

The Breastplate of Righteousness

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[0 : 00] Let's turn this evening to Ephesians chapter 6, continuing with that little passage with the armor of God that's specified there.

Ephesians chapter 6 and at verse 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 firm.

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness. We're coming to look at that second part mentioned, the breastplate of righteousness, having looked at the belt of truth last time.

What is righteousness? How would we understand righteousness? How would we describe what righteousness is if somebody asked us what does the Bible mean by righteousness that applies to us as Christians?

Well, it's not very easy to describe because there are different sides to it, different aspects to it. But essentially, righteousness is, you might say, the standard or the quality of life that is required of us.

[1 : 13] The standard of life that God requires of us as human beings. In order to match up with his own perfection, his own law, his own righteousness, indeed, we are required to be righteous.

Now that is how God created us when he created Adam in the first place and Eve. They were created in righteousness. They were created with a standing before God where they had his complete favour.

It's the standing that we have before God, the favour of God, without anything actually interfering with that, without anything short of full acceptance, full favour.

That's what God created us with. And the Catechism reminds us how we lost that and what happened when we sinned against God.

By asking in question 18, what is the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell? The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness.

[2 : 30] That's the second bit there that we are interested in tonight. The want of original righteousness. In other words, the righteousness that we were created with, we now want, we now lack.

And that is part of the sinful state into which we fell when we fell in Adam. We don't have that righteousness anymore.

And in order to stand before God, we need a righteousness that matches up with the righteousness of God, the standard that God himself requires of us.

And just because we cannot now give it to him and cannot now produce it ourselves, does not mean that God has ceased to require it of us.

How then are we going to get it back? Well, not of ourselves. One of the things we would need to do, to be able to do, in order to get this righteousness back, would be to keep the whole law of God perfectly, every single moment of our lives from birth to death.

[3 : 43] And even that would not be enough. Because there's something other than just keeping the law perfectly now required. And that is that we make up for the sin that we actually sinned against God.

We have to pay the price of it in being able to endure and overcome his condemnation for the broken law. Not only can we not keep the law of God perfectly, but we cannot actually give him what would satisfy him in his justice and righteousness for our sin.

So where are we going to get this? Where does this breastplate come from? How do we come to possess such a thing as the breastplate of righteousness?

How has it actually come to us so that we are able to wear it and have it as a piece of this essential armor? Well of course it has come to us through the work of Christ.

Romans 8 chapter 8 at the beginning there, verses 3 and 4, tells us that what the law could not do, in other words it's really we that couldn't do it because of our sin, but even the law could not do it, in that it was weak through the flesh, our sin God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh.

[5 : 13] That's in our nature. Why? So that the righteousness of the law would be fulfilled in us. The way that it's come about is that God sent his own son, his own righteous, sinless son, to take our place, to do the work which we could not do, and by that he obtained for us this righteousness, which in fact is the righteousness of Jesus himself.

That's the one that's given to us. That's what is imputed to us. That's the one we come to possess. And we can look at this under three headings.

First of all, we look at how it was manufactured. How this righteousness was manufactured. It was manufactured in the workshop of Christ's obedience.

Secondly, we look at how it comes to us. It comes to us with free delivery. It's delivered freely to us by a carrier called Grace and Company.

And thirdly, it's guaranteed. And it's guaranteed to be everlastingly effective. Three things.

[6 : 30] Manufactured, delivered, guaranteed. It's manufactured, was manufactured, in the workshop of Christ's obedience. Now, that means there are two essential matters in that.

First of all, Christ's perfect life. He met everything that the law of God required in terms of living a perfect life. Every aspect of the standard that God required of a human being, Christ in our nature actually met it.

He lived a perfect life. He never sinned. Not for a single iota of a second was there any sin in his mind, in his thoughts, in his actions, in his words, in any aspect of him, his being or his works, in any aspect of that, there was never a sin.

He fulfilled all the demands of the law of God. He lived sinlessly and faultlessly, and even his direst enemies, even his most committed enemies, were forced to actually say they could not find any fault in him.

And his perfect life is itself a great contributory to the righteousness that we have come to possess through him.

[7 : 52] But it required more than that. Like we said, God's law having been broken, it wasn't just that Jesus came into the world to live a perfect life, he came in to die an atoning death.

And this breastplate has come to us forged in this workshop of Christ's obedience, which is not just his perfect life, but is particularly also his atoning death.

That's what the Bible, in fact, major son of the Lord tells us of his perfect life. It tells us more than that about the kind of death which he died. The Gospels, all of the Gospels, major on the fact that this Jesus died, the death of the cross.

Paul's theology is circled around the death which Jesus died, as well as his following resurrection. In other words, Jesus came to be our substitute.

And as he came to be our substitute, that means that our sin became his sin. It was imputed to him. The guilt of our sin was transferred to him.

[9 : 06] And everything that needed to be done by way of punishing our sin as God needed in his righteousness and holiness to punish it, to demand that of us, that was transferred to him.

And that meant that the wrath of God was something that he needed to deal with and to meet and to overcome.

And in this workshop of Christ's obedience, the furnace that really manufactured this wonderful breastplate, the furnace was the furnace of God's righteous anger, God's wrath against sin.

That is where this breastplate was manufactured. That's where it was forged, in this furnace of wrath. That's what it cost to produce such an item of armour for people like you and I.

Romans chapter 4 verse 25 there mentions about Christ being delivered for our trespasses and rose again or raised again for our justification, for our righteousness.

[10 : 29] In other words, the whole of this action of Christ in his death and resurrection as you consider them as one wonderful work is directed towards our acceptance with God, towards our possession of righteousness, towards our meeting the demands of God, towards giving us this breastplate of righteousness that we come to wear as a piece of this vital armour.

So there's the first thing. It was manufactured by God himself in the person of Jesus Christ in our nature. It was manufactured through his perfect life, manufactured by his atoning death, forged in the furnace of God's wrath, manufactured in the workshop of Christ's obedience, his perfect obedience.

Secondly, it comes to us free delivery. Titus chapter 2, for example, verse 11, tells us that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

The grace of God, the undeserved favour of God that brings salvation to us. And salvation is more than righteousness, but it contains this righteousness described here as the breastplate of righteousness.

the manufacturing of this breastplate cost dearly. The cost of it is immeasurably great. We can't put a price on what it costs to actually manufacture it because you're talking about Christ and the death of Christ and the sufferings of Christ and everything that's involved in that by way of making up for our sin and paying in accordance with God's demands what needed to be paid to him in regard to our sin against him.

[12 : 23] And despite the fact that it costs so much to manufacture that's one of the facts of life isn't it? The more something costs to manufacture well obviously the more you tend to have to pay for it.

If you buy something that costs hundreds of pounds to manufacture you're going to pay more than that to buy it. This cost to manufacture an indescribable sum.

Yet when it comes to us and the offer of the gospel there's no price ticket we don't have to pay anything for it. It's free.

It comes to us freely. And the freeness of the gospel offer is very genuine on God's part.

It's not like one of those sort of deals that you may find in this life where something is said to be a free offer and then you actually send for it or click on your computer screen on that free offer and then something else comes up and actually it's not free after all.

[13 : 36] There's some other thing that you need to then connect with. You need to join a club or something like that and that's going to cost you X number of pounds a month or whatever. then you'll get your so-called free gift.

There's no such small print no catches nothing like that in regard to God's free gift of righteousness. It is genuinely free despite the cost of its manufacture.

And it's conveyed to us free delivery by grace through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit here again is where the catechism reminds us and summarizes so well the teaching of the Bible where it says how does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ.

The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us thereby uniting us to Christ.

Now that obviously means that the other part of the armor that's mentioned the shield of faith like we said last time all of these parts are closely connected they're all tied together in some way spiritually and that's how the Bible tells us that our righteousness the breastplate of righteousness is connected to our faith because it's through faith that we receive it we don't pay for it without faith faith is not a work which earns God's favor our faith is the means as produced in us by the Spirit of God the means by which we receive what Christ has already manufactured for us by working faith in us and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling isn't that something tonight that fills you with a sense of wonder and admiration and thankfulness that here is something which costs so much and yet it comes to you free here is something that you can't describe in terms of its manufacturing yet when it comes to us in the offer of the gospel the Spirit of God says I have this for you and I have this to deliver you and there's no charge for delivery and there's no cost to the purchase of it it's already been paid everything about it is free as it comes to you it's got free delivery by grace and co thirdly it's guaranteed everlastingly effective there's no other guarantee in existence like that it doesn't matter what product you buy in this life however long the guarantee is it doesn't last forever and then seldom you'll get a profit seldom you'll get a product that has a guarantee beyond your own life at least but this one does it has an everlastingly effective guarantee in other words

[16 : 47] God is saying about this breastplate of righteousness that for all time and throughout the whole of eternity it is guaranteed to be effective it is guaranteed effective in this life in regard to the way in which Satan attacks us we'll see in a minute but it's also guaranteed in terms of God himself and God's requirements remember God's requirements are not just for us in this life God's requirements last throughout eternity because God is God God is always going to demand that we

are righteous that we appear before him with a righteousness which lasts which will not grow old which will not need to be replaced that's what you've got God gives us this breastplate to meet all his own demands and that's what it does and taking up this breastplate as Paul puts it here take up put on the whole armor of God put on this breastplate having put it on you've got something that is absolutely faultless

God himself will never find a fault in it there is nothing there that does not meet his own perfect demands Romans chapter 8 is one of the great texts that assures of that there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus why is there no condemnation to them because they are wearing a breastplate manufactured in the furnace of God's wrath in the workshop of God's obedience they are wearing the breastplate of Christ's own righteousness and the only way that God is going to find fault with our standing in this breastplate of righteousness is if he finds fault with Christ himself sometime in the future it's never going to happen is it you find all the way through the

Bible that emphasis on that righteousness of Christ that will stand Paul says at the end of his life as he writes to Timothy the second letter of Timothy chapter 4 and verse 8 that there is henceforth laid up for me a crown of righteousness he's going to be crowned he's going to be crowned in glory he's going to be crowned by the righteous judge he's going to have the victory that Christ has achieved for him he's going to have that with him for all eternity that's not going to be depleted but it's a crown of righteousness its guarantee is that it is everlastingly effective and as long as God demands that righteousness is required so that righteousness will keep us will be sufficient for us will be effective for us right through the day of judgment every single person is going to be judged you and I will come before the judgment seat of

Christ as 2 Corinthians 5 puts it that we may obtain things done in this body in accordance with what we have done whether it be good or bad every Christian is going to be judged going to have to pass through the court of judgment God's judgment over every single believer who has faith in Christ is not just going to be not guilty his judgment is going to be positively and fully you are righteous and everybody else is the opposite there is therefore condemnation now to those who are not in Christ Jesus both sides of it are equally valid but the emphasis there is on no condemnation to God's people because whatever demands God has Christ has met them and Christ's product will continue to meet them all throughout eternity it's guaranteed everlastingly effective with regard to God's own in relation to God's own requirements but it's also guaranteed effective against all Satan's accusations because that really is the context you remember in which Paul is actually writing this that's the chief purpose for which he's telling us about this armor for which he specified it to the Ephesians Satan's accusations against us Satan's assaults upon us and that includes assaults upon our standing upon our relationship with God upon which we where we see ourselves in relation to God Satan is the great prosecutor that brings accusations against the people of God Revelation chapter 12 is a very interesting passage not necessarily an easy passage for

[22 : 07] Revelation language in Revelation sometimes is very difficult but it talks there about a great sign appearing in heaven and then this woman who gave birth to a child and then the child being attacked by this great red dragon and his tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and so on and stood before the woman who was about to give birth so that when she bore her child she might devour it she gave birth to a male child one who was to rule all the nations with a rod of iron but her child was caught up to God and to his throne and the woman fled into the wilderness now that's a picture of Christ for us and his coming into the world and the effect that that had upon these principalities and powers the spiritual wickedness in heavenly places because it goes on to speak about the war that arose in heaven Michael and his angels fighting against this dragon and the dragon and his angels fighting back but he was defeated the dragon was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven and the great dragon was thrown down that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan the deceiver of the whole world he was thrown down to the earth and his angels were thrown down with him and I heard a loud voice in heaven saying now the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down who accuses them day and night before our God and I wish that is difficult but it's not actually about the first casting out of Satan from heaven which the

Bible says very little of anything about this is something that happened subsequent after Christ himself had come passage makes it clear that it's subsequent to this child this male child who was going to rule the nations with a rod of iron that doesn't fit anyone but Jesus and the exclamation when this had happened this devil and his followers been thrown down to the earth the exclamation is now the salvation and power and kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down in other words he has absolutely no place left to accuse any of God's people why because Christ has come and done the work which he has done there is absolutely nothing that Satan can lay his hand on by which he can bring an accusation before them to God he is cast down he doesn't have a leg to stand on he has no case he has been thoroughly vanquished and dismissed the great prosecutor has no case left but he'll still try and he'll still try not in the court of heaven but in the court of your soul he will still come to you and to me through his wiles and ingenuity and that's what this passage really is all about isn't it taking this armor of

God so that we will be able to stand against the wiles of the devil every single piece of this armor is designed for that it's designed for our warfare with evil for our warfare with this prosecutor for our warfare with this devil this serpent when he comes he doesn't focus on the breastplate he doesn't say to you what a beautiful breastplate you're wearing he doesn't actually mention it at all he doesn't want you to really look at it he wants you to look into yourself and he wants you to actually think of yourself as someone who's not actually what you think you are or what you confess to be he'll tell you how can somebody who is still such a sinner as you are how can such a person possibly have a standing with God how can you possibly say that you're a Christian when all this is still so and so in your life when you've got such and such a sin when you have a problem with such and such a thing he hides the breastplate he focuses on your sin he focuses on your faults he focuses on all the things that you might fill your mind with and cause you to be discouraged and he comes to you especially when you're tired when you're not watchful when your mind is tired when you've got some disappointment or other that you can actually make the best advantage of he'll come to you when you've got some confusion in your mind he'll come to you over some sore event in your providence and will try and argue with you that that itself is an evidence that God doesn't really have you in his favor if God had you in his favor would he have allowed such sore and difficult and trying things to happen in your life would such grievous losses have come to you if you really were a child of God surely he would have prevented that how do you deal with that what do you do when these thoughts and these accusations come and especially when that makes you really all the more look at yourself and come to the conclusion perhaps partially at least which says well he's right all these things are in my life

I know that's my experience you'll say that's exactly how I am and he'll generate some of these feelings that you have about yourself as you look into yourself and use that to bring a conclusion in this case against you in the court of your own conscience and your own soul to try and persuade you actually you're not really safe you're not a child of God you're useless what do you do you look at your breastplate you stop looking at yourself and your faults and your weaknesses and you look at this breastplate that Jesus has given you and it's shining bright it hasn't diminished nothing's changed with it you don't look at everything that's underneath in yourself what you say to Satan as these thoughts come to you yes everything you're saying about me as a person me myself naturally yes all of that is right everything you're saying about me as a

Christian in terms of my faults that are still there and my failures that I still know yes that's all true but they're all covered by this shining breastplate that was manufactured in the workshop of Christ's obedience that he paid for the manufacture of that has come to me freely and has been delivered by grace into my possession that I can take up every day that I go out to face the world and Satan yes you can accuse me of anything you like but they've all been taken account of they have all been covered and they're kept on being covered by one thing righteousness the righteousness of my Savior he doesn't matter really what he brings to you as long as you can say

[30 : 08] I have every confidence in the righteousness of Jesus and I'm content to abandon every good thought that I have about myself as well as every bad thought I have about myself I'm content to abandon them into that because I know that that will cover them put on therefore the whole armour of God and put on this breastplate of righteousness the breastplate for the Roman soldier covered from the neck right over the whole of his body or that part of his body down as far as below his waist in other words it covered all the vital organs you get a sword slash in your leg you can recover from it you can have your hand chopped off in war you can recover from it if you get an

arrow through your heart you're dead if your vital organs are penetrated most likely you will die the Roman soldier needed a very effective breastplate the

Christian soldier equally so and more so because it has to cope with all the requirements of God and all the accusations of the devil and that's a formidable list but you have it and you'll never lose it and it will never lose its effectiveness you'll never need to replace it you'll never need to repair it it retains all its qualities because it is the righteousness of Christ it's nothing less than that nothing less than that would do nothing less than that you have therefore take up the breast plate of righteousness let's pray almighty and eternal god we thank you that you are righteous that your righteousness requires of us that we also be righteous before you we bless you for the provision that you have made for us in that regard we cannot oh lord understand so much of what lies behind the manufacture of such a thing for us we thank you that you have brought it to us ready made and completed that it fits every single life that comes to place that confidence in you every single exercise of faith on the part of whoever it may be we thank you lord that this breast plate of righteousness exactly matches their need we give thanks for the assurance that you give us that it is indeed everlasting in its effectiveness that it never diminishes in its quality we thank you therefore oh lord for yourself for all the work that you have done for the obedience which you showed and completed in the death of the cross for your great resurrection from the dead emerging victorious and producing for us that breast plate by which we too would be righteous lord give us confidence we pray against the assaults of the evil one may our confidence always be in those things that belong to the armor of god and not in ourselves who wears it we pray your blessing to be with us now hear the prayers of your people both silent and spoken and all we ask is for jesus sake amen