

## Ephesians #03: Ephesians 6:14b

*Ephesians*

By Dr. Joel Beeke

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 6:14b  
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**Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary**  
200 E. Main St  
Taylors, SC 29687

**Website:** [www.gpts.edu](http://www.gpts.edu)  
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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 considered on the first occasion the need to be fully armed due to the seriousness, the power and the goals of the archenemy Satan and his forces. Last time we have considered the foundation piece of the Christian's armor, the girdle of truth. And now the apostle attaches to this girdle of truth the breastplate of righteousness. We need, in other words, he says not only to be girt about with truth but hinged 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 the 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 [unintelligible] peoples 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 spoken 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 or the home of the affections, the feelings, the very heart of man.

Now Paul uses this biblical view of psychology to teach important spiritual lessons. Believers, he says, 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 the 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.

Well, what is exactly that righteousness, then, which Paul is describing? Well, 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 other 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 [unintelligible] tribe in that time, "I was an 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 that 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 in a fleshly way, I turn inside out and when it is exposed in its internals, I see that it is but dung, but garbage," he says literally. So he says to the Philippians, now 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 counted 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 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."

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 and 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 be worn, may always be on him, that it may never hang empty in the closet. We fight, says Paul, having on the breastplate of righteousness. Now 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 pour out their hearts in earnest tearful prayers to God, but in all these things they have found dirt in their tears, 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 work to make him partaker 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, only 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 feeling? 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 man. True religion can be so profound sometimes that it carries the believer beyond tears, clothed in sorrow for sin and an unspeakable holy amazement of joy for deliverance. True religion is something more than notion, it is something truly felt, but, but the true feelings in religion do not become the foundation 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 who can tell drop 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." And 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 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 the growth and grace.

There are many people today who despise the infant 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 when there are 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. It was the Reformers who said the true believers have to see 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 it was 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. The Roman Catholics said there is only one grounds of assurance of faith and that is to 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 Five 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 great 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 and a verse was sweet and 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 the 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, sometimes 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. Certainly 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 would say 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 and 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 know 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 step, let me 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 coldness, 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. Stand therefore girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of righteous, this gives not only sure protection but also blessed fruit.