

## Ephesians #03: Ephesians 6:14b

*Ephesians*

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Our text words this afternoon are Ephesians 6:14b. Only these words "and having on the breastplate of righteousness." With God's help we wish to consider with you the Christian soldier having on the breastplate of righteousness. In the first place, what it is, what this breastplate is; secondly, its sure protection; and thirdly, its blessed fruit. The Christian soldier having on the breastplate of righteousness: what it is; its sure protection; its blessed fruit.

As you recall, dear congregation, we have been considering the Christian soldier armed in God's armory as witnessed in Ephesians 6. We have considered on the first occasion the need to be fully armed due to the seriousness of the power of the archenemy Satan and his forces. Last time, we have considered the foundational piece of the Christian's armor, the girdle of truth and now the apostle attaches to this girdle a truth, the breastplate of righteousness. We need, in other words, he says, not only to be girt about with truth but it gets together with being grounded in the word of God, the truth of God we need to have personally the breastplate of righteousness. He puts these two together, you see. He doesn't just say be girt about with truth period, and then a new sentence, have on the breastplate of righteousness, but he says we need both. We need the objective truth of the word of God. We need to be immersed and girt about with truth and have on, and wear the breastplate of righteousness.

Well, just what is this breastplate and why is it so important that this breastplate be conjoined together with the girdle of truth? Well, in Bible times soldiers would often wear a breastplate. A breastplate was made of very hard metal or very tough leather and would be worn across the chest similar in fashion to what we would call today a bullet-proof vest, only a breastplate would cover not only the chest but also the abdomen, and thus it was a very critical part of the soldier's armor because of the organs in the abdominal cavity. Now you must understand that the ancients attached much significance to organs such as the heart and the liver. Many of these people and much also of biblical terminology seems to imply that the ancients believed that these organs were the seat of the affections, the feelings and emotions of the person. Often joy and anger, for example, are spoke of as coming out of the heart. Now whether these things are literally true or symbolically true is rather indifferent at this point, the point is that the breastplate covered the area of the body which was known to be the source of the home, of the

affections, the feelings, the very heart of man. And now Paul uses this biblical view of psychology to teach important spiritual lessons. Believers, he said, must put on the breastplate of righteousness to protect the very vital parts of their lives against the attacks of Satan, and we certainly know, my friends, that of all the organs of the spiritual part of man, nothing is so susceptible to attack as the feelings, the emotions, the ups and downs of a human breast. Therefore, says Paul, we need a sound and sure and strong protection to protect us from the ups and downs of our human feelings and emotions, and the believer for protection in the area of the human emotions and affections is recommended to wear the breastplate of righteousness.

So what is exactly that righteousness, then, which Paul is describing? The answer to that, my friends, is very simple, that can only be the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul of all the saints of Scripture surely has learned that great great lesson that there is nothing in any other form of righteousness than in the righteousness of Christ. You recall, I trust, in Philippians 3 where Paul outlines all his natural forms of righteousness. He says to the Philippians, "If any man would boast of a natural form of righteousness, I would have more to trust in the flesh than he." He says it very plainly, "If any man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more," and then he gives us a catalog of the reasons for fleshly righteousness. He says, "I was circumcised the eighth day. I was of the stock of Israel. I was of the tribe of Benjamin," so-called 16<sup>th</sup> tribe in that time. "I was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. As touching the law, I was a Pharisee. Concerning zeal, I persecuted the church. Touching the righteousness which is in the law, I was blameless. Oh," Paul says, "what a record I have. I have a record of fleshly righteousness, of legalistic righteousness and nobody can match." But he goes on to say, "I am not at all proud of my achievements. Indeed, just the reverse, all the righteousness that I can boast of any fleshly way, I turn inside out and wherein is exposed in its internal, I see that it is but dung, but garbage," he says literally. So he says to the Philippians and listen carefully, "But what things were gain to me," all those things that people would count as righteousness and be proud of Paul for, "what things were gain to me, those I count as loss for Christ, 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 and be found in him not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God which is by faith."

Now surely we have no doubt what Paul means when he says be girt about not only with the loins of truth but with the breastplate of righteousness. He means the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Only what he has done on the cross, only what he has done throughout the 33 years of his earthly pilgrimage as he lived in the smoke of sin and among opposing sinners but still obeyed the law perfectly, only what he is continuing to do at the right hand of the Father and interceding for me, this says Paul, the work of Jesus in his humiliation and exaltation, this is the breastplate of righteousness. Oh, with the poet, with the hymnist he could say, "I build my hope on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

My dear friends, can you say that too? Are you girt about with the girdle of truth but also do you have on, are you wearing the breastplate of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ? To wear this breastplate we need to feel our need for it. By nature, we don't want to wear a bullet-proof vest, so to speak, we don't want the extra weight and we have to be convinced our lives are in danger before we would regularly wear such a garment, but this is precisely, you see, what Paul is saying. He says for the true Christian soldier, he is intimately aware that his life is always being challenged, that Satan is always there with persecutions, that he needs the bullet-proof vest of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and because he sees his need, he seeks that that vest may always been worn, may always be on him, that it may never hang empty in the closet and he fights as Paul, having on the breastplate of righteousness. Not just looking at it from a distance, not just admiring it, not just having it close by, not just seeing its beauty, but having it on. We need to wear it because we can find no other security, no other sure protection for the vitals of our feelings and our emotions, for the vitals of our very soul's life. We need the breastplate of righteousness.

Well, my dear friends, the people who really learn this truth that they need to have the breastplate of righteousness on are people who have learned to lose all their own righteousness. They are people, and I hope you are one of them, who have learned to say with Paul, "I count all else as loss and dung." They are people who have tried to fashion, who have tried to sow, who have tried to make their own breastplate of righteousness, to be acceptable in God's sight with reformation attempts, with Bible reading, with heart examining, with sessions where they poured out their hearts in earnest fearful prayer to God, but in all these things they have found [unintelligible], they have found need of repentance in their repentances, they have found unrighteousness in their most holy righteousnesses, they have found that all their righteousnesses are as filthy rags in the sight of a holy and righteous God. They must say, "Lord, I am unrighteous." Instead of a breastplate, they've had to expose nakedness before Almighty God and have seen in their unrighteousness discovered to them that they have a need for a better righteousness to be uncovered to them.

We have to lose, my friends, the filthy rag righteousness of our so-called natural goodness and of our so-called religious goodness, but also we have to lose the fig-leaf righteousness we were trying to adorn ourselves with in paradise, and you know what that is. We try to sew fig-leaves to convince ourselves we are not guilty of Adam's sin, to convince ourselves we are not stained in the very core of our hearts. And you see, when the Holy Spirit comes as we heard this morning to comfort the believer, he has first done that stripping down to make him partake of Christ. He has shown him that his filthy rag righteousness must become filthy rag righteousness, but also his fig-leaf righteousness, his original sin in Adam must be true and real. He must become radically naked in the sight of God without any righteousness and, you see, my friends, when we lose our filthy rag righteousness and when we lose our fig-leaf righteousness, when we lose the righteousness of our actual sins and of our original sin and we see that we are nothing but sin, only then is room made for the white-robed righteousness of Jesus Christ, for the breastplate of righteousness with which the Christian soldier may protect the vitals of his feelings, his emotions, his affections. But before we lose those righteousnesses, we are

constantly trying to base our salvation on our feelings, our emotions, on the inner organs of our soul, and they are constantly being bruised. One time we think we're stronger than another. One time we have hope, the next time we don't. Why? Because we are exposing ourselves without the breastplate of the righteousness of Christ, we are making our feelings and our emotions and our affections vulnerable to the very onslaughts of the archenemy and we have no protection. And my dear friends, when we base our salvation on feelings and emotions, we shall surely fall and stumble again and again.

Now does that mean that our religion should be without feelings? Of course not. True religion cannot be feeling-less religion. True religion probes the very depths of the emotions and the affections and the feelings of men. True religion can be so profound sometimes that it carries the believer beyond tears, those in sorrow for sin, and an unspeakable holy amazement of joy for deliverance. True religion is something more than emotion. It is something truly felt but, but the true feelings in religion do not become the foundations of religion. Religion can be used wrongly when we rely unduly upon our feelings when we try to make our feelings and our emotions the foundational righteousness of our salvation itself, but when we rely on anything else beside the blood of Christ, my friends, we shall perish with all that we rely on.

So what happens to the beginner in grace who is being convicted of sin, who has not yet been stripped of his own righteousness both in its filthy rag aspect and its fig-leaf aspect? What happens to him when he has a wonderful experience? When he receives a sweet word from the Lord? When he receives a special promise, perhaps, or an encouragement that God will work? When he receives one of those precious words that are dropped down into his soul, what happens to him? Well, his feelings and his emotions are filled with joy but the next morning he might arise from bed and it might all be gone and he might say, "I'm unconverted after all. I have very little hope that the Lord has ever done anything." Why? Because he's not adorned with the breastplate of righteousness. He hasn't gained the stability of faith that a more advanced believer has gained, who wears the breastplate of righteousness, who is grounded with the foundation of the blood of Christ under his feet.

So how must we view that beginning believer? Well, my friends, we must not despise him. We must not say as many do in our day, "Let us mock with the beginning believer. For one day he thinks he's saved, and the next day he thinks he's not." No, we don't mock with him but we encourage him and seek to guide him that he must lose his righteousness to be clothed with more stability with the breastplate of Christ's righteousness.

So we don't despise him but neither do we want to emulate him, neither do we want to admire and mimic him, neither do we want to make him the model of what the Christian believer ought to be as he advances in growth and grace. There are many people today who despise the infants in grace, totally wrongly so. Indeed I would say one of the healthiest signs of a church is to have many infants in grace. It's a sign of spiritual vitality and the Spirit moving through a church will have beginners in grace. But on the other side, my friends, there are people today who set up the infant in grace as if he were the most advanced believer, and as if there is nothing more to the Christian religion to be

learned and to just have all the ups and downs of feelings and emotions so that 50 years after the believer has been converted, he is still wondering from day to day whether the Lord has ever worked in his heart or not.

No, our forefathers didn't teach us that, my friends. The Canons of Dort show us very plainly throughout the five Heads, especially the fifth one, that it is normative, normative for the believer to have some kind, some degree, maybe not full assurance but some degree of assurance. And it was the Reformers who said that true believers have to seek grace to move beyond the basic question of has the Lord begun or not, and to seek to be useful in the Lord's service and in his kingdom, and to ask the greater question: how may I live to the honor and glory of God? And what the Roman Catholics, maybe you never knew that, but it was the Roman Catholics in Reformation times who said true believers can't be too sure of their salvation. They want to discourage all assurance. A Roman Catholic said there is only one grounds of assurance of faith and that is through a very very special revelation from out of heaven. And the Reformers said no. There can be a form of assurance as many other forms. And that's why in the Canons of Dort, our Reformed forefathers rejected the Roman Catholic error, you can read it in Head 5 under the errors, "We reject the Roman Catholic error that teaches that assurance only comes through special revelation." And why? Because Roman Catholicism was built around feelings, around emotions, around the ups and downs of the individual believer. And the Reformers said, "No, we have a greater ground under our feet. We have the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ."

So when we wake from our beds in the morning and we don't feel as deeply attached to Christ as perhaps we did the night before when we were reading the Bible, any verse was precious to us, we don't despair and say, "The Lord has never done anything because I don't feel it this morning." But we seek to return to our foundation, we seek to wear the breastplate of righteousness and say, "Lord, we can't deny that our only hope is in Christ, and when we don't feel the degree of feeling we want, we will still wear the breastplate of righteousness and go forward in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only."

So it is the Reformed in the biblical balance. The Reformed biblical balance is true religion must be felt, a true religion does not have its foundation upon feeling, only the breastplate of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why that hymnist I quoted to you just before who said, "I build my hope on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness," went forward and said, "I dare not trust the sweetest frame." Why? Oh, because he knew his own heart, how prone he was on the one hand to deceive himself, but how prone he was on the other hand to lose that sweet frame five minutes later. Five minutes later.

And what happens when we build on those sweet frames, well, then we end up having a religion that is operative, maybe an hour, maybe two hours, maybe five hours in a month. Some people would say even less, maybe a couple of hours in a whole year and for all the rest of the 364 days of the year, it is as if I am just like an unconverted person. That's how far some people go and what are they doing wrong? They are only only trusting on their

feelings, resting on special experiences alone and counting the ordinary daily strengthenings of God's grace and the daily normal resting on the righteousness of Jesus Christ to be of no value. Their salvation, they are basing sometimes ignorantly, sometimes mistakenly, something deceivingly, they are basing introspectively upon themselves internally, subjectively, instead of doing what our baptism form and all the Scripture advises us, we seek for our salvation outside of ourselves on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what happens when we trust our feelings? Well, most of the time, then, indeed we are filled with ups and downs, and of course, many more downs than ups because feelings have a way of not staying steady, and then we experience what that same poet cried out, "Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?" And the only solution, my friends, is the breastplate of righteousness. That's the only sure protection. "I dare not trust the sweetest frame," and he goes on, "but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

True religious feelings are not the ground of our faith, true religious feelings are the fruit of faith in the righteousness of Christ. The fruit of faith. When faith is exercised, feeling will naturally come but we don't make feelings to have faith. That's what the Roman Catholic says, sanctification is the way to justification, feelings are the way to faith. Reformed thinking said no, faith in the righteousness of Christ is the foundation and when faith is then exercised, feeling will be the inevitable fruits of true saving faith.

So my dear friends, the breastplate of righteousness is the security, it is the protection, it is the covering for the vitals, those tender places of the internals of the child of God. His tender organs, his sensitive abdominal cavity, as it were, his tender feelings, his tender emotions, his tender affections, the foundation for those things can only be the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore Paul says in another place, "But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin but ye have obeyed the heart, that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you." There you have the three elements which make up true religion. Ye have obeyed, that is the will. From the heart, that involves the feelings. That form of doctrine which was delivered unto you, that is your mind. Your intellect, your heart, your will, all these are involved in spiritual life.

Paul says we need the breastplate of righteousness for the foundation of doing battle against Satan and let me show you why in a very concrete example. Say Satan comes in the life of the believer, say he comes this very afternoon, and when the believer does not have on the breastplate of righteousness, when he is not consciously settled on the blood of Christ, this is what will happen many times unless the Lord prevents it in a special way. Satan will come and say, "Now if you were really converted, you would have prayed more earnestly this morning for blessing when you came up to God's house. You would have had more hope and more faith. You would have more love for God. You would be more consistent in your Christian walk. You certainly must not be a Christian, a believer, a child of God. If you were a child of God," Satan whispers, "you would have much more of this, much more of that. You would have less of this and less of that. You would hate sin more. You would love God more." But what can the believer say? What

can he say when he's not built on the righteousness of Christ? He has to say, "Satan, you're right on every count."

Let me ask you a question, my friends, has a child of God, a true child of God ever said, "I have enough conviction of sin"? Has a true child of God ever felt, "I have enough love for God"? Has a true child of God ever felt, "My hope is lively enough, my faith is active enough"? You know what the answer is? The more faith a child of God has, the more he feels his unbelief. The more hope he has, the more he feels how little he is hoping in God as he ought to hope. The more love he has, the more loveless he feels. And so, you see, when using grounds on the righteousness of Christ, Satan can then make havoc in his soul, Satan can use him as a sway when he comes and enters into these emotions and even when faith is active, he can say, "But look how unbelieving you are." And so you have to say, "Satan, you're right." And isn't that what Satan did with Martin Luther for so many many years? Year after year all his righteousness he was trying to weave and Satan was coming in saying, "But Martin Luther, have you fasted enough? Have you denied yourself enough?" Read, my friends, in the Banner of Truth where we have attempted to outline what Martin Luther went through as we commemorate this coming Sabbath, the Reformation until the great day gone when Martin Luther received those words, "But the righteousness of God is by faith," and he saw that it was outside of himself and he said, "My soul, as it were, went into the open gates of the heavenly paradise when I saw that it was all by the righteousness of Christ."

If the righteousness of Christ were not the foundation of my life, my friends, I can assure you I would be such a bundle of ups and downs inside that it would be almost impossible to go on. The breastplate of righteousness is the most precious wonderful piece of armor that God has provided because it gives stability. Now that's not saying that God's people still won't have their ups and downs. They do, and especially they do when they don't have the breastplate of righteousness actively on, when it's there but hanging in the closet, when they aren't wearing it, so to speak, then indeed they are filled with ups and downs, but we ought not admire that. And oh, Paul says, have on the breastplate of righteousness, seek stability, he was saying to the concerned believer seek grace to make your calling and election sure in the righteousness of Christ. Seek grace to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. He never says seek grace to grow in unbelief, seek grace to grow in doubt. Seek grace to have on the breastplate of righteousness.

Do you know that sure protection, my dear friend? Do you times and places where every circumstance in your entire life should point to you, that you ought to be spiritually depressed? When your own feelings and your own conditions point to you, you ought to be spiritually depressed? And even at such times perhaps your feelings are not strong toward the Lord and you feel somewhat indifferent, and you feel distraught? But even at such times, do you know what it is to say, "But Lord, I will make mention of thy righteousness even of thine only." The breastplate of righteousness is a bullet-proof vest to save me many piercing wounds from the fiery bullets of the archenemy.

My dear friends, this is David's, we read it to you from Psalm 71. We spoke to the elderly about it just a week or so ago. You recall, my dear elderly friends, that David looked back on his whole life and in that Psalm he says five times, "Thy righteousness, O God." And never does he mention one word about his feelings or emotions in that whole Psalm. Why? Because his foundation is in the righteousness of Christ. David had many feelings, David had many ups and downs but the reason why he was so often up was because he felt the power of the breastplate of righteousness and it is only when the believer has on the breastplate of righteousness that he can say, "Darkness and light are both alike to thee, O Lord." Otherwise, oh, otherwise in darkness it is all dark for him, and in light it is all light. He is either up or he is down. So when the Lord's Supper comes around, if it is a down time, he feels he's uncovered, he can't go. If it is an up time, he feels he's converted and can go. And so he's tossed about like a cork on the waves until he may receive the Spirit's comfort to don the breastplate of righteousness. Then, my friends, he learns much more profound spiritual experiences and he matures much more, and he learns much greater depths, and he learns the great depths of what the Lord said when he says, "Darkness and light are both alike to me."

It's only possible when the breastplate is on, otherwise we can't fight Satan in the dark because he has eyes to pierce the darkness and we can't see through darkness. But with the breastplate on, we are safe and secure even in darkness. When Satan poisons his fiery darts and shoots them at our vitals, challenges our feelings, challenges our [unintelligible], challenges our emotions, challenges how poor we are in all the areas of spiritual life and, oh, how he challenges us. "How little you know of Christ," he says. "How little you know of your own unrighteousness. How little you know of this. How little you know of that." And if the believer didn't have on the righteousness of Christ, he would despair and therefore girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of righteous, this gives not only sure protection but also blessed fruit.

Now we'll sing first from Psalter 387, stanzas 1-4, "To God my earnest voice I raise, to God my voice imploring prays." 387, 1 through 4.

"To God my earnest voice I raise,  
To God my voice imploring prays;  
Before His face my grief I show  
And tell my trouble and my woe.

When gloom and sorrow compass me,  
The path I take is known to Thee,  
And all the toils that foes do lay  
To snare Thy servant in his way.

O Lord, my Saviour, now to Thee,  
Without a hope besides, I flee,  
To Thee, my shelter from the strife,  
My portion in the land of life.



Be Thou my help when troubles throng,  
For I am weak and foes are strong;  
My captive soul from prison bring,  
And thankful praises I will sing."

Everything we have been saying this afternoon we have learned from painful experience. I, too, my friends, have tried with all my power to bring in my own righteousness and to live and to maintain spiritual life out of the ups and downs of my own feelings and emotions. But we have to lose all these things as grounds of salvation and that's painful. That is very very painful. And maybe this afternoon there are beginners in grace here and maybe they've been beginners for many many years, who are still trying to do this, who have never been stripped of their own righteousness, and maybe even when you hear the message this afternoon, you seem to want to reject it, don't you? Because why? Oh, because deep down in your heart you want to build a little bit on your feelings and emotions. You don't want to count it all else but loss and dung that you may win Christ and be found only in him.

Yes, my friends, we are enemies of free, unconditional, one-sided, gospel grace and you can pick up all the oldest and soundest Reformed theologians, the real conservatives, pick them up and read them and they will teach you exactly what I'm teaching you this afternoon based on the word of God, based on the word of God. When a slightly more liberal element came into Reformed thinking, the idea of three covenants arose. Not two, three. The covenant of redemption was severed from the covenant of grace so that the covenant of grace was made between God the Father and the believer instead of between God the Father and Christ who represents the believer. So what's so dangerous about that? Well, the Reverend told us the danger of the three covenant view is that there was a tendency when the believer becomes head of his own covenant with God, that he begins to base his salvation on the ups and downs of his own feelings and his own emotions. That was the liberal view which we condemn, the conservative view which we maintain is the righteousness of Christ alone.

We must be stripped, my friends, and we must wear by grace and only by grace the breastplate of righteousness, and when we wear that breastplate of righteousness by grace, by the comfort of the Holy Spirit, there will be two great fruits. The first fruit will be the one we have been speaking about mostly, the fruit of protection, that is, the direct fruit of the breastplate, it protects. It is a defensive piece of armor. It blunts the edge of the enemy's artillery. And so is it not true, child of God among us, when you are living out of the righteousness of Christ, when you have on the breastplate of righteousness, be it at dark times or in light times, in darkness or in light in your life, when you have the breastplate of righteousness on, even when it is dark and Satan aims his blows, can you not feel that those blows are muted? That they are blunted? That the sharp end of the edge of his arrows are worn away as they pierce the breastplate of righteousness? You may feel something of the force of his blows, you may feel something of the intensity of Satan's devices, you may feel the very bulk and the powers of hell come against you, but you may also feel that wonderful protection that you may say with Martin Luther, "In the name of the righteousness of Christ, though there be as many devils as there are tiles on

the roads from here to Worms, I will go in his strength." Why? He felt the power of the breastplate of righteousness. By that righteousness David could say, "By thee I have run straight through. By my God have I leaped over a wall."

The righteousness of Christ gives a sure protection, and why, my friends? Because the righteousness of Christ meets all the demands of God's justice. And what are those demands? I told you before but I hope to tell you many times because it's the foundation of all true Christian religion. There are two demands: you must obey the law perfectly, you must obey the law perfectly and Christ did that for his people; secondly, you must pay for your sins and the only payment that can pay for the smallest sin is the full payment of death because God hates sin with a holy hatred therefore you must die and only Christ can die for his people. And that's the righteousness of Christ, it's his active obedience to the law and his passive obedience unto death, and in this way God's justice to be satisfied, righteousness brought in and there is a foundation, you see, for the believer when he is adorned with the breastplate of Christ's righteousness that he may take the enemies, the archenemy and may take his arrows and may pick up the very arrows that strike him, and they send those arrows to the throne of God and say, "Lord Jesus, here are Satan's accusations, here are Satan's persecutions, here are Satan's doubts, and so much of what Satan says, dear Lord, is true. There is so much handwriting on the wall against me but, Lord, I leave the arrows with thee and with thy righteousness. I leave all my persecutors with thy safety being. I leave all my sins at thy footstool of mercy. I make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." Protection.

You know what Martin Luther did for so many years? When Satan attacked him, he tried to fight him back in his righteousness but there came a day when he learned the righteousness of Christ. When Satan attacked him, he said in one of his writings, "From that day onward for all the rest of my life when the old demon from hell attacked me, I said to him, 'You old demon, you are coming to the wrong address. You don't belong with me for my Master is my head and he is in heaven, and he has my righteousness in his hand. He is my righteousness. Would you uncover my unrighteousness, you must go to the righteousness of my Master. Would you destroy me, you must go the Lord Jesus Christ and you must destroy him for he is my head, he is my righteousness.'" That is, my friends, a holy making use of the breastplate of righteousness.

Until this very day, the best times in the lives of God's people are those times when they can send Satan to Christ and would to God they had faith to do it more often. "Thy righteousness, even thine only." Oh, too often, my friends, we think that our feelings for God are so strong we can fight Satan but we don't realize how weak we are against the strength of Satan. Now if we arm-wrestle with Satan, we will lose, but when we send Satan to the Master, when we take the arrows and they beat against the breastplate of Christ's righteousness and fall to the ground, then we are still alive. Not we, but Christ in us. They pick up those arrows and send them to Christ and say, "Lord Christ, I am not what I ought to be and Satan is right in so much of what he says but, Lord, art thou not for Christ's sake mindful of our human frailty? Oh, take all our shortcomings and cleanse us from all our sins in thy righteousness."

That's making use of the breastplate of righteousness for defensive protective reasons, but there's a second use, the second and final use of the breastplate of righteousness I would mention to you this afternoon is the positive offensive use of the breastplate of righteousness. Why could David run through [unintelligible], why could Martin Luther go to Worms? Why could they offensively move forward as soldiers in the army of Christ? Because the strength of protection gives a confidence, a Christ-given confidence, a God-given strength to move forward in the midst of great adversity.

Now when we're missing that breastplate of righteousness, we don't have the strength to go forward and that we're hoping to just stand where we are. Why? Because all we have is the strength of our feelings and our emotions. They will not carry us very far. As soon as we enter the front lines of battle, our feelings and our emotions will cave-in. They will feel watery in the very boots, in the very soles of our boots. We will become weak and squirmish when we meet the enemy head-to-head and we will flee from the battle. When we base our lives, when we base our offensive fighting against Satan upon our mere feelings and emotions, I know, my friends, the painful experience. We retreat when we are not clothed with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But when we may be clothed in his righteousness, oh, then the security of his protection will allow us to enter the thick of the battle, then we can say the Lord Christ gives me hands to war and fingers to fight. Then we may lift up the feeble knees, then we will say with David, "I will make mention of thy righteousness, thine only, and therefore I will go forth," he says, "in the strength of the Lord God." In the strength to go forward when we are clothed with the breastplate of the righteousness of Christ.

And that's why, my friends, the Christian life is essentially a victorious life. Yes, God's people have their downs and they have their times of missing, and they have their struggles with unbelief until they enter into glory, but they also have the breastplate of righteousness and when they have come to some spiritual growth, to some spiritual maturity and they be adorned with that breastplate of righteousness, then, my dear friends, that becomes their strength to go forward, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith. Read your Bibles, read our forefathers, and you will see confirmed again and again and again what I'm saying to you, but above all may you know it by true heart experience that true Christian strength comes not from his own righteousness, God forbid, but comes from the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My dear friends, I have often thought to myself that the word "righteousness" is the most important word in the whole Bible because I believe in that word "righteousness," it's a substance of experiential misery, that it must be uncovered from our side, and the word "righteousness" is a substance of experiential deliverance, it uncovers the fullness of Christ, and in the word "righteousness" is the substance of experiential gratitude because it is only in the ongoing way of righteousness in Christ, of sanctification in Christ that the believer continues his spiritual pilgrimage. Were there no breastplate and were that breastplate not hinged together with the girdle of truth, the believer could not stand. Paul says, "Stand therefore having on the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness."

Dear child of God, don't be proud when you are missing the breastplate of righteousness. Don't be proud when you are hugging your doubts and analyzing your fears. But neither be proud of those people who take the breastplate to themselves and it is not given to them by the Holy Spirit, and who wear a breastplate and have no feelings or emotions behind it. Be not proud of them either. But only seek the light of God's saints in Scripture in church history and until this very day who have as their model, like David, "Thy righteousness only. On the basis of that righteousness, to go forward with all my fears, with all my doubts, with all my weaknesses, and all my sins, but to go forward in his strength, in his righteousness, to protect me defensively and to be my courage offensively."

Do you too, my friend, know the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ and having known it, are you seeking grace day-by-day to wear it, to have it on? Oh, how often we place it to one side and we forget that Satan makes his attacks 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The believer is always vulnerable when he does not have on the breastplate of righteousness. May God grant that we may wear it more often, that we may wear it more securely, and that we may wear it in more humility, looking forward to him, denying all our own righteousness, counting it loss and dung, but putting on his righteousness, be found in him. Oh, it's altogether lovely, not only but also altogether strong and altogether the future and the victory of his people. Jesus Christ is the breastplate. He is the Alpha and Omega, that means the A and the Z, the whole alphabet of his people. Only his righteousness counts. May God grant that we too may say, "I will build on a good foundation of experiential Spirit-wrought foundation [unintelligible]. I will go forth in the strength of the Lord God. I will make mention of thy righteousness even of thine only." Amen.

*Gracious God, bless what we have heard and that it may be for the instruction of several of thy children among us who may still be going about perhaps for years and years to establish their own righteousness. Lord, open their eyes just as thou hast opened the eyes of Martin Luther, and let them see that salvation lies wholly in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and grant them grace to put on that breastplate for their protection from Satan's darts, for their stability in the most holy faith, and for their offensive warfare to go forward into the unknown future, not knowing what it holds but knowing that the holder of it shall keep them safe in the palm and in the heart of his righteousness. Lord, bless this word of instruction of many, also for the encouragement by more advanced people who have learned these things experientially but perhaps not understood them fully in their minds, that it may serve this afternoon to revitalize their faith to give them more courage for the future. But Lord, that it may also be useful for the unconverted, that they may see how poor they are when they have no breastplate and are open to the assaults of Satan day and night. Forgive all our many sins. Go with us further in this day. Bring us back into thy house of prayer this evening and that thy word speak to our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name alone. Amen.*