

Our Spiritual Warfare (4) - The Breastplate of Righteousness

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[0 : 00] Ephesians chapter 6 and we're looking tonight at verse 13, the second part of verse 13. But let's just read from verse 10. It's been a number of weeks since we were last in the passage, just due to various circumstances. So we'll begin at verse 10. Ephesians 6 at verse 10.

Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, but on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 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. And it's the second part of verse 14 rather than 13, as I mentioned, having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

Now we've seen the context already, and I don't really want to go into that any more than we've done before. The context in which the apostles writing this to the Ephesians, that it has especially to do with their spiritual warfare and focusing particularly on the devil as their chief enemy. And as they face up to his wiles and his stratagems, his plans, he reminds the Ephesians that they are not wrestling against flesh and blood or against flesh and blood only, but especially against these spiritual powers, these cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. And this is why he then goes on to describe the armor of God's people that they have been given by God to wear against the enemy, against the devil and his own strategies. And as we come, we've already seen how he says in verse 13, 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. That's really the whole point of the passage, why he's giving us all of these details, so that it will result in our standing and withstanding. Without this armor, we couldn't possibly do that. But he is emphasizing in the passage that this is precisely why God has given us this armor and these component parts of it that are mentioned there all fit together in that context of facing again, facing these spiritual enemies.

And we come tonight to look at the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness. Well, righteousness is itself such a great topic in the teaching of the Bible, as they're right from the Old Testament right into the New. And it brings before us the righteousness of God himself and the righteousness that he imputes to his people as they come to trust and to faith in Christ.

Righteousness being, you might say, the standard or the quality of life, of personhood that we need in the presence of God in order to meet God's own requirement, in order to meet God's own righteous demands, and the demands of God's law, which require us to be righteous. The law does not actually let us off because we are now fallen sinners, which doesn't actually mean that God no longer requires of us that righteousness, that righteous standing, that righteous life. That requirement goes on, even though we cannot ourselves meet it in our own efforts, in our own persons. And that is where Jesus, where Christ comes into the picture for us. Now, that requirement, that righteousness, in the teaching of the Bible, is, you might say, two-sided. And sometimes, as in this passage, I think we're looking at the judicial righteousness. In other words, the righteousness, that's especially an aspect of our justification, righteousness that we have imputed to us or put on our account as we stand in relation to God through Christ. And by faith in Christ, God imputes that righteousness to us. We'll come back to Romans just to refer to it in a moment, but that's what we read in Romans earlier, Romans 4 into Romans 5. The other side is the practical righteousness, which really is not much different, if any different, from holiness of life. The judicial righteousness, the standing that we come to have as God pronounces us righteous through faith in Christ, that is always accompanied by, it's never detached from a personal righteousness, a practical righteousness in terms of our life as it's lived out. We are required to live a righteous life in all the component parts of our practical life, and also along with the judicial righteousness which God gives us. Now, as you know very well yourselves, we were created righteous. We were created by God as righteous beings. Adam and Eve were perfectly righteous. There was nothing wrong with that relationship with God, but in the fall, we lost that righteousness. They lost the righteousness that was held as Adam was there, the federal or covenant head of humanity of his descendants apart from Jesus. And in that respect, we lost, as the catechism puts it, the shorter catechism and 18, number 18 reminds us that we actually lost that righteousness. We lost that righteousness. We lost that righteousness. We lost that righteousness. We lost that by our own doings, by our own efforts. That's where we fall back upon the provision that Jesus has made, or God has made for us in Jesus Christ. And that seems to be the focus in this passage, in this verse especially, that you put on the breastplate of righteousness. The righteousness that we come to have judicially, which includes forgiveness of sins and righteousness imputed. It's actually Christ's righteousness imputed to us. It's impossible for us to get it. But the only way we could get it back is if we were able perfectly, at all times, at every moment, ongoing in our lives, to meet the law of God.

[7 : 05] And of course, that's impossible. But we mustn't think that that would actually be wrong, that we could be righteous simply by keeping the law, if that were possible. I mean, remember in Galatians, and in chapter three, that Paul is actually saying, there's nothing actually wrong with the law itself, nothing wrong even with the principle of righteousness through keeping the law.

It's just the fact that we cannot do that because of our fallenness and our sinfulness. Because he says there that if a law could have been given, that would actually produce or bring righteousness, then righteousness would have been by the law. But through our fallenness, that, of course, is no longer possible. So here we are in Ephesians, in the armor, looking at this breastplate of righteousness. And it's by the provision of God in Jesus Christ that we come to have this armor provided for us, that we are required to take up through faith, which we're required to take up.

We'll see the connection with faith in a minute. But there are three things with regard to this that I want to just briefly set out, that this righteousness, this breastplate, was obtained by Christ in his obedience. It was obtained by Christ in his obedience as he lived in this life, as he died the death of the cross, leading to his resurrection. It was by that obedience, by in the person of Jesus, this breastplate was obtained by him, when you might say fashioned or created by God through him. Secondly, it was actually delivered and it is delivered to us freely in God's grace. It's not, despite the fact that it's such a wonderful thing, it's not actually at our cost that it comes to us. We don't pay for it. We don't actually have anything to contribute to its provision. We're required simply to take it up by faith and put it on. It is delivered freely by God's grace. Thirdly, it is guaranteed to last forever. It will never actually rust.

It will never grow old. It would never in any way be insufficient for our need judicially before God. It will always remain the righteousness of Christ. And because it's the righteousness of Christ that has been obtained by his, by in his obedience and is delivered to us freely and applied by his spirit, it is going to last forever. There will never be a moment in time or eternity when having taken up this breastplate of righteousness that God will say, well, you need now something else. This has become old. It's become worn out. Nothing like that. It's always, always perfect in the sight of God.

So let's look at it obtained by Christ's obedience just very briefly. There are two sides to that as well. As you know, Jesus, as he lived in this world, lived a perfect life and then came to die the death of the cross, as we've seen from Philippians chapter 2 recently. His perfect life met all the demands of God and of God's law, all the demands that were placed upon him to produce this salvation for us, to create it for us. This is exactly what Jesus actually fulfilled. He fulfilled all the demands of that law of God, all that God required of him in order for our salvation to be perfected.

[10 : 46] This is what he did. And it must have been an amazing sight for those people that knew him in this world as he lived amongst human beings, just like we are here ourselves. It must have been an amazing thing day after day, hour after hour, moment by moment to actually see a perfect human life, to see a life in which there was no flaw, to meet with behavior that had nothing wrong with it, to hear somebody who never spoke a wrong word, who never spoke out of place, who always had the right answer at the right time, whatever the question was that was asked of him, who always met the opposition that he faced in a way that was perfect, in a way that used words or sometimes didn't use words at all.

But in every situation, he is absolutely perfect. There is no flaw in him. That is why, as time went on, efforts were made on the part of his enemies to produce false witnesses that could actually swear that this man actually did do something wrong. And they fabricated some things especially to do with him making himself equal with God. That was one of the primary charges laid against him, as if he wasn't that anyway. But when they came to try him, when he was sent across to Herod to see what he would make of him, and after some elements of sport as far as Herod was concerned with him, he sent him back and said, I find no fault in him. Even the wickedness of this world could not find a fault with Jesus.

There are few things as precious to you tonight as the perfection of your Saviour. There are few things as wonderful and for which you are so thankful as the fact that when your Saviour went through this world and met so much hostility, the contradiction of sinners against himself, and met even ultimately with God himself and the wrath of God, he did so perfectly. He walked a perfect life. He lived a perfect life until it came to laying down his life on the cross.

Tonight you're thankful that there is such a person, such a Saviour, that he is exactly as described in the Bible. Perfect in every respect. But even a perfect life was not enough for our salvation. Because there is this thing called sin that God regards in such a way that sin actually must receive its due penalty.

God cannot simply take his eye off sin, though his son Jesus lived a perfect life as if God could then say, well that's fine, I don't really need to deal with sin now. It's beyond the reach of my wrath, of my punishment, of my penalty. That is why Jesus had to die. Along with the perfect life, you've got the atoning death.

[14 : 06] And that's where this breastplate was actually manufactured. Not only in the perfect walk of Jesus as a perfect life, but in the perfect life, but in the perfect life, but in the atoning death that he died, when the sin of his people laid upon him reached the point where he himself could cry in his agony, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And that forsakenness is the very heart of the death he died spiritually as he faced God with our sins upon him and died the penalty, the death that we deserved.

His breastplate, you might say, was manufactured in the furnace, in the workshop of God's wrath against sin. That's where it was formed, created, fashioned, and now comes to us as such.

There is Romans chapter 4 verse 25, when you've got an account there of both sides of the matter, both the judicial and also following through, saying here at the end of the chapter here, but as for ours also, who it will be counted to us, that's this righteousness, who believe in him, who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and raised for our justification. You see, justification is the heart of our righteousness in Christ. We are justified, we meet with God's approval, he finds no fault in us judicially, there's the courtroom scene, there you are standing before God, and there is God looking upon your person, and you want to, and you have to be righteous, you have to be presented to him, not just as innocent as if it were possible, you have to be presented as perfectly righteous, as if you had never sinned at all.

That's exactly what God has provided, because that's the righteousness of Christ that covers you as God imputes his righteousness to you. You receive it by faith. When you receive Jesus, and accept Jesus by faith, and place your trust in him, this is what God gives you, this is what God puts on your account.

It's all gone this side of the logbook, this side of the record book, this side of the account book, that had listed you as somebody guilty of all of this sin, and these sins, that's all been wiped clean, and instead it simply says, Jesus Christ the righteous one is covering this person. That's the breastplate of righteousness. I'll come back at the end to how we apply what this verse is actually saying in regard to standing against the wiles of the devil. Secondly, this breastplate comes free by God's grace.

[17 : 16] Let me just remind you of these verses elsewhere in the Bible, where you find Titus, for example, chapter 2 and verse 11. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, so as to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. And as you go further on through the chapter, you see that this salvation came not because of our own works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost. So the grace of God, again mentioned, as he poured on us rich through this grace through Jesus our Savior, so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. There is Paul again saying to us, this justification, this righteous standing that we have judicially before God, in God's courtroom, as it were, as he sits on the bench as the great judge. And he is there, of course, too, as the father of his people. But this is what he is constantly accounting to us. This is what is constantly on our record.

We are justified. And we have that because of God's grace, God's free grace, God's great unfathomable kindness in Christ toward us.

And the cost of its manufacture, as we said, was the death of Christ. And what a cost that is. Wasn't it just yesterday? Some jewelry belonging to Marie Antoinette, the last queen of France, was actually sold. It was impossible to put a valuation on it as to what it would fetch at auction.

And to fetch today, these two bracelets, they were sold at auction for six, six million pounds or six million dollars, six million pounds, I think it was more money than we can imagine ourselves. But you cannot, that was the price put upon it. That was the final sum. Whether it's worth that or not, it's another matter. But this is priceless.

This righteousness of God, you cannot put a price on it. It's impossible to estimate the price of it. And it will always be like that. And yet, when it comes to you, and if you look at it tonight, look at your breastplate, look at this righteousness that you have in Jesus Christ, this standing, and you look in vain for a price tag that you have to meet, that you have to pay for it, and it's not there. Because Christ has paid the price of it. It's his death that's paid the price for our sin. And this breastplate comes entirely freely to us in the genuine free offer of the gospel.

[20 : 22] And there is no small print. Sometimes, you know, I think this is one of the ways in which the devil does come to us, and does sometimes take a hold of us. He will sometimes suggest to you, it can't possibly be as good as that. It's too good to be true, that you could have such a thing as this righteousness, this great salvation, this eternal life through Jesus Christ, that it should come freely to you.

He will say to you, well, if you look at the small print, there's bound to be something there that you've missed, something there that's required of yourself in order to pay for this, in order to somehow contribute to its production. It's not there. Just tell him it's not, it's free.

How could anything else be required by way of payment for this breastplate, when the death of Jesus has already taken place? And when the death of Jesus has actually included all the sin and sins of his people, there is nothing else required for them to be righteous. And tonight that's, again, one of the great, one of the great facts for which you are actually so thankful.

It comes freely, and it's applied freely by the Spirit. Here's where our shorter catechism, again, becomes very useful. That the Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

Then it goes on to speak about effectual calling, but there it is applied to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us, bringing us to life as we saw last Lord's day, and in bringing us to life, the production of faith, the gift of faith is ours by the Spirit's work. He produces that faith in us, and then that faith is exercised by you. You can then say it's my faith, but you didn't create it. It's the gift of God. And that's where it connects. In other words, we said at the beginning of our studies, I think we mentioned the fact that all of these pieces of the armor are in different ways joined together, some more obviously than others. But here's a very obvious connection between the breastplate of righteousness and what he calls later on the shield of faith.

[22 : 59] Because as you place faith in Christ, and he becomes yours as your savior, the gift of grace is this savior, this righteousness that you have in him, and therefore the faith that you exercise, that the spirit creates in you, that enables you to reach out and take hold of Christ, it's joined to the breastplate of righteousness. Here's the great thing that Satan again will try and persuade you of, that there's no necessary connection between your faith and this righteousness. Or perhaps if he can't convince you of that, he will try and convince you, well, your faith isn't just big enough to take in this wonderful breastplate of righteousness and wear this. Surely faith as small and as tiny and as feeble and as fluctuating as yours can't possibly be the faith that takes hold of this righteousness, this breastplate will try to put it on. Well, your reply to the devil in terms that say to him, I don't find anywhere in the

Bible that actually suggests for a moment to me that only strong and only great faith lays hold of this righteousness. Your faith tonight may be the feeblest faith in the whole of Christendom.

You might be saying of yourself, I cannot possibly see how my faith is anything like the level of faith that I find in any other Christian I know. Remember friend, it's genuine faith.

A faith that actually sees Jesus as the answer to all your need. And that even hesitantly or feebly or however you reach out and take hold of him, really it comes down to this, am I satisfied tonight holly with all that I find in Christ? If your answer to that is yes, then that's your faith in exercise. You might say it's small, it's not too small to take hold of this breastplate and put it on. Don't let the devil persuade you. There is only great faith that is able to do that.

There's nothing wrong with looking for great faith and seeking increase of faith and asking God for your faith, enable your faith to grow. But that's very different to actually coming to the conclusion that unless I've got great faith, I can't be a Christian. And I can't have Jesus.

[25 : 41] And I can't have this breastplate. That argument doesn't come from God. It comes from these powers that want to persuade you that you need more than you have in Christ. And God is saying that just cannot be.

So there is the obtaining of it in Christ's obedience or by Christ's obedience. It's delivered freely to us by the Holy Spirit who produces the faith by which we take hold of Christ in our effectual calling.

And it's guaranteed to last forever. All of God's requirements in terms of our judicial standing are found here in this breastplate. He is Christ in his righteousness is exactly what we need and all that we need to have this standing before God.

And you'll find that, of course, in various parts of the scripture. Let me just take you back to Romans again. And you know the well-known words there of that great chapter, Romans chapter 8, where you find it starting off there. There is therefore now no condemnation. That therefore refers back to all that's been going on since chapter 5, including the application or the way in which righteousness comes to be accounted to us, imputed to us through faith in Christ.

Here's what he says. There is therefore now no condemnation. What does no condemnation mean? It means perfectly righteous. There is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[27 : 24] For the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin. He condemned sin in the flesh. Why? So that in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. In other words, God is saying, as he sees you through faith in Christ, clothed with Christ's righteousness, wearing this blessed plate, God himself is saying, that is the fulfillment of my law's requirement for righteousness.

And you see, he goes on, fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. Just reminding us again that it's not just a judicial righteousness.

We have that in our justification, but it's never separate from sanctification, from a holy life who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

And you could get many other texts in the New Testament, especially that remind us of this or teach us this. This righteousness is guaranteed to last forever. It never becomes depleted or devalued, but in any way lose its properties.

And it goes right through to the great day of judgment. You remember Paul, again, writing to Timothy in the second Timothy chapter four, where he's talking about his own departure, talking about the end of his course in this world. Henceforth, he says, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will give to me at that day, and not to me only, but also to all of the rest as well who are in Christ Jesus.

[29 : 22] And this is the wonderful thing about it, that it lasts for all eternity. There's nothing else like that. There is nothing else that you can put your finger on that will last forever and forever without becoming in any way dated or insufficient. The righteousness of Jesus is that.

And it's that even towards and into and beyond the day of judgment. So it's obtained by Christ's obedience and it's delivered freely by God's spirit and God's grace, and it's guaranteed to last forever.

But let's look at the context again and try and apply that practically to the way in which Paul is actually setting it out for the Ephesians. It is against all of Satan's accusations.

One of the names given in the Bible to Satan is the great accuser or the prosecutor. And the prosecutor is one, of course, who comes with an argument in favor of having somebody condemned, having somebody imprisoned, having somebody pay the price, the penalty for some crime.

And Satan is that, the great prosecutor. And as he comes with his prosecuting arguments, this is really what Paul is saying.

[30 : 54] We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, against the rulers and authorities and cosmic powers over this present darkness. Well, this fits very much into the maneuverings and the suggestions and the wiles and the stratagems of the devil.

And we face this every day. We're more conscious of it at some times than others. But you see, this is the thing. When Satan comes to you to accuse you that you just don't have a sufficient standing in the presence of God, I guarantee you that the thing he will actually point out is not your breastplate, and not the shine on your breastplate as it's perfect in Jesus.

He will point to your ongoing sins. He'll point to the fact that you still have sin in your life. How can you be a Christian? Not only when you have sin in your life and your sins are obvious day by day, but you keep doing some of the same sins day after day or month by month or whatever.

And Satan will come to you and say, you can't possibly be righteous in the presence of God. You can't possibly stand before the great judge and expect him to say, I find no fault in him because he is righteous, because she is righteous.

Well, again, you just simply say, in response to your tempter, to the great accuser, to the great prosecutor, my God tells me that my breastplate that he has given me was paid for by Jesus.

[32 : 32] It fits me perfectly. It shines as it was the day I received it. It is as bright as the day he produced it through his death on the cross.

And you can say what you like. But I know from my God and from his truth that this breastplate, the breastplate of righteousness, having put it on, it's never going to fail me.

It's always going to be much bigger than your accusations. It's always going to be perfect against your insinuations that it is anything else than that.

And it'll come when you're tired, when you're disappointed, when you're confused, when you've had some sore event in your life.

But you respond in the same way. And sometimes, of course, it's not easy to just focus on this.

[33 : 44] When your mind may sometimes be in a bit of a turmoil. But this is what we need to focus upon. That's why we have it here in the Bible. That's why Paul was writing this to the Ephesians.

The breastplate covers all of your sin. And all of your sin, as it's covered by the breastplate, is covered forevermore.

You see, sometimes Satan will say, Well, if you've been justified, if your sin's been forgiven, if you have this righteousness in your judicial standing, why are there still practical sins in your life?

Why do you still find yourself doing things that you know are wrong? And, of course, the answer to that is that our judicial righteousness is a legal term.

It's a thing which stands in terms of our status before God. And along with that, we still have an ongoing fight with the sin that remains in our lives. That doesn't in any way suggest that the judicial righteousness is other than perfect.

[34 : 53] A breastplate covers all our sins. After the last war, you know that a lot of ordinance, a lot of ammunition, stuff like that was dumped in the deepest parts of the ocean in the hope that that just would be it.

But sometimes, just occasionally, some of that ordinance gets washed ashore. And then people have to send for bomb disposal experts and places cordoned off, as you know, until it's dealt with and defused or it's exploded.

And that's the end of the matter. But you will never find on the shore of your life any of the sins that Christ has forgiven coming back to be washed ashore to accuse you.

Never. They're gone. And they're gone forever. Whatever Satan will suggest, having this breastplate of righteousness on, that's what you're wearing.

It's fit for purpose. It will always be fit for purpose. That's why Paul is saying, therefore, take up this armor. Why? So that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

[36 : 16] That you may be able to stand in the evil day, the day of temptation, and having done all, to stand firm. What a great peace we are wearing.

What a great provision is God's provision in this breastplate of righteousness. There's so many things in it that I don't understand. So many things that I can't explain, that I can't go into, because I simply can't get to the depths of why this would be the case and how this indeed came about, though I know it happened in Christ through his death.

But the important thing is, the really crucial thing is, that God is saying to you, it's not how much you understand about this breastplate and about how it came to you, about Christ's death, about the formation of this righteousness.

The important thing is that by faith, you've taken it up and you're wearing it. And you're convinced that it's absolutely sufficient and fitting for your needs before God.

And it is the breastplate of righteousness. Let's pray. Our gracious God, we give thanks that your word makes it so clear to us that the righteousness we could never provide for ourselves, you have done so in the wonderful gift of righteousness in your Son.

[37 : 49] We bless you, O Lord, that in all aspects, this armor that you give us to wear is entirely sufficient for our needs, spiritually, mentally, physically.

And we ask, Lord, that you would enable us to maintain our proper vision of this armor. And when we find ourselves assaulted in terms of any aspect of it, especially tonight as we were thinking, O Lord, of this righteousness that we need to have as a standing before God, Lord, help us, we pray, to constantly bear in mind and never to be deflected from the fact that you've already given us this, that it can never be removed from us, and that we will always find it to be sufficient.

So go before us now, we pray, hear the prayers of your people, silently and spoken alike, and receive us graciously for Jesus' sake.

Amen.