:20** that Christ lives in us! We are talking not simply of being forgiven of sins, but of a radical transformation that God works in us. His righteousness comes out of us.

Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. When he came down from that holy place, people observed that his countenance was shining with the glories of God. So intense was the reflection that he had to veil his face. Moses had been in the presence of the holy God of the universe.

A regenerated child of God has the very presence inside his being which Moses beheld outwardly upon the mountain. Christians are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Moses' countenance glowed because of this divine presence. How much more shall the very life of a Christian glow with God's holiness who is indwelt by the One before whom the angels continually cry: "holy, holy, holy"? A Christian is a new creation in Christ; he is Christ's "workmanship" (Ephesians 2:10). Indeed all born again people before or after Christ are given a new heart that causes to love Him (Deuteronomy 30:6).

A regenerated heart has the power to conquer sin in some measure. How can this be? It is possible because of the work of Jesus Christ. Christ has "delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). We are now "light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:9). We have been resurrected from spiritual death to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). A genuine Christian always has some measure of holiness in his life.

A. W. Tozer said:

The whole purpose of God in redemption is to make us holy and to restore us to the image of God.²

The very essence of salvation is not simply that the Christian has the forgiveness of his sins, but that he has entered into a new humanity as a new creation of God with a new and holy nature producing the evidence of a holy and godly life, with a view toward the final

² A. W. Tozer. *The Root of the Righteous* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1955), 25.

redemption which is the ultimate eradication of his sinful nature. For now, God's work in one in which He conforms us to the image of Christ. This is all possible because Christ's righteous nature is united with our nature at regeneration.

Conclusion: What is the result of our breastplate of righteousness? Christ's blood has so satisfied God's justice for your sin that God says we can "come boldly to unto the throne of grace". Christ pleads for you before the Father, and you will never be harmed. You are welcomed in God's presence!

1 John 4:17, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment". Christ loves us. He is our Advocate, our High Priest, our Representative before God. You have nothing to fear if you have faith in Him.

Listen to the promises of God's Word:

Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Psalms 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

Jeremiah 31:34, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."