

“Body Armor”  
Pastor John Bronson

(Ephesians 6:10-20)

February 13, 2011

Order of Worship for February 13<sup>th</sup>  
Pre-service Song  
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: (?)

Call to Worship: Zephaniah 3:9-20 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“Come, Now is the Time for Worship”

“I Will Celebrate”

“The Battle Belongs to the Lord”

“Stand Up for Jesus”

Overhead

Song # 66

Song # 732

Song # 730

Offering and Offertory

Special Music:

Message: “Body Armor” (Ephesians 6:10-20)  
by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “How Deep the Father’s Love for us”

Overhead

Parting Word of Grace

Evening Studies in the Word  
Hebrews 5  
5:30 – 7:00 pm in the Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

February 13, 2011

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **The Nelsons, EFCA church planters in the Philippines:** that by the Spirit’s anointing the gospel will dispel the teachings of both traditional Catholicism and Islam, winning many converts to Christianity; that strong church leaders will grow up amongst the Philipinos; that the Lord will protect the Nelsons’ physical, mental and spiritual health
2. **President Obama:** that by the Spirit he will be broken to the purposes of God; that he will be an effective peacemaker in Egypt; that he will listen to wise counsel and effectively prosecute the war against terrorists
3. **Men’s and Women’s Ministries:** that the Spirit will guide the leadership in both for the effective encouragement and service by the men and women of the congregation; that each will draw in and strengthen new attendees and new believers
4. **Military Personnel of the week: E4 Tim Hammonds** (son of Tom and Cindy Hammonds):
5. **College student of the week: Caleb Hammonds at Butte College** (son of Tom and Cindy Hammonds):

Today’s message continues the series in Ephesians 6. It is entitled “Body Armor.” You can probably figure that out just from reading the passage. I am not going to read the passage again today. In order to warm our minds up I thought it would be good to start by reviewing the pieces of weaponry that are entrusted to us by God, as Paul writes it out here in Ephesians 6:10-20. This is, he says, the whole armor of God. We have already dealt a little with the belt of truth. The second is the breastplate of righteousness. That is our focus for today. But we need to be sure we keep them all in focus at the same time, remembering what it is we are dealing with. There are the shoes of the gospel of peace. Beyond that there is the shield of faith. We are also to receive and put on a helmet of salvation. Lastly there is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. This is the whole armor; this is what God entrusts to us, what He gives to us in order that we would be able to stand fast. It is highly significant that he uses that particular word in order to describe the challenge that we face: stand fast. It is my contention, as I have been preaching through this section, that the church is particularly challenged in this time, that we are in fact in grave danger. The danger does not arise from anything new on the part of our enemy; his tactics do not change. The danger arises from us. We are ill prepared.

There is a beautiful example of this on the internet. I read an article: I skim and try to keep current on what is happening. I don’t know how many of you may have noticed this. I think recently, within the last week, thirty three I think it is, retired United Methodist Church bishops got together and they all agreed and are recommending to the denomination that they change their rules as to who is qualified to serve as clergy. They want to change the rules so that practicing homosexuals can now be members of their clergy, bishops and all the rest. I found it highly significant that they said let us change “our rules”. They did not say, we have read the Bible and found that there is a different way of understanding it. They just said, let’s change the rules. Why? To keep current. I said to the elders this morning, that they are indeed going to keep current. They are returning to a form of worship that is as old as human rebellion. It is the worship of Baal. What is that worship? It is the worship of human sexuality. That is what happened at the Golden Calf. After the children of Israel were led by Moses out of Egypt, they escaped through the Red Sea. They travelled through the wilderness, they arrived at Mt. Sinai. They received briefly the Ten Commandments, emphasizing no graven images of anything to represent Me [said the Lord]. Moses went back up on the mountain to have a further conversation with the Boss; he was gone longer than the children were comfortable [with]. They went to Aaron the high priest; they said, make us a god. He did. They called the god – now listen – the name of the god was “Yahweh”, the same name. But what did they do with that god they named Yahweh? They worshipped that god in a manner diametrically opposed to the purposes and character of God. You can call [your] god by any name you want, but if you change the definitions, if you alter the character, if you rewrite the rules, you are no longer worshiping the true God. Your Bible’s probably say that when they were worshiping in front of the calf they had a great feast. Sometimes your Bibles will say they rose up to dance or they rose up to play. You must understand that that rising up to dance and play included sexual behaviors. The heart of man is easily corrupted, and we are in a corrupting age.

Last week we looked at the belt of truth. Perhaps that little comment about the sad direction of what was once one of the great Christian denominations in the world will help us to appreciate why truth is so critically important and not to let it slip away from us. The belt of truth was the first thing that Paul mentioned, and we examined that and we realized that when a man put on a belt in meant that he in fact was getting serious about what he was doing. In this case it was that God’s truth is serious business; we do not take it lightly. Indeed, what we understand is that when it comes to the truth of God we not only need to firmly grasp that truth but we need and want that truth to grasp us, so that we are held in the right place. It is very interesting; four times, if you read this passage, four times over Paul says, this is the objective, this is the goal of the war: stand, stand fast, stand, don’t move, don’t yield, don’t surrender: stand. The only way you can stand is if you know the truth upon which you are standing.

The breastplate of righteousness is the piece of armor that Paul mentions next. It is mostly significant for what it is supposed to protect. As a piece of armor, if you think about it, the breastplate goes over the shoulders, the chest,

the stomach and your back, your torso. That is well and good. It is important for us to appreciate that almost all ancient peoples understood that this portion of the body was the seat of the emotions. We retain something of this in such phrases as “a gut wrenching experience”—I cooked omelets once for my three [older] sons and that was a gut wrenching experience, though perhaps not of that sort! They never asked me to cook again. It was an interesting experience! Also [there is] “lily livered”, a person who is all afraid. If you read some of the older translations of the Bible like the King James Version, you will read something about having the “bowels of mercy”. I don’t suppose that many of us would choose that particular term in order to describe mercy, but they did.

The most significant aspect of this portion of the body in the ancient psychology, the ancient understanding of human beings, is the heart. The heart was understood to be the center of a person’s emotions, desire and will. Out from the heart were understood to come a person’s perceptions, their conscience and their actions. This is what we hear from Jesus about the heart in Matthew 15:16-19. Jesus said this: “...are you still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.” That listing by Jesus is highly significant for our understanding of the importance of this “breastplate of righteousness”. It is important for us to appreciate that the schemes of the devil – remember, he is our enemy and what he uses are schemes – the schemes of the devil are generally or characteristically aimed at our emotions. He wishes to catch us, hold us, turn us, use us. We are very vulnerable in our emotions. Perhaps the most poignant statement of this is found in I John 2:15-16. John warns his readers; he says, look, as you’re walking the life of faith, as you’re moving through the world you need to watch out. I am going to sum it up in three terms. You need to watch out for the love of the world and the things of the world. “*If anyone loves the things of the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.*”

Desire, desire, pride: Those are emotion words. I thought about this, something I have been hooked in: how many of you have been hooked this way? How many of you have seen somebody who had a new car? Did you ever notice what happens? I’ve done the same thing. Here is the car. I get out, close the door. I start to walk away, but I look longingly back, letting my eyes linger! I love my new car: shiny, sleek, low, powerful: I imagine my self as anything I want to be! Pride in possessions: Beloved we never properly estimate the subtlety or the power of the deceiver for entrapping us. How so? Well let me carry this offense one step further. Who of us does not know that there is the closest possible tie between debt and desire? In Romans 13:8 we have an explicit command. There Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says that we are to owe no one anything except to love one another. But beloved, how often does desire drive us to debt? James in James 4:1-2 pinpoints how the issue of desire can penetrate into and actually corrupt our prayers. This is what he says: “*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.*” Ah, but you know we don’t do that. We are far more civilized. We buy on credit. And having bought on credit, the quarrels come later: how are we going to make ends meet? What are our priorities? Who wins the battle of finances?

You know we live in the midst of a nation that does us no good [in this regard]. A number of you have beautiful gray and white hair. You might remember this! Do you remember that once upon a time, long ago, in a distant land, there was a battle in the Federal government between whether or not you would pay for guns or butter? Do we remember that? Are we going to spend our resources on building our armaments and being secure in the world that was filled with dangers, or were we going to concentrate on the kind of social programs that would feed and raise up and cause prosperity amongst our citizens? What are we going to do, and what have we done? Both! As a consequence of having both, where are we now? Trillions of dollars in debt! Trillions! By the way a trillion is incomprehensible to me. This is not an issue that is primarily a concern to me. I will die while [the young people in

this room] are working to pay the debt. By the way, you will also die while your children are still paying the debt. The laws of God do not change to suit our preferences.

The breastplate of righteousness is given to us to protect us against the schemes of the devil which are designed to play upon our emotions. What, therefore, is this righteousness? It becomes now of paramount importance when we realize what it is that the breastplate is supposed to do, what aspects of our character are supposed to be guarded and protected. Now we want to know how, what is it, what is this righteousness that is supposed to be so effective? The Bible talks about two kinds of righteousness and both of them are necessary in order for us to understand. Please turn to Romans 4:3-8. This is the first kind of righteousness. Paul here will be talking about Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. He is the father of the faithful. And this is what scripture says:

*“For what does scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted [reckoned] to him as righteousness.’ Now to the one who works, his wages [his return or reward] are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.’”*

This first kind of righteousness is not the kind of righteousness that one gains by work or achieves by means of self-control or character development. Rather this is the righteousness that is given on the basis of faith. This is righteousness of faith; it is also called justification. When an evangelical Christian says, “I am saved”, they are referring to this kind of righteousness. He means that his life has been put right with God, that he is now no longer under judgment, for Jesus has taken that judgment. He has paid the price, therefore this man says, I am now justified; I am no longer under the judgment of God. This is basic Christian teaching.

Now we might ask this question, and rightly we should: how does this sort of righteousness protect us against the schemes of the devil? This is imputed righteousness. That is its theological name. It works by way of the assurance of salvation. This kind of righteousness sends a powerful message about God’s love for us. Basically it says this: God says, “Sinner, I have saved you. Sinner, I’ve given my life for you. Sinner, my blood has paid the full price for your salvation: trust me; you do not need to be afraid. It is well.” What is the effect of keeping that message clearly in front of my mind and my heart? What it says is that our standing with God is not as a result of our works, or of the sum of our good deeds weighed against the ones we regret, or the relative degree of our character development and personal excellence. That is not the basis of my standing before God. The basis of my standing before God is the result of God’s love for me in Christ, and my faith in the sufficiency of what Christ has done. What we are told is that when we place our faith in Christ, we receive His robe of righteousness, which wraps around us.

Now, when we are under attack, when we feel that we are being hammered, twisted, turned, tossed, destabilized, when we feel that we are being separated from others, set into hostility and in antagonism toward others, when areas of common understanding begin to disintegrate, when those whom we thought were our friends, respected and esteemed, suddenly turn cold towards us – well you can make up a list as well as I can, surely, based upon your personal experience. What do we do? We remember, the single most important thing about me is that I am saved. The single most important thing about me is that God has made Himself known to me, has come to me and His presence is with me, and that He has promised that His power and His wisdom are available to me. So though I may feel that I am robbed of all those things which sustained me in the world, yet nevertheless I am not poor, and I am not weak, and I am not without resources because I am with my God. That is true even if I have fallen and sinned! That is true even if and when the evil one comes hammering at me saying, “You are a loser and a sinner.” I will say, “You’re right. But I am a sinner loved by God and my sins have been washed away and my guilt is removed and I stand in the circle of His acceptance and I am approved by the Beloved and I am numbered amongst those who will stand in the circle of the Almighty and will sing Jesus’ praises forever. That is who I am, because God has made me His own.”

By grace we are covered with the protective armor of Christ’s righteousness. God does not see my corruption, weakness and failure. What He sees is the sufficiency of His Son’s death on my account. These things are ours by faith, and they are ours because God first loved us. This is the foundation from which we must never move, for this is our strength.

Remember, the devil’s one great strategy is deception. One way or another he is always trying to get us to believe that we are essentially on our own, that we have to make our own way, that God is either not needed – “I am very fine on my own, thank you; I will handle this situation” Did anybody here do this, this past week? “I will take care of this by myself!” Or [to get us to believe] that God is not really for us: “If I talk about [this], if I go to God and pray about this, I know exactly what God is going to say. God is going to say, No! And because I know that God is going to say no, because God doesn’t like me very much, I am not going to pray.” Somebody is whispering in your ear. He is whispering a lie!

Against any and all of these promptings and insinuation we put the breastplate of Christ’s righteousness behind which are hidden all the weakness and desires with which we struggle. This is why James writes those peculiar verses in his first chapter. He says this: *“Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation and let the rich in his humiliation. . .”* The lowly man rejoices that by grace his lifted above [his circumstances, and the rich man escapes] the snare of pride and vanity of boasting because he knows he has been saved by grace alone, and there is no other salvation. This is the imputed, the freely given righteousness of God.

This is so fundamental; because unless this comes first there is no righteousness at all in us. That is the message that Jesus taught in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. This is one of the best known parables. Usually we go to that parable in order to get a clear view of the danger of self-righteousness, and rightly we do. But I think when we turn to Luke 18:9-14a, we should pay attention to the tax collector. Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves- you don’t need God, you can do all right on your own – that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. Now Jesus’ words: *‘Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: “God, I thank You that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.”* Now let’s just pause a moment. The Pharisee is a very admirable man. If the reality is that he is able to avoid all of those sins, he is a man of remarkable character. His problem is not his character. His problem is his lack of faith. *“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”* Rightly, as I said, this parable is understood against self-righteousness, but equally in view is the fate of the tax collector. The tax collector was not justified because he humbled himself, as if humility was somehow some magnificently meritorious action, that if I could bend myself low and make myself miserable and be a little heap of unhappiness quivering on the ground that God would say, “Wow, that’s really cool! What an impressive person that is. Look how humble they are!” No, the tax collector is forgiven because he puts his trust in God. That is why he was forgiven. He directs his prayer to the only place there is any hope. That is why he was forgiven, or as Jesus says, he was justified.

The breastplate of righteousness is my faith in the righteousness of Jesus wrapped around me, protecting me from the attacks of the devil. But what of the second kind of righteousness? Here turn to Romans 6:15-19. This is one of many places. I emphasize that again: this is one of many places where the second of righteousness is laid out in front of us. What does Paul here say to these good Romans to whom he has already written about the first kind of righteousness? He says:

*“What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either*

*of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking inhuman terms, because of your natural limitation. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

This is very different! This righteousness is a command and a choice. Now you look at that, at those words, if you are like me you ask, “Can I, can I do that? Can I maintain that kind of walk, that kind of focus of mind?” By faith in Jesus we have received Jesus’ own righteousness as a gift. So in the eyes of God we are righteous. But in the thoughts and intentions of our hearts and in the deeds of our bodies and the words of our mouths we are still trapped in the habits of sin.

Paul answers this – this is a dilemma, and he presents it precisely in that manner so that we would go, “What?” So turn now to Romans 8:3-11. This is the answer. What you want to do as work through these verses is to pay very close attention to the Spirit of God: what does [Paul] say about the Spirit? The passage breaks into three sections. The first section is verses 3-4. Here Paul speaks of what God did through His Son on the cross, from which we gain our imputed righteousness: *“For God has done what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”* That is the first. Jesus has fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law for us.

However, to receive what Jesus has done we must – here is the end of v. 4 – not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. That brings us to the second section, verses 5-8. In this section we hear the choice: will we walk according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. Paul tells us that flesh-centered thoughts are death, Spirit centered thoughts are life. This is what he says: *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”* Notice in particular in v. 7 to be flesh centered in our thinking is to be hostile to God, because such thinking cannot submit to God’s law. When in the fourth verse, if you go back and look, Paul said that God’s Son met the requirement of the law what he was referring to was paying the penalty demanded by the law for its being broken. Meanwhile the law itself, its requirement, its expectations, is the will and wisdom of God. That is what Paul said in Romans 7:12. What does it say? *“...the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”* Well this is puzzling, for we all know full well that we cannot perform, we cannot keep the law. The truth of the matter is that to be forgiven is not to be empowered. Millions of Christians have been told, “Your sins are forgiven; you are free!” And they think, “Wahoo! That’s it!” And they fall back into sin. Why? Because nobody told them, “To be forgiven is not yet to be empowered.”

That brings us to the third section, verses 9-11. Here we read that those who place their faith in Jesus as the one who removes the offense of their sin before God not only receive forgiveness and the righteousness of Christ in the eyes of the Father, but we also receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the key, the essential requirement for each of us. This is what [Paul] says: *“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in us.”* Do you see that eleventh verse? Dead bodies, bodies still separated from a holy God because of sin, receive life through the Holy Spirit, so that I, in this dead body, can do righteous things, not by my power, not by my wisdom, but by that which is given through the Holy Spirit. This is

what enables us to walk in faith. This is what enables us to listen to God and to obey Him, to stand up again every time we fall. This is what enables us to love righteousness and truth more than we love self, comfort and pleasure. This is what enables us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and to love God above all other things. When in 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul writes, *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation,”* he is referring to the same truth, for it is the Spirit of God who makes of us new creations. The Spirit of God takes the truth of God and applies it to our minds and our hearts and we are transformed. As Paul wrote to the Romans in Romans 12:2, *“We are not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds, that by testing we may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* This is the second kind of righteousness. This is imparted righteousness. We are transformed by the truth and power of God. God works by faith in us. He redeems our desires; He renews our minds; and He changes our wills. That is the intention of God

We put on the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness as protective armor so that we can stand against the schemes of the devil. This, Paul says, is serious business. We need to know the truth and we need protection. The first line of protection is the grace of God by which we are saved with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We look to Him and not to ourselves first of all. But the second line of defense is our reliance on the Spirit of God who refreshes and renews and redirects us day by day in the choices that we make, that we might love God and our neighbor and live lives ordered by God’s Word. In both cases Paul says, if you read the verses, “having put on”. Now here’s the question: Day by day are we standing against the devil? Or, are we leaving ourselves exposed by neglecting the armor of God?

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, teach us the wisdom for not neglecting the riches of Your grace. Grant that we, O Lord, might draw close to you, that we might fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and that we might live in daily dependence on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In these ways we will walk safely through a dangerous world. We pray, Father, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. As a general rule do you feel confident in your faith, and upon what do you base your confidence? Would you say you have consistently stood fast in your witness for Christ?
2. Do your desires and emotions match up well with your convictions regarding the truth of God? That is, is what you want and the way you spontaneously react to situations and people in agreement with what Scripture says they should be?
3. To your knowledge, has the devil ever “played” with your emotions?
4. Do you find it easy or difficult to turn your thoughts to Jesus when you face trials and temptations? When is it easiest for you to “turn to Jesus”?
5. Why does imputed righteousness – a gift through faith – necessarily come first in our lives?
6. Are you often aware of the presence of the Spirit in your life? What have you done, or what might one do to be more aware of the Spirit? Why is this important?
7. Why is forgiveness not enough for us to live righteous lives of obedience to God?
8. What in your life have you learned to be “good and acceptable and perfect”?
9. Do you generally enter the day “well dressed” in the armor of God? What might you do to improve your dress code?