

## The Breastplate of Righteousness

### Review

- Ephesians 6.10 is literally translated: “Be being strengthened in the Lord.” This is a reminder to us that victory in spiritual warfare comes not from ourselves, but from active and ongoing reliance on Christ.
- Nevertheless, we are still commanded to “put on” (v. 11) and “take up the whole armor” (v. 13). This reminds us that active reliance on Jesus leads to responsible action – taking up the tools he provides.
- If we understand “the whole armor of God” as “means of grace” – tools for our sanctification (WSC 35), part of our gospel transformation – then we should interpret them through a gospel grid:
  - Doctrine: How does the Bible define the doctrinal element (ex. “truth”) of the piece of armor?
  - Gospel: How does it point us to Jesus? How did Jesus use this armor in spiritual warfare?
  - Evil: How will the devil, the flesh, and the world use the opposite (ex. “lies”) to tempt us?
  - Armor: United to Jesus as our head, how does the church and its members use this armor? Does the action element (ex. “belt”) suggest any particular mode of application?
- Regarding the “belt of truth” (v. 14a), we noted the following:
  - “Truth” corresponds to God’s interpretation of reality – since God’s word made all things (Gen. 1).
  - Since it comes from God, “truth” should not just be acknowledged, but also trusted.
  - The “belt of truth” is Christ’s own armor (Is. 11.5), deployed against Satan’s temptation (Mt. 4.1-11).
  - The Enemy will tap into our appetites, anxieties, and ambitions in order to tempt us with lies.
  - The “belt of truth” is essential armor for holding everything together in spiritual warfare:
 

“[The soldier's belt] gathered his tunic together and also held his sword. It ensured that he was unimpeded when marching. As he buckled it on, it gave him a sense of hidden strength and confidence... To ‘tighten one’s belt’ can mean not only to accept a time of austerity during a food shortage but also to prepare oneself for action, which the ancients would have called ‘girding up their loins.’”<sup>1</sup>

### The Breastplate of Righteousness

*“...and having put on the breastplate of righteousness...” (v. 14b)*

#### Doctrine

- In the Bible, “righteousness” has the basic sense of conformity to God’s own character and God’s revealed standard for humanity – especially as revealed in God’s moral law:
 

“The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.” (Ps. 145.17)

“For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.” (Ps. 11.7)

*“What is the moral law? The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding every one to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man: promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.” (WLC #93)*
- When it comes to believers, there are two senses of “righteousness”:
  - “Justifying” righteousness, in which God credits us and clothes us with Christ’s own perfection:
 

“And [Abram] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” (Gen. 15.6)

“For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5.21)

“Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” (WSC 33)

<sup>1</sup> John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 277.

- “Sanctifying” righteousness, in which the Holy Spirit progressively makes us righteous:
  - “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Eph. 4.24)
  - “Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.” (1 Jn. 3.7)
  - “*What is sanctification?* Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” (WSC #35)
- “Righteousness” in Eph. 6.14b thus carries this double sense: “The completeness of pardon for past offence and the integrity of character that belong to the justified life, are woven together into an impenetrable mail.”<sup>2</sup>

### *Gospel*

- The gospel as a whole is referred to as “the righteousness of God” (Rom. 1.17, 3.21).
- The essence of humanity’s fallen, flawed condition is a lack of righteousness:
  - “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Rom. 3.10-12)
- The appalling nature of our natural unrighteousness, and the goodness of God’s solution, is depicted vividly in Isaiah 59 – which culminates with these words:
  - Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. 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... And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the LORD. (Isa. 59.14-17, 20)
- Righteousness is so central to the gospel that Jesus is given it as a name by the prophet Jeremiah:
  - Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch... And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.” (Jer. 23.5-6)
- Jesus’ life was utterly righteous (Jn. 8.46). Pilate knew it – and tried to wash his hands (Mat. 27.17-24)!
- It was because he was righteous that death could not hold Jesus (Rom 6.23; Acts 2.23).

### *Evil*

- Because they hate the God who is righteous, the world, the flesh, and the devil hate righteousness. Paul addressed Elymas the magician as: “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness,” (Acts 13.10).
- “Antinomianism” (anti-law): the Enemy will tempt us to un-righteousness (Rom. 1.18, 29; 1 Co. 6.9-10).
- “Legalism” (“moralism”): the Enemy will tempt us to self-righteousness (Mk. 2.17; Lk. 18.9-14):
  - “[Since it is] impossible to remove spirituality from his life... we must corrupt it... success of this third kind is the most glorious of all. A spoiled saint, a Pharisee... makes better sport in Hell...” (C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*)
- Accusation (Rev. 12.10): “Look at you... how could God ever love such a filthy, unrighteous screw-up?”

### *Armor*

- Jesus did not just pay for us; he also obeyed for us. “When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look at see him there, who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free; for God, the just, is satisfied to look on him and pardon me.” (“Before the Throne”)
- Righteousness is our “breastplate” because it protects the vital places of our soul (1 Jn. 1.9):
  - “No spiritual protection is greater than a righteous relationship with God... To be clothed with a righteousness which is not one’s own but Christ’s, to stand before God not condemned but accepted – this is an essential defence against an accusing conscience and against the slanderous attacks of the evil one... [But] the Christian’s breastplate may [also] be righteousness of character and conduct. For just as to cultivate ‘truth’ is the way to overthrow the devil’s deceptions, so to cultivate ‘righteousness’ is the way to resist his temptations.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> G.G. Findlay, cited in Stott, *Ephesians*, 279.

<sup>3</sup> Stott, *Ephesians*, 278-279.