

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Ephesians 6:14b

- “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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.
- 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. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, **having put on the breastplate of righteousness.” (Ephesians 6:10-14)**

Prayer

- Reminder of four important principles that apply to each piece of the armor, including the breastplate of righteousness:

THE ARMOR IS GOD’S ARMOR.

- We are in a spiritual battle. It’s not against people. It’s against demonic forces of wickedness, and it can’t be won without Gods.
- “The weapons of our warfare...” **(2 Corinthians 10:4)**
- This is God’s armor.

THE ARMOR POINTS US TO, AND IS FULFILLED IN, JESUS.

- Everything about the armor points to the finished work of Jesus, on our behalf.
 - **As we are clothed with Christ, we are clothed with this armor.**

THE ARMOR IS METAPHORICAL, NOT MAGICAL

- Which means that we don’t just pray “Lord give me the breastplate of righteousness”, and we are suddenly armed with a breastplate, protecting us from the devil.
- **Every piece of armor is a METAPHOR for a spiritual reality, that is necessary for the spiritual battle (the breastplate reps righteousness)**

Which leads us to the last reminder:

THE ARMOR MUST BE APPROPRIATED, IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE.

- Again, it does us no good to talk about the armor, and we certainly don’t just “pray it on”.
- In order for it to do its job, we must apply the spiritual realities, that the armor represents, to our lives. And we’ll talk about how to do that, with the breastplate of righteousness, today.
- The breastplate is this upper area of the armor that would have started at the soldiers neck and went all the way down to his waste.

- Apart from the helmet, probably the most critical part of armor for the soldier (which we should remember, as we think about it as a metaphor for righteousness)
- **THE FUNCTION OF THE BREASTPLATE:**
 - Protected all of the vital organs
 - Protected the largest and most vulnerable target
 - Attached to belt — critical that the two stayed connected.
 - Insignia that identified the soldier
- **There is something profound, and deep, and emotional, and spiritual, related to this part of our body. It is the deepest part of who we are.**
- And so God has made provision to **protect** the deepest part of who we are, because the enemy is after it.
- **God has given us: A breastplate... of righteousness.**

1. WHAT IS “RIGHTEOUSNESS”?

- To be righteous is to be right (pure) and right standing.
- GOD is righteous.
- **“The LORD is righteous in all his ways” (Psalm 145:17)**
- That concept shouldn’t be difficult for us to grasp. After all, He IS God.
- What’s difficult for us to grasp is the idea that WE are now, somehow, righteous.
- Because we feel deeply, the reality that, (apart from Jesus)
- **“There is none righteous, not even one.” (Romans 3:10)**
- And that
- **“...and [even] all of our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” (Isaiah 64:6)**
 - God’s standard is perfection, which means that no one can be declared righteous and right before God, on the basis of their own merit or morality.
- **“...we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” (Romans 3:23)**
- **So it can be difficult for us to grasp the idea that WE would be righteous and have a perfectly right standing before God.**
- And yet, Christian, that is **exactly** what scripture declares about us:
 - **“[God] made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)**
 - **This is what happens when we are born again. Christ takes our sin and gives us his righteousness.**
 - **We now have a right standing before God, and this right standing is ONLY accomplished through us by our faith in JESUS and his death and resurrection**
 - **“...to the one who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.” (Romans 4:5)**

- Paul, writing about his own righteousness: **“not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ” (Philippians 3:9a)**
- When you put your faith in Jesus, your old sinful person is buried, and you are risen into newness of life, with Jesus, and what is His, becomes yours:
- **“for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Galatians 3:27)**
- **“He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.” (Isaiah 61:10)**
- But unlike a physical garment, that can be removed, this garment of righteousness has become a part of our spiritual identity — who we ARE, and God treats us, as such.
- Jesus is righteous. And I am in Jesus. Therefore. Because I am in Jesus. I am righteous before God.
- **Saying AND BELIEVING that, is difficult for some of us.**
- It's one thing to say something like: “I HAVE the righteousness of Christ”, but it's quite another to say **“I AM righteous before God”**. (it's an identity statement)
- To believe THAT, is to change what we believe about ourselves (which is really hard). But to believe that, is to believe what GOD believes about us.
- And when we do THAT, righteousness does its best work of acting like **breastplate** that protects us from the catastrophic, destructive schemes of the enemy.
- **2. WHAT SCHEMES OF THE ENEMY DOES (THE BREASTPLATE OF) RIGHTEOUSNESS GUARD US FROM?**
- Every piece of armor protects us from different schemes of the enemy.
- Remember what scheme of the enemy, the belt of TRUTH, guards us from?
- LIES.
- **What does a “breastplate of righteousness” guard us from?**
- **le.** If I appropriate the righteousness of Christ to my life, and believe that I AM, INDEED, in right standing before God, what schemes of the enemy will that guard me against?
Two key things:
- **Sin and Shame.**
- Our right standing in God guards us from giving into sin and coming under shame.
- For the believer, us being righteous before God means that we are both, pure and justified.
- Sin and shame attacks both of these.
- Because what opposes a PURE life more than a life full of sin. And what opposes JUSTIFICATION, other than CONDEMNATION?

- **Remember, the breastplate covers the vital organs.**
- Without (the breastplate of) righteousness, the enemy will infect the vitality of our spiritual lives with the viruses of **sin and shame.**
- This should make sense to us.
- After all, what has sucked the life out of more Christians more than habitual sin and shame?
- **The enemy's scheme of luring us to sin:**
 - Last week we saw that Satan IS A LIAR.
 - Today, we need to understand that the Bible ALSO calls Satan "**the tempter**" (ref. 1 Thes. 3)
 - Obviously we have our own fleshly desires that tempt us to sin, and if you have not been born again and filled with God's Spirit, then you are actually a **slave** to sin.
 - But enemy ALSO lures us into sin, and will actually USE our own fleshly desires to do so.
 - When teaching his Bible college students, Spurgeon wrote:
 - "The devil is a greater scholar than you, and a nimbler disputant; he can 'transform himself into an angel of light' to deceive, he will get within you and trip up your heels before you are aware; he will play the juggler with you undiscerned, and cheat you of your faith or innocency, and you shall not know that you have lost it: nay, he will make you believe it is multiplied or increased when it is lost. You shall see neither hook nor line, much less the subtle angler himself, while he is offering you his bait. And his baits shall be so fitted to your temper and disposition, that he will be sure to find advantages within you, and make your own principles and inclinations to betray you. And whenever he ruins you, he will make you the instrument of your own ruin." **(Charles Spurgeon)**
- **One of the schemes of the enemy is to tempt us, and lead us into sin.**
- **WHY?** Because Satan comes to **steal, kill, and destroy**, he knows that sin will always bring destruction.
 - Habitual, unrepentant sin, will always bring destruction to our lives, and the lives of those around us.
- So if Satan can get us on a path toward sin, he will.
- Without the the righteousness of Christ covering us, we are exposed to this attack of the enemy.
- **Revelation 12:10** ALSO calls Satan **the accuser of the brethren** (that accusing voice you hear... that's often the enemy)
- And what's the point of this? Condemnation and shame.
- Not only does he try to lure us into sin, but he tries to drive us into shame with his condemning accusations.

- **Shame can show up in a slew of ways:**
 - After we have sinned.
 - After we've been sinned against.
 - **Something like getting divorced or having mental illness can produce shame in people.**
- The enemy doesn't care how it shows up. He will make SURE to capitalize on it, no matter where it came from.

- **Difference between shame and condemnation, and guilt:**

GUILT... is the feeling of conviction that you have done something wrong.

- This is a God-given, healthy thing, designed to drive us **toward** God and his love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace.

CONDEMNATION... is the accusing voice of the enemy telling us that, because we have done something wrong, we do not deserve the love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace of God, much less His blessing.

- Condemnation is not of God. If you have put your trust in Jesus, then you need to know that: **"There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)**

SHAME... is the emotion associated with condemnation.

- Unlike a healthy dose of guilt and conviction, shame always drives us AWAY from God, reinforcing the idea that **you are underserving** of anything good from God.
- Shame also goes right to our identity, attacking the most vulnerable and vital parts of who we are.

- **And shame does two things really well:**

- **Shame holds us down, and drives us away.**

- Satan desires to both debilitate us and isolate us. Shame is extremely effective at doing both.
- John Piper actually attributes **shame**, connected to pornography (specifically), as THE reason, why there are so few men serving God.
- **Maybe that's why in 20 years of sending people to the nations, I can't recall one time where we sent just a single unmarried man.**
- On the other hand, I've lost count of the number of the men who have been crippled because of their shame connected to porn, even AFTER some of them have stopped using it.
- This is the crafty, shameful, work of the devil, and it goes right to the core of our being.

- And when we have not appropriated the righteousness of Christ to our lives, we can leave our spiritual vitality, exposed to this attack.
- **And this whole evil scheme**, works in conjunction with the **lies of the enemy**, which is why we don't JUST put on the breastplate of righteousness, but the WHOLE ARMOR of God, including the **belt of truth** which guards us against the lies of the enemy.
- We need to know that, just like the breastplate attaches to the belt, our righteousness MUST BE attached to the TRUTH of the gospel and person of Jesus Christ — who HE is and what HE says.
- Your standing in righteousness HAS NOTHING to do with what **people** say, what I THINK about me, OR what I have done.
- Self-Righteousness: "I can do enough good to be deemed righteous".
- The Gospel: "I am deemed righteous because of what Jesus has done, on my behalf."
- So, the two biggest ways the enemy attacks our righteousness: leading us to sin, and covering us in shame.
- **Appropriating** the righteousness of Christ to our lives, guards us against giving into sin, and coming under shame.

3. HOW DO WE APPROPRIATE (THE BREASTPLATE OF) RIGHTEOUSNESS TO OUR LIVES?

- **A soldier's breastplate would have done him no good to simply know that it was his, if never put it on.**
- It does us no good to simply know what God says us about us, if we don't believe it in our minds, receive it in our hearts, and walk it out in our lives.
- **Let me remind us who we are and what God has done:**
- On the cross, God treated Jesus as if He was sinful like us, **so that** He could in turn, treat us as if righteous like Him.
- **And you can't do anything to EARN it (that would be SELF righteousness).**
- **However**, you CAN do something to UTILIZE IT (to put it on), which is what we need to do if we are to experience the benefits of it.
- **How this would work with sin?**
- **Identity leads to action.**
- We generally live out who we believe we are.
- **When I was a kid I had a family member who was an alcoholic...**
- **AA really helped because it reminds us we need help from God.**

- **But the problem with continuing to believe that you are a powerless addict, is that you will eventually start acting like a powerless addict again.**
- This is why so many addicts will break their addiction to one thing, only to find another.
 - You get off drugs, and become addicted to sugar. You get off porn and become addicted to work.
 - For my family member it was cigarettes. They were still an addict. They had just found something to be addicted to, that was more socially acceptable, and less destructive to their life.
- Now, I am not dismissing the victory of someone breaking their addiction to something as destructive as alcohol. That's amazing.
- But what I've seen, is that true FREEDOM comes when we stop believing that we are still powerless slaves, and start believing what God says about us:
 - "I'm not addict anymore. I am not a slave to anything. I am a free, victorious child of God, who has the same power living in me that rose Christ from the dead."
 - "THEREFORE, I will not act like an addict. I will not use anything to medicate, or comfort, calm, or distract me. I am fulfilled in Jesus. THAT is who I am."
- **You've probably seen these self help gurus...**
- What going on there?
- **It's actually a biblical principal. It's an identity thing.**
- They showed up to the interview believing that they're good enough to work for company, and it translates as confidence and competency.
- **Sometimes I feel like WE need to look ourselves in the mirror and remind us who WE are:**
 - "I'm not a porn addict. I'm a child of God... So I'm going to live that today."
 - "I am not failure."
 - "I am not alone"
 - "I am not undeserving of love."
 - "I am not controlled by fear"
 - "I am a child a God"
 - "I am free"
 - "I am hidden by, and comforted by Christ"
 - "I am God's masterpiece"
 - "THEREFORE, I'm gonna live like THAT today."
- "I am not a filthy sinner. Yea I mess up sometimes. But I am righteous and clean before God because of what Jesus did on my behalf. I am powerful of the Holy Spirit in me... So I'm gonna live like I'm powerful today."

- When we believe and receive the truth about our righteous standing before God, we come into alignment with our true identity. And when we believe that our identity is that of being righteous before God, then we begin to live more like a righteous person, than a sinful one.
- You start to sin, and you're like... "I'm not gonna do that. That's not who I am." This is how the righteousness of Christ works like a breastplate, guarding us from falling into sin.
- So don't be afraid to boldly PROCLAIM what is true about who you in Christ.
 - The righteousness of Christ should act insignia on your souls, reminding you who you are, whose we are.

It works similarly with shame:

- **Let me repeat that shame condemnation are not of God.**
- "God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:17)
- "Anyone who believes in Him (Jesus) will never be put to shame." (Romans 10:11)
- Condemnation and shame are the work of the enemy.
- **Shame (as I said earlier) is really good at two things:**
 - **Holding us down, and driving us away.**
 - As we see with Adam and Eve in Gen. 3, shame always forces us into hiding, but it usually happens in these two ways:
 - It will hold us down making a person believe they are small, insignificant, undeserving.
 - Shame makes you go into hiding like a child sitting in the corner of room with his back turned to everyone.
 - You often see this in people's countenance and even their posture.
 - I have friends who go from this (head high, shoulders back) this this (head hung).
 - And that smallness, caused by shame, can so easily become someone's new identity.
 - **Shame holds us down, causing us to hide.**
- **But it also drives us away into hiding** — disconnecting from people, isolating ourselves etc.
 - We become more distant from God. We keep our distance from community.
 - Shame drives us away into hiding.
 - The sad thing is: This is exactly where the enemy wants us, because it's in isolation where his accusations can incubate, creating a new narrative about who are.
- If the can get us to believe a shame-filled narrative that — I am worthless, broken, dirty, I am undeserving, etc, then we'll eventually start living like it.

- **But, this isn't what God has for us.**
 - You may have messed up really really bad, but that not who you ARE, that's something you've done.
 - You are forgiven. Loved by God. Jesus took your sin and gave you his righteousness. You are RIGHT before God.
 - If you find yourself with your head hung low today, You need to know who God is:
 - **"But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head." (Psalm 3:3)**
 - **Shame forces us into hiding, by holding us down and/or driving us away.**
 - **Appropriating the righteousness of Christ to our lives, lifts us up and brings us back in.**
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- **Prodigal son (Luke 15):**
 - I think shame was where he found himself, after waisting his inheritance on sinful living. He had, all but, destroyed his life.
 - And for a while he stayed in hiding (because that's what shame causes us to do).
 - But then he finally came to his senses, and headed home.
 - However, he brought his shame with him. He said, I'm going go home and tell my father:
 - **"I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." (Luke 15:18-19)**
 - "Because of what I have done, **I do not deserve** the identity of a beloved son any longer."
 - **This is the lie that shame tells us.**
 - "Because of what I a have done, or what was done to me, I don't deserve (fill in the blank)."
 - But, what does the father do?
 - **'So, he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.**
 - **The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."**
 - **But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.' (Luke 15:20-24)**
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- THIS is what the OUR Father does when we acknowledge that we have messed up, and then turn to Him.
 - THIS is what the Father does when come to him in our shame.
 - He RUNS to us. He grabs hold of us. He kisses us.

- He removes our cloak of shame and exchanges it for a robe of righteousness, giving US back OUR honor and dignity.
- He puts a ring on our finger, restoring to us our position as an heir.
- He straps sandals on our feet, to remind us that we are not servants, but sons and daughters.
- And He throws a party, boldly proclaiming that no amount of good or bad deeds can ever grant us (or strip us of) the place in his house.
- He puts his hand under our chin, and lifts our head up so He can look our eyes and He remind us who we are.
- And then announces to the whole universe: "This is my son! This is my daughter!"
- Today your Father, tells you to stand up tall, hold your head high, and remember who you are.
- You are Kingdom Kids.