

The Armour of God: The Breastplate

Trinity CRC, Edmonton, March 20, 2022, AM
Lent Series 2022 Armour of God: Part 2

Ephesians 6:14b
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Bible Reading:

Eph 4:22-24 ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Eph 5:8-10 ⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord.

The Armor of God

Eph 6:13-14 ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with **the breastplate of righteousness in place**

This is the Word of the Lord...

Beloved people of God,

Last week we had Daryl here dressed in his firefighter equipment. And we saw that it served primarily to protect him. A firefighter puts on his armour so that he will be safe when he enters into a fire zone. But his protective equipment—while it keeps him safe—is given so that he can serve others. The same is true for a police officer. The police strap on a bullet proof vest which protects them. But they only need that protection because they are going into potentially dangerous situations in order to help others. The police and firefighters don't need to wear their equipment when they are relaxing at home. They wear it when they are out serving the community.

Back in the 1970s, someone wrote a book called *Against the World, For the World*. And that sort of encapsulates where the heart of the Apostle Paul is as he writes the letter to the Ephesian Church. This last part of the letter about the armour of God highlights this passion. The church is never against the world for our own sake. It's only against the world or both the forces of evil in this realm and beyond for the sake of the world. In other words, the armour we're called to wear is to protect us from evil for the sake of serving the world. That's the same reason the Roman army put on their armour. It's for the protection of soldiers as they go out to serve their country.

Now keep that in mind as we think about putting on the second piece of the armour of God we read about in Ephesians 6:14. Stand firm... with the breastplate of righteousness in place. The Apostle Paul's encouragement here is intended to help us be a stronger witness for Christ in a world that so often promotes a life that is contrary to the desires of God. So we "armour up" in order to stand strong on God's truth while bearing witness to the power and love of Jesus—for the sake of others. Whatever we do is for the sake of others. We long for others to join us in the family of God, enjoying his comfort and grace in its various forms.

So this armour of God is not simply about protecting us. It's about serving others.

The Breastplate

For firefighters, the breastplate is their coat. Here I have a breastplate for a floor hockey goalie that I dug out of our gym storage room. This piece of protection will keep you from getting hurt when balls or pucks get shot at you from your opponents. If someone tosses you one of these orange balls, you can catch it quite easily and it won't hurt you. But if I fire it at you with a slapshot from a hockey stick, that'll hurt if it hits your body. So this shoulder, chest and arm padding is like armour for a goalie.

For a police officer, the breastplate is a Kevlar vest that stop bullets from entering the chest. That's pretty amazing! Like the Kevlar vest, a breastplate for a Roman soldier protects the vital organs. A spear or sword into the heart or stomach would most often be a death sentence. So, the breastplate offered a level of lifesaving protection from the enemy to help you stand firm in battle as you sought to serve your king.

A typical Roman soldier wore a breastplate. The earliest ones were often made of several layers of leather. Eventually that turned into something made of metal which would have been much stronger and safer than leather. Then still later breastplates were made of chain mail, little loops of metal all made into a coat. This was lighter and more flexible. Whatever the breastplate was made from, its purpose was to cover the soldiers' vital organs, namely, the heart and stomach.

When we read in the Bible about a breastplate of righteousness, we need to ask ourselves what is it protecting us from? What does God have in mind when he tells us put on the breastplate of righteousness?

Protecting Our Heart with His Righteousness

For a Christian, the breastplate of righteousness is also designed to protect our heart. The heart is the centre of our being. It's the core of our being. Proverbs 4:23 calls it the wellspring of our life, meaning that everything we do flows from how we view ourselves. Like our physical heart which pumps our blood to keep us alive, so our spiritual heart or our soul is our lifeline to living well as a Christian so that we can best serve God and others in our world.

We must understand that the breastplate which protects our heart is attached to the belt of truth. The bottom of the breastplate was fitted with loops or buckles that attached it to belt. I'm not entirely sure how it worked but those who know better say that if the belt came loose, the breastplate slipped right off. It's only as good as the truth which we know and trust from God. Last week we saw that the truth is, first of all, Jesus Himself, and, secondly, the truth of the Bible that teaches us how to live as Jesus empowers us to live.

There are a lot of truths in the Bible that are intended to strengthen us as Christians. But Satan, our world and our own brokenness from sin attack our heart. They try to accuse us, dismiss us, lie to us, and ultimately keep us from enjoying our new life in Christ.

So the breastplate of righteousness makes us stronger soldiers in the Lord's army. How? By ensuring us that our righteousness is in Christ. You see, Satan the Accuser and Deceiver will always try to shake our confidence in Christ. He can't ultimately take away our salvation, but he'll try to make us think we aren't worthy of salvation. He'll try to get us to believe that Jesus' work on the cross isn't sufficient for our sin. We're still left unrighteous, sinful, unworthy and even disgusting in the eyes of God and others. The righteousness of Christ might be available to some people, but not to you! If Satan can get us to believe such lies, then we'll be of little use in the service of the Lord because can't serve fully and freely without having the comfort that comes from Christ's righteousness.

Well, dear friends, such comfort-stealing lies need to be put to death in our life. When you feel unworthy, when your mind tells you that your sin is too big or you've committed some sort of unpardonable sin or whatever it is that you hear or believe about your unworthiness, listen to what God says. People drink themselves to sleep because their heart is damaged by lies of their unworthiness. They cut themselves because they hate the pain of how they view themselves or of what others have said or done to them. They sometimes even commit suicide because they simply hate themselves. Their heart is deeply broken.

Paul practically screams the truth in this letter that salvation in Jesus is by grace. We need to defend our heart from all sorts of hurtful lies that we believe about God, about ourselves or about others. In chapter 2 Paul declares,
Eph 2:4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.
⁸ and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

The righteousness of Christ—imputed to you, gifted to you—makes you righteous. It's not your good deeds that save you. It's not your sin that excludes you. The lies you believe about yourself are not true. The things people might say about you don't make you unredeemable. It's God's grace through Jesus that guarantees our place in the family of God. So hold that truth up. Your righteousness is in Christ. Get behind him. That's the truth that must deflect the lies of Satan, attacking your heart to take away your confidence in Christ. Nothing can

separate us from Christ! So the breastplate of righteousness defends our heart from attacks that keep us from living in the comfort of belong to God through Jesus' work for us. He is our righteousness.

It's interesting to me that the breastplate of righteousness has some parallels with the breastpiece that made up part of the clothing of the Old Testaments high priest. In Exodus 28, the priest is instructed to wear a breastpiece that is tied to the shoulder and to the waistband just as the belt of truth supports the breastplate of righteousness. The breastpiece of the priest has 12 precious stones on it representing the 12 tribes of Israel—all God's children. Its purpose is to cover the heart of the high priest from distraction so that he can get direction from God that will serve the people well.

When we come to the New Testament, the book of Hebrews devotes several chapters to showing how Jesus is our ultimate high priest and his role is to connect us to God. So, again, we need to hold to this truth that Jesus is our righteousness. Nothing else. He binds us to God. He ensures us of God's grace for us. He protects our hearts from deception and lies and accusation that Satan devises to rob us of our strength. He strengthens our heart for more effectiveness as part of the army of God in this world. When we don't confidently rest in Jesus as our righteousness, then we won't be courageous soldiers who faithfully serve our world as Jesus served us.

Empower Us to Live Righteous Lives

So, dear friends, Christ's righteousness protects our hearts from the lies of Satan. And in doing so, he empowers us to live a righteous life.

Paul has hammered this truth home earlier in this letter. We read from chapters 4 and 5 where Paul calls the church

4:22 to put off your old self

4:24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

And in the next chapter he again says,

Eph 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)...

He's saying that our imputed righteousness in Christ makes us new people who now can live righteous and holy lives, lives of light in a world of darkness, lives that model righteousness which pleases God, lives that show the life-changing power of Jesus in us.

This power is ours through Jesus. He died and rose from the dead to deliver us from sin, darkness of heart and soul, from misdirected love of self as well as from self-hate. In his victory over sin, Satan and hell, we receive power and grace to live a new life that honours God as it shines with his righteousness in us.

We need to get out of bed each morning and tell ourselves, “I’m recreated in Christ to live a righteous and holy life. I’m not here to live for myself. I’m here to represent Jesus in how I live. I’m here to help others enjoy the strength of heart that I enjoy because I know what Jesus has done for me. I’m covered in his righteousness, protected from Satan’s deceptions, and empowered to do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Living into the righteousness that Jesus won for us involves putting away our own sin, said Paul, and seeking to live righteously. It’s standing firm on Jesus, knowing that He is our life and living for him is always worth it, regardless of the cost. Just think of a soldier who goes into battle to represent the king and his kingdom.

I was reading about a young lady names Leah. She grew up in North Carolina and all of her life she dreamed of becoming a basketball player for the University of North Carolina—UNC. When finishing high school, she couldn’t get into UNC. But then just a few weeks before starting school at a different university, a UNC coach who’d seen her play at a basketball camp, called her and offered her a full scholarship to UNC. “It was a dream come true,” said Leah. “It was amazing.”

The article states, “For two years, it was amazing. Leah worked hard, acing her classes and improving her game. Her faith (in Jesus) set her apart, but she was shielded from some of the secular pressures of her team and university by her Christian coach...” until that coach resigned at the end of her second year. “The environment (on the team) shifted under a new head coach. At the end of her junior year (her third year), Leah walked away from the team.”

When asked how she knew it was time to quit, how she handled the disappointment, and how God has provided for her since, Leah responded:

It was so hard.

When you get to play in Carmichael Arena—where the UNC women’s team plays—you’re on the court where Michael Jordan played when he was at UNC. When I got to step onto the court, it was everything I’d ever dreamed of.

The first month or two with the new coaching staff were fine, but as time went on things became more difficult. I started seeing that there were expectations for me to participate in the party lifestyle and condone things that didn’t line up with my biblical beliefs. I choose not to drink, and I’m choosing to save myself for marriage. I said no to a lot of things, which made team bonding challenging.

There was only one other Christian girl on the team, and she quit when the new coaching staff came on.

It was super lonely. I felt like sometimes I was singled out for my beliefs, which led to degradation. Midway through junior year, I started thinking, *I'm going to have to get out of this. I am miserable.* It absolutely killed me when basketball started no longer being fun or enjoyable—it was crushing.

My mom would tell me, “Light and darkness don’t mix. It’s not you they dislike, but Christ in you.” I knew that, but it didn’t make it any easier.

When the coach came out with the list of causes the team would be supporting, I knew I wasn’t going to be able to compromise and go against biblical principles. I decided, in light of eternity, that basketball wasn’t worth it.

...I tried to be a witness at UNC where I could. I tried to live my life honoring God. I know there is always a purpose wherever we are placed...

...I kept coming back to James 1:12 (“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial”) and Jeremiah 29:11 (“For I know the plans I have for you”). You may think in the moment, *Why am I giving up my senior season?* But if you really trust (God’s) sovereignty and plans, you have to go to the end of the verse, where it says his plans are to give you hope and a future. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/college-basketball/>

I don’t know that Leah would have thought of this as a way of putting on the breastplate of righteousness. But that’s essentially what she was doing. She understood who she was in Christ. A righteous child of God, fully saved and loved by God. She faced the taunts of the enemy—in the person of a new coach and teammates—that made her feel unworthy. But she remembered that her righteousness is from Christ. And with that, she maintained her desire to live out the righteousness of Christ in her daily life. It was a huge sacrifice, giving up on her lifelong dream. Nonetheless, she knew it was necessary to let the light of Christ in her shine through. That could not happen if she caved and went along with the immorality promoted by her team.

Leah chose to put on the breastplate of righteousness through her life decisions so that the light of Christ might shine in her corner of the world. It’s not as severe as Paul going to prison for the sake of Jesus but it’s another example of how we all must make choices each day that put on righteousness or let it pass.

Leah says she leaned on her parents for support. That reminds us as a church that together we are called to put on the armour. Therefore we must be helping one another live into the righteous life of Jesus. Teach our kids to put on the armour and help them to discern lies and false accusations in a world that is pulling us in the opposite direction. The social media pressures a lot of youth are under today send them all sorts of messages of unworthiness or finding your worth in things that dishonour God. The body of Christ must come alongside of one another just as soldiers work in groups. Leah said,

The biggest thing is to be grounded in your faith before you go (into the world). It helps to purpose in your heart that you'll be willing to stand when the going gets tough, because pressures are going to come.

Before you go in, decide what matters, which is the Word and your witness.

May the Lord help us all to put on the breastplate of Christ's righteousness which alone will help us live righteous lives to the glory of God and as a light in the world.