

The Breastplate Of Righteousness

Ephesians 6:10-14

Pastor John Miller

I want to read Ephesians 6:10-12 to get us started. We're going to read these verses every week as we look at the different parts of the armor. Paul says, "Finally," which is literally, for the rest, "my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," there's our enemy. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

We've seen in the last couple of weeks as we introduced our subject of spiritual warfare, and looked at the belt of truth last Wednesday night, that we are in a spiritual battle and that God has provided for us armor by which we may be able to stand against, notice it says in verse 11, "...the wiles of the devil." He has tactics or schemes. The word "wiles" means methods, so the devil has his methods and applies them to try to tempt or test us and trip us up. We also have an enemy who is powerful, and we saw in verse 12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities," and there's the word "powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world," so he's wily and also powerful. Don't underestimate his power. Thirdly, we saw at the end of verse 12 that he is wicked, he is "...spiritual wickedness in high places," and we talked all about the devil. If you missed the first teaching, go back and listen to it online. We did an introduction to our enemy who is the devil.

In verse 13, God has provided armor, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God." One of the reasons why we've slowed down and we're looking at each piece of the armor is because you can't choose and pick which pieces of the armor you want to wear. You might say, "I just want to wear the sandals, I don't want to wear the helmet; I just want to wear the belt, I don't want to wear the breastplate; I just want to have the sword of the Spirit, that's all I need." We need to put on the whole armor of God. It's really an emphatic statement in the Greek, "...the whole armour." Scholars refer to it as the whole panoply of God as you would read it in the original language. It means everything that God has provided, including His strength; and in verse 18, we're going to see when we get there, that we are also to pray. All prayer is one of the most powerful weapons that we have against the enemy. But we put on the armor through prayer, verse 18.

In verse 14, to bring us to our text, "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth," that's the belt of truth, and the second item that we wear is "...having on the breastplate of righteousness," so the way to overthrow the devil's lies is to put on the belt of truth, and the way to stand against the devil's accusations and temptations is to put on the breastplate of righteousness.

What was the breastplate that the soldier wore at that time? Well, it was made out of two things: one was heavy leather that was layered, but more commonly it was made out of a coat of mail. They did have the solid steel ones, and it was kind of like having a bulletproof vest. If

you were in the police department or in a war, you put on a bulletproof vest which covered the vital organs of the soldier. You hear quite often, and I think incorrectly, that there was nothing on the back of the soldier, so we're not to turn and run from the devil. That's not accurate; it's not true. The breastplate covered the back of the soldier because he could easily be hit in the back and be wiped out. The breastplate would go up to his neck, it was most often sleeveless, and it would be heavy metal. The combat in those days was close quarters. They would use swords. It would be easy to be attacked, so you had to have that protection on. The cool thing is that the breastplate fastened to the belt—as I said, everything tied together by the belt—so without truth, everything falls apart. Without truth, you can't walk in righteousness; without righteousness, then you're going to be defeated by the devil.

This breastplate of metal chains covered his body from the neck to the waist, both front and back, and protected his heart and other vital organs. Now, whether there's significance in that, I don't know, but when we talk about the breastplate of righteousness, it's interesting that Satan is going to come against us, attack us, and accuse us that we are not worthy or not righteous to be followers of Christ. He attacks us in the area of our emotions, so this protects the soldier's heart. No soldier would go into battle without his breastplate on, and no Christian should go through the day without standing in that righteousness that's been given to us by Christ.

What does this breastplate symbolize for the Christian? The answer is right there in the statement—it's the breastplate of righteousness. In verse 14, this breastplate symbolizes righteousness. Here's the question we need to ask next: What kind of righteousness does it symbolize? This point, and it's the main point of my teaching tonight, is going to be a little repetitious for some of you. I've tried my best to hit it at a little different angle, but I make no apologies to repeat myself. This is a very foundational doctrine of Scripture, and without a knowledge or understanding of it, you'll never be able to really walk in victory in the Christian life. You'll live in constant defeat if you don't understand this concept.

Basically, there are two kinds of righteousness...I want you to get this, get it well, and understand it. There are two kinds of righteousness, some say there are three, that there is self-righteousness, the sinner stands in his own righteousness and can't be accepted by God. In context here, I think it's more appropriate to focus on the two kinds of righteousness that we have as believers. Those two kinds of righteousness are referred to as, first of all, imputed righteousness, and the second one is called imparted righteousness. Now, I'm going to give you some other terms and describe these two concepts. If you understand these two kinds of righteousness, then you're going to be able to understand how you can stand against the attacks, accusations, and slanders that come from the devil. We have imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness.

Imputed righteousness is known biblically as the doctrine of imputation. That's the idea that Jesus died for our sins, and that when we put our faith and trust in Christ, that His righteousness is given to us. It's a big fancy word that means His righteousness is put into our account. It's imputed or reckoned unto us. You need to understand this biblical doctrine of imputation, and every Christian has this kind of righteousness. This is not the kind of

righteousness that you have to get up and put on every day, it's imputed to you and you have it. It's your standing or your position.

Imparted righteousness is practical Christian living in a righteous way or what we call living in holiness. The two could also be described, and I encourage you to write it down, as positional, which is what is imputed to us, and practical, and that's what is imparted to us. We need both to stand against the wiles of the enemy.

First of all let's look at the righteousness that the believer has referred to as imputed or positional righteousness. Another term, or what happens to you the moment that takes place, is what's called justification. The moment they believe in Christ and put their faith in Him, and they are quickened, or regenerated or made alive by the Holy Spirit, they immediately—there's no progression here—are justified before God. Now, listen to me carefully. To be justified, and this is another main doctrine of the Bible, means that God declares you perfectly righteous. When God justifies you, some say it's "just as if I'd never sinned," but the justification is God declaring. Now, just a little quick note before I forget. It's not making you righteous practically in your living, but it's declaring you positionally in your standing before God to be perfectly righteous. Why? Because it's the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed unto you. That happens the moment you are saved, and all Christians have justification just the same.

There's no such thing as a Christian who's not justified. There's no such thing as a Christian who hasn't had the imputed righteousness of Christ. This is why, if you don't understand that, you're going around always freaking out, "Well, I'm not good enough. I'm not righteous enough. I shouldn't have come to church tonight. All these people are holy, and I'm not holy," and "I messed up today," or "I stumbled and fell," or "I had a bad thought, and I need to repent and get right with God." You can just get beat up by the devil by your own self constantly if you don't realize that you are in Christ, forgiven, declared righteous, and in Him you are complete. You cannot improve on justification. There are no degrees of justification. There's no such thing tonight as one believer more justified than another believer. You can't get any more righteous than the righteousness of Christ imputed to you. Imparted, or practical, righteousness does come by degree. It's a lifelong process.

I want to turn real quick, because we're only looking at this one concept, to Romans 3 and just give you a rundown on this doctrine of justification. We'll read from verses 20-28. I'm not preaching this passage, and I'm not going to do an exposition of this passage, but I want to mention seven aspects of your justification or your imputed righteousness. Begin with me in verse 20. Paul says, "Therefore," and this is his coming to the conclusion of the beginning of Romans on how God saves sinners, "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be," here's our word, "justified," or declared righteous, "in his sight," why? "for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

If you're taking notes, I'm going to give you these seven bullet points that justification is not by the law. No one is justified by keeping rules, regulations, ceremony, rites or rituals, good deeds, or by the law. Notice verse 21, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is

manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.” Here’s the second truth about justification, verse 22, “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ,” stop right there. Secondly, justification is by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works of the law, but it’s by faith in Jesus Christ. It’s not by your performance, but it’s by trusting in faith in Jesus Christ. Notice the end of verse 22, it comes “...upon all them that believe,” that’s the faith, “for there is no difference,” so justification by faith without the law is for everyone.

Verse 23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Notice fourthly, verse 24, “Being justified freely by his grace,” stop right there. Justification is by the grace of God. These are important foundational truths. It’s not by the law, it’s through faith in Christ; it’s by the grace of God. That’s so very important, “freely by his grace.”

Fifthly, it’s “...through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” verse 24. It’s a great cost to God. It involved God giving His Son to die on the cross for our sins. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” Your justification cost God the life of His Son upon the cross, at a great cost to God.

Sixthly, verse 26, “To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” When God declares you righteous, justifies you, it’s done in perfect righteousness and perfectly consistent with the righteous nature of God. For God to declare the guilty, unguilty or sinless or free from sin, it’s not unjust or unrighteous because God penalized or punished His own Son in our place.

Lastly, notice it excludes boasting, verse 27, “Where is boasting then? It is excluded,” it is shut out, “By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith,” so boasting is excluded. Remember Ephesians 2:8-9? “For by grace are ye saved,” or we might say justified or declared righteous or given the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, “through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Notice the conclusion, verse 28, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” This is so important for you to understand. We are righteous before a holy God because He’s imputed to us the righteousness of Christ, and we have been justified or declared righteous.

Charles R. Swindoll says this positional righteousness can never be forfeited, lost, diminished or taken away. The implications of this biblical truth are mind blowing. Once you have been justified, you are always going to be justified—you can’t add to it, you can’t take away from it, you can’t diminish it, it doesn’t fade, it doesn’t get tarnished. You can’t say, “I’m going to give it back.” I hear people say, and I don’t want to get sidetracked but I hear them say all the time, “Well, you know, you can’t lose your salvation but you can give it back.” The moment you were saved, you were taken out of Adam and placed in Christ. For you to go from saved to unsaved, you’d have to get out of Christ and get back into Adam. You didn’t put yourself there, and I have no idea how biblically you can get yourself out of Christ and back into Adam. You would have to unregenerate yourself. You didn’t regenerate yourself, God did it for you, and I have no idea—no way in a million years can I think of biblically—how you can unregenerate yourself.

I have four biological kids. I had to think for a minute how many kids I have. No matter what happens, I will always be their biological father. They could renounce me, disown me, divorce me and say, "We're not your kids." You can't change the fact that biologically I'm your dad. If you've been born into God's family, I believe that once you're in Christ, you're always in Christ. You'd have to get out of Christ, you'd have to unregenerate yourself. I don't know how you'd give back what God does to you. Salvation isn't like a little package you carry around in your pocket and sometimes you either lose it and don't know what happened to it, "Oh, No! I need to get saved again," or I can give it back to God. There's nothing biblical to support that concept.

I want you to write down Romans 8:1 to kind of cut to the chase. We know it so well, it says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," so no condemnation to those who are in Christ. These are all synonymous concepts. You say, "Well, why are you building all this doctrinal information on just the concept of a breastplate of righteousness? Because you're not going to be able to stand against Satan's attacks and accusations if you don't realize that you are righteous in Christ. He can say what he wants to say, do what he wants to do, attack you all he wants to; but you are in Christ, and in Him, His righteousness has been imputed to you. Satan is the accuser of the brethren, but his accusations have no basis.

I don't think that this is perhaps the primary concept Paul has by the breastplate, but it's linked together because you can't live a righteous life without being first of all having imputed to you the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 1, Paul talked about being "in Christ," "in Christ Jesus," that's the concept of imputed righteousness.

Secondly, write it down, there's imparted or practical righteousness that is also known as sanctification. Imputed righteousness is the point where you're justified or declared righteous. Imparted righteousness is God making you righteous. In justification, He—underline the word—"declares" you to be righteous. It's a forensic term. It's a courtroom term. When it comes to imparted righteousness, God actually helps you to live a righteous life in cooperation with you surrendering and yielding, being filled with the Spirit, walking in obedience to His Word, you actually are living a righteous life. Don't stop with just imparted righteousness or imputed righteousness and say, "Well, I get to go to Heaven, now I can go live however I want." No. God wants us to bring our walk up to our position. Remember in Ephesians 4:1 he says, "... walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," so we're to weigh the same as. The idea that I can just disregard holy living is to separate the two that are taught clearly in the Scriptures.

What a contrast between justification, which is the act of God declaring us righteous based on the finished work of Christ on the cross, and sanctification, which is the lifelong process of Him making us more like Jesus Christ as He works in our hearts by His Holy Spirit. In sanctification, we have Christ in us; in justification, we are in Christ, and the two importantly go together for defeating the devil. You need to know positionally, "I'm righteous," and then as you practically live a righteous life, that's ammunition to defeat the attacks of the devil. Paul is writing here in this passage to Christians in Ephesians 6:14, so I believe that primarily he has the idea of living a righteous life. He's talking about imparted righteousness.

Write down Philippians 2:12 where Paul talks about working out your salvation. That's the concept of practical righteousness or imparted righteousness, you're living it out. When I was in school, one of many worst subjects for me, I wasn't very good at school, but to this day I hate math. God have mercy on my soul. If I start even thinking about math, I'm going to start shaking right now. I still wake up in a cold sweat in the middle of the night—I'm in a high school math class. I had a math teacher that was in love with math, and something was loose in his brain, I don't know. He used to get chalk all over the board and all over the room. He'd be writing on the board. He would do these big long mathematical problems. He would start here and go way, way, way down here. He'd get so many he'd have to go to another board and another board and another board. Then, he would get the answer and would light up like a light, "Oh! Isn't that awesome?" No, not really.

The concept of "work out" is actually taken from that idea of starting here and working through this mathematical problem to bring it to its completion. It starts here with justification and then works itself out in our lives in sanctification. You can't work out what God hasn't worked in. Paul didn't say, "Work for your salvation." Remember we just read in Romans 3 that we are justified not by works of the law, so you can't work for it, but you can live it out—you can bring it out in the way that you live. That's what Paul means in Philippians 2:12-13, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Here it is: How we live either fortifies us against Satan's attacks or makes it easier for him to defeat us.

We all have positional righteousness. But if you want to give the devil a club to beat you up with, then live in sin and he will beat you up—you're not worthy, you're not a Christian, you lost your salvation, God doesn't love you, you weren't really saved. You'll lack assurance. You'll get discouraged and depressed. You're giving him a club to beat you up with when you're living an unholy life.

Why do we need to wear this breastplate of righteousness? The answer is that the devil is the slanderer or the accuser of the brethren, Revelation 12:10. Satan is going to—you can bet your bottom dollar—accuse you as a Christian. He's going to attack you, accuse you, and bring accusations against you. The devil accuses us before God.

Now, listen carefully. When Satan talks to God about us, and he has access to God, he brings us up by name and he accuses us, he tells the truth; but when he talks to us about God, he lies. When he comes before the Lord and says, "Lord, have you seen John Miller down there? He really thinks he's something. I want to tell you about John Miller," and says this, that, and the other. He lays out the things that I have sinned in, and you know what? He's telling the truth. The cool thing is that I have a defense attorney. I have an Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and the Judge is His Father, and mine as well. Satan brings all these accusations against me before the throne, and I have to say, "Yes, devil, you're right. That's true. That is me, but Jesus died on the cross for me. His blood has forgiven me, and His righteousness has been imputed to me, so I stand in Him righteous before the throne," and Jesus is pleading and defending me before the throne of the Father. I am declared righteous, and it silences the devil.

Also, when the devil comes to accuse and condemn you, you need to be able to stand in that biblical truth, “I am in Christ. I have the righteousness of Christ imputed to me by faith.” That is unchangeable, unshakable, and immutable. It will not change. Jesus is our Advocate, 1 John 2:1-2, before the Father, but Satan will accuse and seek to condemn us. Look at verse 11 of our text and remember he has methods, he has schemes.

There are three “wiles” or schemes I want to remind you of that Satan uses by which we must protect ourselves with this breastplate of imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness. First of all, he gets us to accuse ourselves. Now, that may sound kind of bizarre, but it’s a common thing. Sometimes we condemn our own hearts. It’s self-condemnation. Someone said, “God convicts us in love, but Satan accuses us in hatred.” The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to convict us; Satan uses our feelings, emotions, and our memories to accuse us. When God convicts us, it draws us closer to Him; but when Satan accuses us, it pulls us away from the Lord. God’s conviction leads to discipline and devotion; Satan’s accusations lead to depression and discouragement. When God convicts, it is so that we might look ahead and have hope; when Satan accuses, he wants us to look back and to give up.

Many times Christians get too introspective and look at their own sinful thoughts, emotions, feelings. The Bible says the just, those who are righteous, must live by faith, not feeling, not by emotions, not by tingles, not by goosebumps or chicken skin, by faith. I may not see, I may not understand, but I’m standing in faith that I have that imputed righteousness given to me. That imputation concept, by the way too, is used of if I were bankrupt and a very wealthy individual took some money and deposited it into my bank account and now I am rich. I’m bankrupt, but the righteousness of Christ has been imputed, or put into my account, so I have the riches of Christ in my behalf. But Satan want us to dwell on our sin not on God’s grace and forgiveness. If he can get you dwelling on your sin, your faults, your weaknesses, your shortcomings, and if he can get you to forget that you are positionally in Christ declared righteous, he can defeat you. You’ll basically say, “Well, I can’t go to church tonight because I’m not worthy.” “I can’t take communion, I’m a sinner.” Communion is for sinners. Who could take communion if it wasn’t for sinners. Amen? We’re sinners saved by grace.

John Newton, the man who wrote the song “Amazing Grace,” to his dying day said, “I only know two things: I am a great sinner, and He’s a Great Savior.” If you are introspective, looking at your sin and focusing on that, forgetting the righteous breastplate that God has given to you in Christ, he’s going to keep you defeated if you’re going by feelings. The breastplate protects the heart so that we’re not living by feelings or emotions. We’ve got to be careful we don’t fall into the sin syndrome—sin and guilt and estrangement from God. Satan tells us we’re not worthy. Satan says, “God won’t forgive you. God doesn’t love you,” so remember Romans 8:1 and 1 John 1:9. Every Christian should memorize that because it’s your bar of soap when you fall. It says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” You say, “Well, I thought we had righteousness in Christ?” We do. When we sin we don’t lose justification, but we do lose fellowship and communion with God.

Did you ever notice that even on a cloudy day that behind the clouds the sun is still shining? Do

you know God doesn't stop loving you, but the clouds, like sin, have separated God from you. You're out of fellowship. That's what 1 John is all about. You're not losing sonship, you're losing fellowship and communion. We want to be able to say, "Nothing between my soul and the Savior so that His blessed face I can see." Again, when we do live in sin and it's unconfessed, like David when he sinned with Bathsheba and said, "For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer...my bones waxed old through my roaring," and he felt far from God. He had to cry and pray, "Restore unto me the joy of my salvation." He didn't say, "Restore my salvation," just bring the joy back to me because he was separated from God.

If you're here tonight, and you are living in unconfessed, unrepented of sin, then repent, turn from your sin, confess it to God, and He is faithful and just to forgive you and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness and will impart to you the strength and ability by His Spirit to live a life that pleases Him. You'll never be sinless, so you'll want to hang on tight to 1 John 1:9. You'll want to carry that around in your back pocket because you need to take a bath, sometimes several times a day throughout the day. Don't let your heart condemn you. Write down Isaiah 43:25 where the Lord says, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins," anymore.

Secondly, the way Satan also in his "wiles" comes to accuse us is he uses others to accuse us. I've noticed that anyone in the Bible that was used of God was attacked and accused by others. I think of Nehemiah when he wanted to build the walls of Jerusalem and Sanballat and Tobiah said, "You just want to be king, and you're just doing it for your own glory." They came against him, attacked, and accused him. That breastplate of righteousness helps us to stand against those kinds of attacks. Read the psalms of David. You see David all through the psalms talking about his enemies who lie about him, talk about him, accuse him, and come against him. Anybody wanting to be used by God will be accused, and Satan will use others to attack and seek to beat you down. Moses was accused by his own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam. Paul was constantly under attack by accusers, "He's just in it for the money," "He's in it for the glory," "He's not really an apostle," and people come and attack you. Jesus, what a prime example that is. His own family said, "He's lost His mind. We've got to go rescue Him, save Him from Himself." As He hung on the cross, they mocked and ridiculed Him. They called Him names, and Jesus prayed for them to be forgiven.

Thirdly, note this, that Satan in his "wiles," and this is the reason why we need to wear the breastplate of righteousness, uses our circumstances to accuse us. He will get us to accuse our own hearts, he'll get others to attack us and accuse us, and then, thirdly, he uses our circumstances to accuse us. In difficult circumstances, Satan capitalizes and often uses them because of our sin. The book of Job is a great example, when Job had all those tragedies happen in one single day. You think you've had a bad day? Job lost everything in one day, except for his wife, why are you laughing? All she said was, "Why don't you just curse God and die right now?" "Thank you, Sweetheart. I needed that encouragement." Then, his three friends showed up, and what did they say? Well, first of all they just sat there silent and everything was cool, until they opened their mouth. Sometimes people just need to not open

their mouth. It was basically, "Job, what did you do? You must've done something. You must've really blown it big time because all these things are going wrong in your life."

What does the devil do? "You must've really been a sinner to get cancer." "You must really be a bad person to have this loved one die." "You must really be a wicked person or sinner for you to have lost your job and God's punishing you." God's not punishing you, but many times when you're going through a time of suffering or adversity or difficulty or trial, Satan will use that to come along and then tempt you.

Remember when Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days and He ate nothing and was hungry? What's the first thing the devil said to Him? "Turn these stones into bread." He knew what was going on in the life of Christ, "Turn them into bread." That was out of the will of God, so he comes when you're suffering physically. You know, physical suffering can be an opportunity for the devil to come. "Why won't God heal me? Why did God allow this to happen to me? Why am I living with this pain, this suffering, or this impairment?" We misinterpret that as though God doesn't love us, God doesn't care, God isn't watching over us. "If God really cared, I wouldn't be in pain, I wouldn't be struggling in my marriage, I wouldn't have this situation in my life." Believe me, you can almost hear the hiss of the enemy as he comes to try to discourage and beat you down, so you need to put on that breastplate of righteousness when he comes to use circumstances to attack and condemn you.

We need to stand in His righteousness by faith. We need to walk in His power of the Holy Spirit for we are in Him, righteous, and He is in us to make us righteous. We sing in the song, When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, My anchor holds within the veil. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand. Amen?

Understand that you've had that imputed righteousness, that God gives you His Word, and when you get a chance, I didn't want to take the time now to turn there, but read Romans 6 where you yield to the Spirit, and you walk in the Spirit, and you don't fulfill the lusts of the flesh. He wants to impart to you the power of His Spirit to live a righteous, godly life to defeat the attacks of the devil. Let's pray.