

*Sermon #82 — Ephesians Sermons*

Title:      **“THE BREASTPLATE OF  
                    RIGHTEOUSNESS”**

Text:        Ephesians 6:14

Subject:    *Christ’s Righteousness Our Breastplate*

Date:        Tuesday Evening — October 24, 2017

Readings: *Mark Daniel and Mark Henson*

Introduction:

Open your Bibles to the Gospel of Ephesians. **Ephesians 6:14** will be my text. In this passage of Scripture, the Apostle Paul is showing us how to make use of the armor God has graciously provided for us. The alarm has been sounded. A rousing call to battle has been issued. Our courage has been excited. The enemy has been identified. And we have been assured of the victory. As Zion’s soldiers, we have our marching orders. — *“Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”* — In verse 14 God the Holy Ghost tells us how we are to stand.

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“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.:

In the confidence and courage of God given faith in Christ, we have taken the field, relying upon the strength of the Almighty. — *“Having our loins girt about with truth,”* we are set in array against the very gates of hell. The next word of instruction is our text, — *“Stand, having on the breastplate of righteousness.”*

As God the Spirit will enable me, I want to talk to you for a few minutes about — **“THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”** spoken of here. — **“THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”** — That is my subject.

The breastplate was a very important piece of armor for a Roman soldier. It extended from the base of the neck to the upper part of the thighs, covering all the

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vital organs of life — the heart — the lungs — the kidneys — the abdomen. A soldier could survive many wounds to the arms or legs. But a wound in this area would be the sure forerunner of death. So you can see that the breastplate was a vital piece of armor. It is not at all strange that Paul should use the soldier’s breastplate to represent the righteousness of Christ.

## **GIRDLE AND BREASTPLATE**

The righteousness of Christ is a breastplate to cover our souls and protect our hearts. Like the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness is essential. These two pieces of armor are joined together in our text, just as they were literally joined together when worn by a Roman soldier. The soldier’s breastplate was buckled to his girdle. Both together are necessary.

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**Truth is a girdle for the loins of our souls.** —

“*Having our loins girt about with truth,*” we are strengthened and protected. And the girdle of truth gives us freedom to carry on the warfare committed to our hands. There is little danger of men being overcome by error who are firmly established in truth. But along with truth, there must be righteousness.

**By all means, we must have our hearts established with the real, solid, substantial truths of the gospel.** But that is not enough. **We must also have the righteousness of Christ.**

**BELIEVERS RIGHTEOUS**

The righteousness of Christ is the security of our souls and the rule of our lives. This is what it is to have on “*the breastplate of righteousness.*” **He is truly holy who has the righteousness of Christ imputed to his account and infused into his soul.**

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And all such men live in and by the righteousness that is in Christ Jesus. Believers, regenerate men and women are people who seek to live in the likeness of Christ, who is their Life. They are, as Jerome long ago described them, men and women “in whose veins the blood of Christ is yet warm.” Believers were first called “*Christians*” at Antioch (Acts 11:26) because they were then and are now men and women who are like Christ, followers of Christ, disciples of Christ.

**We all know that God’s people are righteous. The Lord Jesus Christ is made of God unto us righteousness.** All who are born of God are made

righteous by God.

- In Justification
- In Sanctification

**Yet, this righteousness is something that must be pursued by us.** We are here called upon by the Spirit of God to put it on. “*Having on the breastplate of*

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*righteousness,”* we are to put it on as a part of “*the whole armor of God.*”

**Proposition:** The righteousness of Christ is the believer’s breastplate to guard us against the assaults of Satan, to secure us from all wrath and condemnation, and to make us fearless in doing the will of God.

**ARMOR PUT ON**

Before we come to our text, I want to remind you that when Paul admonishes us to “*put on the whole armor of God,*” he is simply telling us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. **Christ in his person, offices, and work is the entire armor of God for us.** In these verses, the Apostle uses the various pieces of armor, by which ancient Roman soldiers were clad when they went into battle, as spiritual representations of the different branches of Christ’s work for us. For example...

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- The girdle of truth is the revelation of truth by Christ our Prophet.
- The breastplate of righteousness is the righteousness of Christ our Representative.
- The gospel of peace is the good news of Christ our High Priest.
- The shield of faith is the gift of Christ our ascended Lord.
- The helmet of salvation is the deliverance of Christ our Mighty Savior.
- And the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God given by Christ our Mediator.

**Divisions:** I will give you my message in these three points.

1. What is the breastplate of righteousness?
2. Why is the righteousness of Christ compared to a soldier's breastplate?
3. Why should believers put on the breastplate of righteousness?

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4. How do we put on the breastplate of righteousness?

**THE BREASTPLATE**

1<sup>st</sup> — The first question which must be answered is this — **What is this breastplate of righteousness?**

We must carefully avoid the mere mechanical interpretation of Scripture. We should not press the illustration of a soldier’s armor too far. **This is an allegory. Paul wants us to grasp the spiritual significance of his words.** So, what is the righteousness Paul spoken of here?

**Be sure you understand this. — Paul is not here talking about moral integrity or legal righteousness.** The New English Bible as it is called

translates the word “*righteousness*” here “*integrity*”. But the mere integrity of a man is not what Paul is talking about. Neither does he speak of the legal righteousness of the Mosaic law. These things cannot



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never repel the fiery darts of Satan. **Those things religious infidels call “personal righteousness” and “personal holiness” cannot resist the accusations of conscience, the whispers of despondency, and the power of temptation, much less the severity of the law, or the assaults of Satan.**

**Legal righteousness is that which God requires of man by the law.** — *“Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them”* (Romans 10:5).

If you would attain righteousness by your obedience to the law of God, if you would make yourself righteous, three things are necessary.

1. You must render to God an absolutely perfect obedience to all the law. The whole law must be kept with the whole heart. The least defect, either in thought or deed, is the breach of all. —

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*“For it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Galatians 3:10).*

2. That perfect obedience must be perfectly performed by you personally.
3. And perfect personal obedience must be performed perpetually. If the law is once broken in the slightest degree, it can never be mended, though a man live perfectly all the rest of his days.

**But the Book of God declares** — *“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight”* (Romans 3:20).

(Galatians 2:16) “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

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- We lost all hope of legal righteousness in the fall of our father Adam.
- By nature, we have no ability to obey God’s law.
- By nature, we do not even have a desire to obey God’s law.

**No man living can be accepted by God on the grounds of legal obedience, because all that we do is tainted by sin.** — *“All are under sin, as it is written, there is none righteous, no not one.”*

- The most boastful philosopher among the Gentiles has nothing of which to boast before God.
- The most self-righteous Pharisee is nothing but a sinful mass of flesh before God.
- The holiest saint who ever lived can never stand accepted in any degree before God on his own merits.
- Children of God, even our best righteousnesses are but filthy rags before God. Even **David**, the

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man after God’s own heart said, — *“Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified”* (Psalm 143:2).

**Is the law therefore useless?** No. The law is holy, and just, and good for its purpose. But it was never intended as a means of acceptance with God. It was never intended to be a means of attaining righteousness. It was never intended to be a rule of life.

- The law shows us our guilt.
- The law restrains sin by threatening punishment.
- The law drives us away from Sinai to Calvary, away from Moses to Christ (Romans 10:4).

**The righteousness which Paul calls our breastplate is the righteousness of Christ.** This is the doctrine of the gospel, doctrine which all men by nature reject. They will not submit to the righteousness of Christ as their only righteousness and their only grounds of their acceptance with the

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Holy Lord God. — *“They being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth”* (Romans 10:3-4). As the disobedience of Adam made all his seed sinners, so the obedience of Christ makes all his seed righteous.

- The Lord Jesus Christ accomplished a perfect righteousness for us as a man, while he was here upon the earth.
- The Lamb of God died to satisfy the demands of justice against us because of sin.
- The Christ of God arose to glory to give repentance and the remission of sins to every believer.

**The Scriptures everywhere declare this blessed, gospel doctrine of substitution.**

- God requires from me a perfect obedience to his law. And he provides it in my Substitute.

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- God requires that the very man who sinned be infinitely punished. And he punished our sins in our Substitute (Romans 3:24-26; 4:25–5:1; 5:10, 17-19; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Isaiah 53:4-11).

(Romans 3:24-28) “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (25) 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; (26) To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

(Romans 4:25-5:1) “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. (1) Therefore being justified, by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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(Romans 5:10) “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

(Romans 5:17-19) “(If by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) (18) Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life. (19) For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

(2 Corinthians 5:17-21) “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (18) And all things *are* of God, who hath

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reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (21) For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

(Isaiah 53:411) “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. (5) But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us



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all. (7) He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. (8) He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. (9) And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth. (10) Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. (11) He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”

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**The Substitutionary work of Christ is so perfect that God made his Son to be our sin and he made us to be Christ’s righteousness.** If Christ were not made sin, it would have been most unjust for him to die. If we were not made righteous, it would be impossible for us to live. That is the doctrine of this Book.

**In the new birth, God’s elect, Christ’s redeemed ones, the sinner who trusts the Son of God, is made partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), the Lord Jesus Christ is formed in us (Galatians 4:19; Colossians 1:27). His righteousness is imparted to us and infused in us by the grace and power of God, making us new creatures in him (Hebrews 12:14).**

The Puritan, **William Gurnall** rightly describes this righteousness imparted to us as “a supernatural

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principle of life planted in the heart of every child of God by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit.”

- This is one of those blessings of grace secured for us in the new covenant. — *“A new heart, and a new Spirit will I give you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and keep my judgments, and do them”* (Ezekiel 36:26-27).
- This is that principle of life created in us by the quickening power of God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-10).
- This is that seed which cannot sin, which lives in every believer (1 John 3:9).
- This is the new man within us created in righteousness and true holiness.
- In the new birth righteousness becomes the principle by which the believer’s life is governed.

**This breastplate of righteousness, the righteousness by which we stand accepted with God, is the very same righteousness in which**

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**Christ himself, as our God-man Mediator, stands  
accepted with the Triune Jehovah** (Isaiah 59:16-  
21; 11:5).

(Isaiah 59:16-21) “And he saw that *there was* no man, and wondered that *there was* no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. (17) For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance *for* clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke. (18) According to *their* deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. (19) So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. (20) And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from

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transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. (21) As for me, this *is* my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that *is* upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and forever.”

(Isaiah 11:5) “And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”

**THE COMPARISON**

2<sup>nd</sup> — Briefly consider this question. — **Why is the righteousness of Christ compared to a breastplate?** I will give you just three points of similarity.

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- 1. The breastplate was designed to preserve the life of the soldier. And the righteousness of Christ preserves God’s saints.**
  - His righteousness preserves us from Satan’s fury.
  - His righteousness preserves us from divine judgment.
- 2. The breastplate was prepared for the soldier before he puts it on. And the righteousness of Christ was prepared for us by God himself.**
  - It was formed and molded in the eternal covenant.
  - It was made for God’s elect at Calvary.
  - It is put on every regenerate sinner in the new birth by the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit.
- 3. The breastplate made a soldier bold and fearless, knowing that he could be easily**

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**harmed by his foes. The same is true of God’s  
saints.**

We trust in the righteousness of Christ, and being secure in that, having the testimony of God in our hearts that we please him, saved sinners are made bold and confident. — *“The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are as bold as a lion”* (Proverbs 28:1).

**PUT ON**

2<sup>nd</sup> — **Our text speaks of us “having on” the breastplate,” but in verse 11 the Apostle tells us to “put on the whole armor of God;” and this “breastplate of righteousness” part of that armor we must put on.** Time and again, we are told to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, to put on the new man, to put on righteousness. That is because we must daily seek Christ and rely upon his righteousness. We must

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daily seek to be renewed in his grace and righteousness (Philippians 3:3-10).

(Philippians 3:3-10) “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. (4) Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: (5) Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; (6) Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. (7) But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. (8) Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, (9) And be found in him, not



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having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (10) That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”

**BY TRUSTING**

3<sup>rd</sup> — In the last place, let’s consider this question. — **How do we put on the Lord Jesus Christ as the breastplate of righteousness?** We must renounce all self-righteousness if we would have the righteousness of Christ (Philippians 3:8-9). We must receive the righteousness of Christ by faith (Romans 5:1). We must rely upon the righteousness of Christ as our only righteousness, the only grounds of acceptance before God. — *“Stand therefore...having on the breastplate of righteousness.”* That is what it is to live by faith. That is what it is to walk with God (Colossians 2:6).

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We stand against Satan’s temptations, trusting the righteousness of Christ. **We stand before our accuser trusting our Savior** (Zechariah 3:1-9).

(Zechariah 3:1-9) “And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. (2) And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: *is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?* (3) Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. (4) And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. (5) And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with

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garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by. (6) And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, (7) Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by. (8) Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they *are* men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH. (9) For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone *shall be* seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”

Compassed with trouble, in distress,  
What fears possess my mind!  
Savior, I long to see Your face,  
For grace and peace Divine!

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With broken heart, and waiting long,  
Beneath this crushing load,  
I own my sin, confess my wrong,  
And stretch my hands to God.

My wretched heart, my God, I mourn;  
And for my sin I weep!  
With every lust obscene I burn,  
And sink into the deep!

As Satan raises Moses up  
And roars against my soul,  
Lord Jesus, my poor cause take up  
And make Your servant whole!

Arise, O Lord! Shine forth in grace!  
Your precious blood apply!  
Embrace my soul, dear Prince of Peace,  
Blest Rock higher than I!

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Speak, Savior, let me hear Your voice,  
Show me, again, Your face!  
Oh! Hear my inmost groans and cries. —  
Revive my soul with grace!

We stand against our own carnal nature, trusting Christ, the Lord our Righteousness. We stand in the path of duty, trusting Christ our Righteousness. All that we do is done with an eye of faith upon Christ, realizing that our best works are but sin and filthy rags, and they are acceptable to God only upon the righteousness of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). And in the Day of Judgment, when we stand before the Great White Throne, we will stand firm, bold, confident, trusting the righteousness of Christ.

Bold shall I stand in that great day,  
For who aught to my charge shall lay,  
While through Thy blood absolved I am  
From sin’s tremendous guilt and shame?

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**APPLICATION**

**This is my joy; and this is the sum of all that I write and preach** (Psalm 40:9-10). It was the sum and joy of all that my Savior preached while he walked on the earth. And it is the sum and joy of all that I preach to you.

(Psalm 40:9-10) “I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. (10) I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.”

**Make the righteousness of Christ sure to your soul every day, by trusting him who is Jehovah-tsidkenu. THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

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(Job 27:6) “My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach *me* so long as I live.”

Amen.