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The Christian's Warfare Ephesians 6:10-20 6. The Breastplate of Righteousness

The capitol can be an extremely challenging place in which to serve. It is certainly challenging when it comes to our emotions and attitudes. We can easily become angry over the proposals, actions and words of others. We may become discouraged or defeated over the failure of bills or policies to pass. It is easy to become prideful in the successes we may experience. The statehouse can also be a challenging place to keep the right motives and affections – acting for the right reasons and valuing the right things.

These are the most important “heart” issues you face in capitol. God has provided for you the armor to protect you in the middle of these greatest of challenges.

In our studies in Ephesians 6 we have learned that Paul wants to warn and remind us that we are in a spiritual battle. “Don’t you know there’s a war on?” is his call to us. He wants to make sure we are seeking to fight the right battles, against the right enemy, using the right weapons. He urges us to make the commitment to stand and fight, even as we do so in dependence upon the Lord and the power of His might.

Now Paul is describing for us the individual pieces of the armor of God and the parts of our lives they protect as we fight our spiritual battles:

13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:13-17)

Putting on the Breastplate: Protecting Our Hearts

We first consider the importance of the breastplate as a piece of armor.

The modern soldier or marine wears an IOTV (improved outer tactical vest) which provides substantial protection from small arms, shrapnel, and debris for their main torso. It has pouches that hold Kevlar plates and protective flaps which offer protection around the neck and sides. While this vest is heavy, weighing around 30 lbs., it is vital for the protection of the most important parts of their body. This body armor is certainly reminiscent of

the Roman soldier’s breastplate Paul is describing in Ephesians 6:15. This may have been a cloth garment with protective metal plates attached or a molded metal chest plate that covered from the base of the neck to the top of the thighs. This was obviously an important piece of armor because of the parts of the body it protected, and most fighting was with a short sword in hand to hand combat. The “breastplate of righteousness” is one of the most important pieces of armor God has provided because of the part of our lives it protects and the nature of the combat we face.

The breastplate protected the soldier’s heart and the vital organs of the abdomen or the “bowels”. Today we consider the heart figuratively as the seat or location of our emotions and affections. In Bible times, it was the bowels or the lower organs in the abdomen that were considered so. The word “bowels” is used to describe the love, affection, and compassion we should have for each other (Philippians 2:1; Colossians 3:12). The heart was considered the seat or location of the conscience, the desires, and the will. God has given us the breastplate of righteousness” to protect these most important parts of our lives: our emotions, affections, desires, and will.

Satan’s greatest attacks against us are certainly in these areas. He attacks our emotions tempting us to anger or leading us into discouragement and depression. He allures our desires and affections prodding us to love the things of this world. He attacks our consciences leading us to believe we’re basically good and in need of no Savior or so bad we cannot be forgiven. And of course, he attacks our will to act draws us to sin based on our emotions and affections.

Now we must determine what Paul means by “righteousness”. As this is the armor of God – something provided by Him – we recognize this must be a righteousness which He has given to us. This is the righteousness Paul describes in Philippians 3:

“...And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith...” Phil. 3:9

It is important that we understand two aspects of the righteousness God has provided for us.

Imputed Righteousness

“Righteousness” can be most simply defined as “rightness”, goodness, or holiness. God is completely and infinitely holy and right in all He is and does. He has revealed that “rightness” and goodness to us in His word, and in order to be right with Him we must live accordingly. Every one of us must recognize we have fallen short of God’s holiness and righteousness because of our sin. But God provided a way for our sins to be forgiven and for Jesus Christ’s goodness or righteousness to be imputed or credited to us.

“Because we can never attain to God’s standard of righteousness, God sent His only Son into this world, in order that He might be able to give us His righteousness. He came, the spotless, sinless Son of God, and He rendered a perfect obedience to God’s law, obeyed Him in every jot and tittle of the law, He lived a perfectly righteous life. But more than that; He made Himself responsible for our sins, He bore them in His own body and was crucified for them. ‘God laid on Him the iniquity of us all.’ And at the cross God smote His dear Son as our sin bearer. And in raising Christ again God has proclaimed to us that Christ’s death was more than sufficient to satisfy His righteous demands.” (Jones, Martyn-Lloyd. *The Christian Soldier*. Baker Books. P. 228).

We have more great news in that that not only was our sin imputed – or credited to Christ – but that His goodness and righteousness can be credited to us. When we repent and trust in Christ,

“Christ’s perfect righteousness is put to our account, imputed to us, put upon us by God. And, looking at us, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, God pronounces us to be just people, righteous people; and the law cannot touch us. The law has nothing to say against us because we are covered by this perfect, spotless righteousness of the Son of God Himself; and have on the ‘breastplate of righteousness’” (Jones. P. 229).

This is the truth Paul so greatly lays out for us in Ephesians 1-3. Though we were dead in our sins and separated from God, when we trust in Christ, we are

made alive, adopted into God’s family, and seated with Christ in heavenly places.

Imparted Righteousness

There is another important aspect of the righteousness God provides for us – the righteousness He imparts to us when we trust Christ and begins to work out in our lives daily. *Imputed righteousness* is our justification – our salvation once for all provided by God. *Imparted righteousness* is our sanctification – God working in our lives to make us more like Christ. This is our commitment to grow in our personal holiness and righteousness. We do not do so in order **to be** saved – to be made right with God. We do so because we **ARE** saved – we ARE right with God and begin to live like it. At the time of salvation God takes up residence in the life of the believer in the Person of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:9). The Spirit will be at work in our lives giving us assurance and working to make us more like Christ. In this process we do our part. We fight. We strive against sin. We commit to fight the battle using the strength and weapons God provides.

How does this righteousness protect us in battle? We realize we do not stand before God or fight the battles in our own righteousness but in the righteousness provided by Christ. We must fully understand this most basic truth and seek to apply it to our lives and our battles.

We do not live according to our feelings or experiences which may vary day by day or moment by moment. Doing so only leads to defeat and discouragement. Our hearts are protected by the truth of what God has done for us in Christ.

When tempted to live in our own strength, we remember how sinful we are, and that Christ had to die to provide our righteousness. When accused by Satan and tempted to despair we rest in Christ’s righteousness given to us.

So how do we put on the breastplate of righteousness?

Not hell, nor anything else can penetrate the righteousness of Christ. Put it on! ‘Having the breastplate of righteousness.’ So, whatever the assault may be, and whatever form it may take, we know that we are quite secure and that finally ‘nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’. God has put upon us ‘the righteousness of Jesus Christ’. And you put ‘the breastplate of righteousness’ on yourself by reminding yourself of this truth, and by relying utterly and solely upon it. (Jones. P. 246).

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays,

8:00 AM McManus Conference Room (M252 by House Min Ofc)
12:00 PM Senate President’s Conference Room