

“The Breastplate of Righteousness”

Ephesians 6:14

Introduction:

1. Consumers are confronted by many marketing schemes, or should we say scams? One of these is the “price after rebate”, which sounds fine until you try to read the rebate instructions that seem impossible to comply with! Another such method is the “lifetime guarantee” from companies that are small and that no one has ever heard of. However, true Christianity is not a marketing scheme. Consider Christ’s message to people (Lk 13:3,5,24; 14:27; 16:13; 18:22). However, the good news does come with a number of guarantees, one of which we are looking at during these summer months.

2. Our subject in this series of messages is spiritual warfare, and we are especially focusing on the armor or spiritual protection that the Lord Jesus Christ has provided for us. The apostle Paul uses the illustration of an ancient soldier’s armor to represent the spiritual blessings that we have in and through Christ. When we are strong in the Lord and his mighty power and by faith rely on what we have “in him”, we are fully protected against any attack of the enemy. Now let us think about the spiritual blessing we have in “the breastplate of righteousness”.

Exposition:

I. Unpacking the illustration

A. The importance of the breastplate

1. In the close combat action of the ancient world (consider scenes from a movie like *Gladiator*), the breastplate was especially important. It had two parts (the front and the back) and protected the soldier’s heart, lungs and other vital organs.

2. Without this piece of the armor, the soldier was very vulnerable to every sword, spear or dagger thrust and to arrows and other debris of battle. While not impenetrable, it offered him at least some means of making it through close combat alive.

B. Removing a misconception

1. At least since the time of John Bunyan, a teaching has been circulating through the Christian church that “the armor is only for the front. The Christian has no armor for

the front, so you must face the enemy.” That teaching is partially incorrect. Certainly, we ought to confront the enemy. “Stand!”

2. But the point of confronting the enemy was taken from the wrong idea. Both the breastplate and the helmet protected the front and the back (and the sides) of the ancient soldier. We are still protected, thank God, if our spiritual enemies slip up behind us, or if we fall flat on our faces! Having put on the armor of God, we are very safe throughout all the special emergencies of battle.

II. Understanding this spiritual grace

A. Like the other pieces of armor, some try to interpret this righteousness as the believer’s own achievements in sanctification.

1. I can certainly understand their concerns, for the pursuit of holiness and godliness is not optional, as the New Testament Scriptures constantly stress. The imputed righteousness of Christ is not a license to sin, as some wrongly teach (Jude 1:3-4). In fact, union with Christ demands a godly way of life (Rm 6). In a time of growing rebellion against God, we must stand for righteous and holy conduct.

2. However, the evil surrounding us must not lead us to misuse any text of Scripture. For reasons mentioned in the previous message, “righteousness” must be the imputed or credited righteousness of Christ. Anything else turns the armor of God into our armor, and offers little, if any, protection against spiritual attacks. Only the proud or the ignorant assume that they have progressed in growth in grace to the point where their holiness protects them. Yes, the Holy Spirit produces a growing conformity to Christ. Yes, that way of life glorifies God. But where in the Bible does he ever tell us to trust in ourselves and our works of righteousness? No, the Spirit of God does not.

B. Instead, let us think about the gracious provision of the righteousness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

1. This righteousness, which is ours through faith in Christ, is God’s righteousness. It comes from him and fully meets his approval. By it we are right with God—justified! We have peace with God (Rm 5:1), are saved from God’s righteous wrath (Rm 5:10), and reconciled to God (Rm 5:10). Being in Christ Jesus, we can never be condemned (Rm 8:1) or separated from God’s love (Rm 8:38-39).

2. The righteousness that comes from God and that is by faith (Ph 3:9) is what the Spirit of God through the apostle urges us to put on. “It is an infinitely perfect righteousness, consisting in the obedience and sufferings of the Son of God, which satisfies all the demands of the divine law and justice....” [Hodge] It is this kind of breastplate that can protect us who follow Christ against the devil’s schemes.

Apply: Christ’s righteousness is our true joy and confidence in spiritual warfare. Thank God for this far beyond your ability to imagine perfect armor.

III. Using what God has given us for his glory

Comment: Let us consider how this armor strongly protects us from two of Satan’s schemes.

A. One of the ways that Satan opposes the people of God is to accuse us before God (Job 1-2; Zech 3; Rev 12).

1. As our adversary he seeks to break our fellowship with God, and at times he attempts this by raising questions about our standing before God. The evil one strives to find an ally within us called a guilty conscience. By attacking us here, he seeks to cause all kinds of uneasiness in us. “How can **you possibly** imagine that God will accept **you**? Look at the ugly mess your life is in! The Holy God, whom you presume to call ‘Father’, will have nothing to do with you, sinner! I have observed your way of life. You call yourself a child of God? Hypocrite is a better name for someone like you.” And so he seeks to unnerve us, to raise doubt and fear and unbelief in the good news of Jesus Christ.

2. How do you handle such attacks?

a. A mere professor will shrug them off. “Why should I worry? I made a decision, I was baptized, and I am a member of the church! I even serve in the church!” But notice the emphasis on “**I**”. Such an attitude reveals reliance on “works righteousness”. And such a person does not have any firm basis for salvation.

b. On the other hand, a true believer will renew his or her repentance, humbly bow before the Father, and cry out, “Father in heaven, I have no other hope but the blood and righteousness of your Son. Lord Jesus, I trust in you! Lord, you know all about my sin, and my deepest thoughts and motives, but your saving grace is all the merit I need. I rest on you.” Every time a true believer relies on Christ, he or she will experience the full strength of Christ’s righteousness. There is **no condemnation!**

B. Another tactic of the evil one is to distract us from the glory of Christ and the joy of knowing the Lord. There are many subtle attacks here.

1. One method is to tempt us to add a little to Christ—a little ritual, a little doctrinal knowledge, a little experience, or a little service. Once the believer falls into the trap, the devil promptly kicks the legs out from that one little extra. Some problem enters the church or the believer's life, and he or she finds out that there is no joy in that little extra. They have lost connection with the head of the church. The only way back is repentance and reliance on the Lord's perfect righteousness.

2. Another method is to draw our hearts away from our first love to pursue worldly things: wealth, sports, recreation, vacation, homes, toys, and so on capture the heart, and the believer wanders from the battle line to the sidelines. And you listen to their talk. It is not about Christ and his righteousness. It is about their current infatuation with the worldly thing. Can such a person recover? Yes, praise God that Christ's righteousness is sufficient even for that bitter denial of Christ.

Song: Verse two of "At the Foot of the Cross" by Steve & Vikki Cook.

Upon the cross of Jesus
Lord I would fix my eyes
For it always will remind me
Of these truths
My iniquity seems endless
Yet greater still your grace
And I will glory in the Cross
Throughout the ages

Apply: Has something besides the Risen Lord Jesus captured your heart? What is the burning passion, the desire of your heart? Do you want to sing "love songs" to the Lord Christ, to praise the Father by the power of the Spirit for God's Beloved Son? Or do you wonder what in the world the pastor is talking about? "What has happened to all your joy? ... I am perplexed you! (Gal 4:15,20)" I plead with you. Put on God's armor! Rest and rejoice in Christ's surpassing righteousness.