

The Armour of God Breastplate of Righteousness

[Please note : English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Thank you for the opportunity to share God's Word with you. As a guest speaker let me briefly introduce myself. My name is Roderick Harbottle. I was born in Newcastle upon Tyne. I received the call of God to minister to Turkish people while I was at university in 1964. This was followed by language study and ministry in Turkey from 1966-1973. It was there I met my wife, Enedina who is from Spain. When we had to leave Turkey we served briefly in Austria and then for twenty one years in Germany. When the call came for Bible teachers to help the growing Turkish speaking church my wife and I decided to go and live in Bulgaria to support this ministry. We spent fourteen very interesting years ministering there. We came to live in the UK in 2007. Since 2018 I have been involved in a project to provide a Bible in simplified Turkish for the millions of Turks who have not had the benefit of an education in their own language.

Our subject for today is The Breastplate of Righteousness from Ephesians 6 vv 10-14.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For 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 armour 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.

Before we look at the breastplate of righteousness in detail we should consider the fact that a soldier needs all the pieces of equipment to go into battle. It would be useless if he went with just a shield. Verse 11 commands us specifically: "Put on the whole armour of God!" We can consider the pieces one by one but we need to use them all. They are one whole. We should also consider the fact that the armour belongs to God. It is the armour of God. It is interesting to note that many of the Old Testament references to armour picture God putting it on himself.

One of these is found in Isaiah 59:

Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries,

repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives (vv. 15-19).

In order to judge the world then the Lord himself put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head. We can truly see that these items of armour are God's. What a blessing that he makes them available to us! It only remains for us to put them on! The final thing to consider is that the commands are in the plural. They were for the whole assembly in Ephesus and they are for our whole assembly too. Unity in the spiritual war is essential. We should all fight as a unit to take our stand against all that the devil throws at us.

When visiting Ephesus in 1972 I took a picture of the relief sculpture of a Roman soldier. The breastplate can be clearly identified as segment armour with overlocking metal segments attached to a leather jacket. The breastplate obviously provided great protection against stab wounds for the soldier's vital organs.

What is Righteousness? The New Testament Greek word for righteousness is *dikaiosunē* (dik-ah-yos-oo'-nay), which means equity, correctness of character or act. This word is also connected with the word in most Bibles translated as justification. It comes from another Greek word associated with it, *dikaios* (dik'-ah-yos) which means equitable, correct or upright in character or deed and by implication innocent, holy, just, meet and right. When Jesus sought to overcome John the Baptist's reluctance to baptise him he said: "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." We would say in today's language something like: "Come on, it's better to do the right thing." So we may say that righteousness is the state of being in the right or doing the right thing.

From this we can gather that there are two aspects of righteousness which are aptly illustrated by two statements of Jesus in chapter 6 of Matthew

Beware of practising your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven (v. 1).

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (v. 33).

One form of righteousness is to be practised by followers of Jesus. The other is God's righteousness which followers of Jesus are to make it their priority to obtain.

This brings us to the Biblical concept of justification which as we saw is one aspect of righteousness in the Ancient Greek word *dikaiosune*. Paul expounds justification in his letter to the believers at Rome:

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one'; 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.' Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for

all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins (Romans 3 vv. 9 -10 and vv. 18 -25).

The Holy Spirit through Paul reveals in accordance with the testimony of Old Testament Scriptures that no human being whether Jew or Gentile is righteous in God's eyes. There is no way that anyone can keep all of the laws of the Old Covenant and then come to God and demand to be declared righteous on the basis of keeping all these rules and regulations. That person will be unable to speak in God's presence because his failures will be exposed by the laws he has broken. "Since through the law comes knowledge of sin." But God offers his own righteousness to everyone who will give up trying to establish their own righteousness. It is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. This righteousness or right-standing with God is a gift given out of the goodness of God's heart. It has been paid for in full by Christ Jesus through his suffering on the cross. God through the death and shedding of the precious blood of Christ has made Jesus a sacrifice that turns away his own righteous judgement against our sin.

Once a sinner repents and puts his or her faith in Christ Jesus as the sacrifice that turns away God's righteous judgement against sin, he or she will on the basis of a right-standing with God start to do the right thing. The believer inspired by the Holy Spirit and in obedience to the Word of God will begin to do righteous deeds. He or she will begin practising righteousness. Right-standing with God and practical righteousness give double strength to the breastplate of righteousness.

Practical righteousness has eternal value and will be rewarded in eternity: as we read in the book of Revelation:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure'— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (Revelation 19 vv. 6-8).

Practical righteous is also clear proof of the genuineness of our faith. This, I believe, is what James meant in his general letter when he writes:

Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works (James 2 v.18).

He had previously written:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2 vv. 14-17).

Paul had written that we are justified by faith. James writes:

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2 v. 24).

On the surface it looks like James is contradicting Paul but in fact he is just emphasizing that saving faith must naturally result in works of practical righteousness that prove that this faith is genuine.

Why do we need the Breastplate of Righteousness? We need it because we need to answer our accuser who continually accuses us of being unrighteous. Zechariah's vision in chapter 3 of his prophecy is a powerful illustration of this:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?' Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.' And to him he said, 'Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments' (Zechariah 3 vv.1-4).

Here we see the Lord answering the accusations of Satan on behalf of Joshua. He answers first on the basis of Joshua's right standing with God. Joshua is a resident in the city the Lord has chosen and he is one whom the Lord has saved as a brand plucked from the fire. Then the Lord cleanses Joshua of the effects of his sinfulness so that he may answer Satan with a life of practical righteousness. We have a similar scenario in the book of Revelation.

The accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death (Revelation 12 vv. 10-11)

The difference here is that it is now the brothers who conquer the accuser. They have conquered him by their right standing with God through the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Christ Jesus shed on the cross has made them righteous before God. We might say they conquered Satan because they had put on the Breastplate of Righteousness. They also conquered him by the word of their testimony through confessing the truth about themselves from God's Word. We might say they conquered Satan because they had put on the Belt of Truth. They also conquered in their lives of practical righteousness. "They loved not their lives even unto death." They were willing to die rather than deny their Lord.

Not only are we well armed but our enemies have been disarmed. The work of Christ on the cross which secured our right standing with God is so powerful that it has taken all legal status away from the accusations of Satan and his demons. It is in this sense that they have been disarmed:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Colossian 2 vv.13-15).

The only way that Satan and his demons can accuse us now is to trick us into thinking that their accusations have legal status. We answer from our position of right standing with God based on the finished work of Christ on the cross. We take our stand in the right standing with God that we

have been given by the work of Christ and thus put on the breastplate of righteousness. We confess that we are justified freely by his grace and thus fasten on the belt of truth. We make sure there are no chinks in our armour by living lives of practical righteousness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The double strength of the breastplate of righteousness provides great protection for the Christian soldier against the stab wounds of the baseless accusations of Satan and his demons. Let us first of all make sure that we are always aware of the righteousness of God that has been given us through the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord “who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

And secondly let us make sure that we are always living lives of practical righteousness in obedience to God’s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. This will ensure that there are no chinks in our armour, and we will bring glory to God and give a testimony to the world. This will bring us the hope of a bright reward in heaven. Let us make sure we have put on the breastplate of righteousness! Then we will “be able to withstand in the evil day.”

I have given you a lot of information which would be difficult to remember. Let me try and summarise it all before we close. We started with the fact that the armour is God’s armour that he gives for us to use to resist the devil. He even uses the armour himself to judge the world.

The armour itself is a whole composed of several pieces. While we can study each part of it we need to put on the whole armour of God. We noted that the breastplate in the relief sculpture is segment armour. This armour obviously provided great protection against stab wounds for the soldier’s vital organs.

We asked the question: What is righteousness? Our conclusion was that it had two aspects: Being in the right and doing the right thing. We got this from two verses from the Sermon on the Mount:

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and Beware of practising your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them (Matthew 6 vv 33 & 1).

We also saw that the Greek word for righteousness has close connections to the word for justification which could be paraphrased as being put in the right or being brought into a right relationship with God. God offers his own righteousness to everyone who will give up trying to establish their own righteousness. This righteousness or right-standing with God is a gift given out of the goodness of God’s heart. It has been paid for in full by Christ Jesus through his suffering on the cross.

We saw that once a sinner repents and puts his or her faith in Christ Jesus he or she will on the basis of a right-standing with God start to do the right thing. The believer inspired by the Holy Spirit and in obedience to the Word of God will begin to do righteous deeds. He or she will begin practising righteousness. Right-standing with God and practical righteousness give double strength to the breastplate of righteousness. We also noted that practical righteousness has eternal value and will be rewarded in eternity. Practical righteous is also clear proof of the genuineness of our faith. We saw that we need the breastplate of righteousness because we have to answer our accuser who continually accuses us of being unrighteous. We noted the connection with the vision of Zechariah of Satan accusing Joshua the high priest.

We also saw the connection to the brothers in Revelation chapter 12 who conquer the accuser. They have conquered him by their right standing with God through the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Christ Jesus shed on the cross has made them righteous before God. We could say they conquered Satan because they had put on the Breastplate of Righteousness. They also

conquered him by the word of their testimony through confessing the truth about themselves from God's Word. We could say they conquered Satan because they had put on the Belt of Truth. They also conquered in their lives of practical righteousness. "They loved not their lives even unto death." They were willing to die rather than deny their Lord.

Let us make sure that we are always aware of the righteousness of God that has been given us through the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord "who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." Let us make sure that we are always living lives of practical righteousness in obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. This will ensure that there are no chinks in our armour, and will bring glory to God and give a testimony to the world. This will bring us the hope of a bright reward in heaven. Let us make sure we have put on the breastplate of righteousness! Then we will "be able to withstand in the evil day."

And if you have not yet received the gift of a right standing with God may I encourage you to confess to God that you are a sinner and on the basis of the death of Christ on the cross accept God's gift of righteousness? Then you yourself could put on the Breastplate of Righteousness.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on the Breastplate of Righteousness, in our series on the Armour of God - talk number 1458.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.