

Christian Warfare

The Breastplate Of Righteousness

Ephesians 6:13-17

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 (NASB))

Our Lord knows His creation well. He knows that we often need a visual representation of a thing He is explaining to us. We see that in His use of parables; and now here, we see that to be so with this “full armor of God”, and here today, as He tells us about the “Breastplate of Righteousness”.

Our modern day soldiers and even our policemen wear a similar covering to protect their most vital of body organs, especially their heart, their “breastplate” being a vest made of “Kevlar”.

But here in these words of scripture, God speaks to us about a different kind of “Breastplate”, one that protects you and me from a whole other kind of attack, an attack that while it often can become very physical, has its greater impact in the “spiritual realms” of our heart, our soul, our mind and our spirit, a “spiritual warfare”.

And as we know, neither “Kevlar” nor any other of the modern protective devices can stand up to “spiritual warfare”, those piercing attacks that come from the demonic world. I can recall an incident some years ago, when as I was sitting in a tree stand deer hunting, holding a large caliber hunting rifle in my hand, suddenly I sensed the presence of a strong demon. It was still pitch dark and I had been thinking about and praying for several people when one young man came to my mind, a young man that I was sure had a demon in him. In that darkness, the young man’s face appeared before me and I knew right away that I was in the presence of a demon. I had a high-powered rifle in my hand, but I knew that even the most powerful of guns was of no help against a demon. And I confess to you that I was in great fear. I knew that my only help would come from God through prayer. So I began to pray and pray and pray, and just as suddenly as the demon came, he left. And I was at peace again.

Our earthly weapons and defenses will never work against the demonic world, because their weapons are not like ours. Theirs are “spiritual weapons” and their attacks have to be countered with “spiritual defenses”, beginning with the “full armor of God”.

Now . . . thus far in our study of God’s armor, we have put on the “belt of truth”. And here today, we are being instructed to put on a “Breastplate of Righteousness”, a “breastplate” that is made from the most powerful materials in all of God’s kingdom, a breastplate made from the “imputed righteousness of Christ”. Our “breastplate” needs that kind of strength because nothing short of the personal “righteousness of Christ” can provide the protection that our heart will need to stay us through the battles we will encounter.

And yes, there are several other vital organs that our “breastplate of righteousness” will protect, but none so needful as our hearts. That is because our hearts have a special vulnerability and are especially susceptible to the kinds of attacks that the devil will launch against us.

Why is that so? It is because, as we are told in Jeremiah 17, our heart has come to us already teetering on the verge of collapse, a defect that is natural to our birth. Listen!

9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV))

One of the diagnoses that I have heard our medical experts give when describing one of the problem conditions of a heart is that of a “congenital heart defect”. A “congenital heart defect” is a special abnormality in the structure of the heart that a person is born with.

May I say that while the “diagnosis” of a “congenital heart defect” is serious and foreboding, it is not nearly as serious and foreboding as the “diagnosis” about our heart that God is giving to us here in Jeremiah 17: 9! The “condition of heart” that God is describing carries with it not only long-term life problems, but also eternal consequences.

We come into this life burdened down by a “sinful nature”, a nature that is already “bent” in directions towards things that will get us into trouble. And our “sinful nature” seems to reside square within the middle of our heart. And again, note the special way that God describes the inclinations of the heart. He tells us that

9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV))

These words, “deceitful” and “desperately wicked” cannot help but bring to mind the nature of the prince of all sinners, the prince of demons, satan himself. In Genesis 3, God described satan saying,

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. (Genesis 3:1 (ESV))

The word translated here as “crafty” can also be translated “cunning” and “subtle”, each word being essential elements of deceit and desperate wickedness. Our hearts seem to be “matched” well with the same tendencies as satan. And that is why we need a very, very strong measure of protection surrounding our hearts.

A question . . . was mankind always afflicted in this way, having hearts that were so accepting and receptive to sin? No, not the first man and woman! And I have to believe the same is true for satan. We are told that in the beginning man was created in the very “image of God”, with hearts that desired good and pure things. And so was satan. He began as one of God’s most beautiful and powerful angels, reigning with God and doing wonderful things.

But somehow, the negative side of “freewill” began to exert its nature into the equation, first for satan and then for Adam and Eve. And that was when everything changed. The once strong and faithful hearts of Adam and Eve weakened and became susceptible and receptive to the things and the ways of sin. And once they stepped across that line and gave in to temptation and sinned, a “heart defect” was formed within them; and from them then was passed along to every son and daughter since, to you and me. And we forever have to take its weakness into account as we walk through our days.

Thankfully, God’s heart does not have that same defect. Thankfully, His heart, especially the heart of the Lord Jesus is “strong” beyond measure, with a righteousness that is incorruptible. And in our salvation, God has “imputed” the righteousness that is in Christ’s heart over to us.

Do we understand “imputed righteousness”? I confess that I don’t, but I am thankful for it. And so, as part of our seeking to understand this “breastplate of righteousness” that you and I are to “put on”, may we take a few moments and seek to know more of the “mind of God” about the precious and all-powerful “righteousness of Christ”!

First of all, the word “righteous” is defined as “a condition of being”, a standard of perfection that reaches into every attribute of who a person is, a condition of perfection that is flawless and without any form or measure of impurity or wrongness against the

laws of God. And that perfection extends out from who they are into all that a person does, both in their thoughts and in their behaviors.

Such perfection is of course, only possible with One, and that One is God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And His “standard of righteousness is the only form of righteousness that is acceptable to Him and the only condition of righteousness that He will allow to exist within His kingdom.

And were it not for the precious “plan” that God put into place before the foundations of the world, the sinful condition of men’s hearts would condemn us all and cause all of us to have to cease to exist, leaving only the “Righteous One”, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to remain.

But thanks be to God for His precious “plan”, the “plan of redemption” for mankind, the “plan” that would allow all who would call upon His Name and receive Him as Savior and Lord to also receive His perfect righteousness “imputed” into our souls, and by His “imputed righteousness”, gain eternal favor and entrance into the kingdom of God.

But again, what is “imputed righteousness”? What do those words mean? I found this definition given in Elwell’s Evangelical Dictionary. Listen!

“Imputed righteousness is a theological concept directly related to the doctrine of Justification. Justification is that step in salvation in which God removes all vestiges of sin and guilt from a believer’s heart and by crediting the righteousness of Christ over to his "account", judicially decrees and declares before the courts of God that the believer is “righteous”.

I like this definition because it explains well the necessity for our receiving of Christ’s “imputed righteousness”, especially when we read such scriptures as those given in Romans 3. Listen to those words!

10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." (Romans 3:10-12 (NKJV)

This folks is the desperate condition that we are born into. And we are completely unable, by our own wits and abilities, to change. Our hearts are desperately wicked and deceitful, even from the first moment of birth.

But thanks be to God, Jesus has solved that irreconcilable flaw in us. He has perfected our “congenital heart defect”, by “imputing” His righteousness over into our “account”,

our heart, our soul, our mind and our spirit, and He has made us perfect in the sight of God, fully able to enter into the eternal kingdom of God.

So why then do we need this “breastplate of righteousness” to protect us? It is because of the problem that I mentioned a moment ago, that of “free will”. We still have it and it can make “good choices”. But as we know, it can also make very “bad choices”. And also there is ever and always the devil and his demons diligently plying their evil arts. So then, for as long as we remain in this flesh, and our freewill always being put to the test, God is here saying to us, “Do that which the righteousness of Christ requires, use your free will and put on the “breastplate of righteousness”.

A follow-up thought to this necessity seems akin to the command from God that we be “filled with the Holy Spirit”. Yes, from the first moment of our salvation, we receive the blessed presence and filling of God’s Holy Spirit. And He continues to live within us from that moment forward. But the “manifest presence” of God’s Spirit seems to ebb and wane depending upon the strength or weakness of our flesh at any given moment. And so God then puts some responsibility upon our shoulders. He tells us to “bow our knee” and return our heart to Him and He will fill us afresh with His Holy Spirit. He will give us a greater “manifest presence” of His Spirit.

And so it is with putting on the “full armor of God”, and specifically with the putting on of the “breastplate of righteousness”. This is a responsibility that God has decided to “delegate” to you and me. That’s because we are His children, “sons of God”, and sons ought to do what sons ought to do. As “sons” we reign with Him as “owners” of the kingdom. And as “owners” we ought to protect and defend that which is ours and we should “drive out” all the invaders who would dare set foot on our property.

And again, we are fully equipped for the task. We have the “righteousness of Christ” dwelling within us. All we have to do, each day as we rise up, is to “put on the armor of God” and we will be fully ready to defend God’s kingdom and to drive out invaders that have come over from the evil realms.

Before we close, may we resay some of the things that we have been saying here today! The “breastplate of righteousness” protects and defends our “spiritual heart”, that “mystical” place within us, out of which springs forth all of our responses to life, both good responses and bad ones.

While yes, in our salvation, we have been declared to be completely “righteous” before the courts of God, with a “free will” that can be so easily corrupted, our conduct and our behavior has a propensity to go either way.

And our behavior is the “manifest conduct” of who we actually are in Christ, both before God and before all those people who walk with us each day. It is our witness. And the question for us is, “Is the righteousness of Christ being witnessed in us as we go about all the matters of our day”?

One last thought, and it has to do with this “spiritual warfare” that we have been studying about. May I say again very strongly, please do not underestimate the dangers from the “spiritual warfare”. It is oh so real and it is taking place in and around us every moment of every day. And it attacks at every point that we leave “uncovered” by the armor. We dare not leave our heart uncovered. It is already weak and bent towards being deceitful and desperately wicked. We must, be diligent to put on the protection of the “breastplate of righteousness” to cover us throughout our day. It is the only protection that will allow the “righteousness of Christ” to prevail and to be seen in us. So then,

13 . . . 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.** (Ephesians 6:13-14)