

Christians in Spiritual Warfare

Course: The Armour of God

Lesson 6

Lesson Title: The Breastplate of righteousness

Text: Ephesians 6:14

Theme: Trusting in the righteousness of Christ alone.



Introduction:

Details concerning the Breastplate:

- ‘The cuirass of the Roman soldier was made of overlapping bands of metal which are fastened down the front. There are shoulder pieces of similar construction and straps are brought over from the back to hold the armour in place. Underneath is a belt of leather or metal-plated strips.’ British Museum Guide (‘The Whole Armour of God’ by P N Corry, 1931)
- A Coat of Mail – (Gr. Thorax) meaning a cuirass or corselet comprising both breastplate and back pieces fastened together.
- Consisted of two parts, protecting the body on both sides from the neck to the middle.
- Leather coat with iron plates sewn on with wire
- Comfortable to wear

Two sides of the breastplate, '...the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left' 2 Corinthians 6:7.

- The two kinds of righteousness: imputed righteousness (Justification); and imparted righteousness (Sanctification).

Imputed righteousness is the righteousness of Christ that is credited to us by faith in His death and resurrection on our behalf.

Imparted righteousness is the righteousness of Christ working in us on a day by day basis.

- The Breastplate of righteousness covers the heart and bodily organs. It reminds us that righteousness is not just 'what we do' but it is 'who we are'. Righteousness deals with the heart. In the Old Testament the Lord cried for His people 'O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!' (Deuteronomy 5:29). The Lord knew that the law couldn't bring righteousness because a set of rules can't change the heart.

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus came so that we can have a 'new heart' upon which the Lord has written His law. Hebrews 10:16 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them'.

Biblical Psychology - our affections must be 'set on things above'.

'If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory.' Colossians 3:1-4.

It is not trying... It is being a new creation.

Because we are risen with Christ – a new creation

Set the thoughts and desires on God's kingdom (righteousness; peace and joy in the Holy Spirit).

Introductory Story: Only the righteousness of Christ can justify the sinner. Titus 3:5, 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;'

Testimony of Martin Luther concerning 'the righteousness of God'.

Luther's discovery of salvation came through understanding the meaning of the 'righteousness of God'.

Initially Luther associated this phrase with the wrath of God towards sin and the sinner, but through his studies of the scriptures he came to see that the righteousness of God was imputed to the sinner through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Luther's Own Account of his Monastic Life

I was indeed a good monk and kept the rules of my order so strictly that I can say: if ever a monk got to heaven through monasticism, I should have been that man. All my brothers in the monastery who know me will testify to this. I would have become a martyr through fasting, prayer, reading and other good works had I remained a monk very much longer.

Luther's 'Breakthrough' from the 'Autobiographical Fragment', March 1545

I began to understand that the righteousness of God is the righteousness in which a just man lives by the gift of God, in other words by faith, and that what Paul means is this: the righteousness of God, revealed in the Gospel, is passive, in other words that by which the merciful God justifies us through faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'

At this I felt myself straightway born afresh and to have entered through the open gates into paradise itself. There and then the whole face of scripture was changed; I ran through the scriptures as memory served, and collected the same analogy in other words, for example *opus Dei*, that which God works in us; *virtus Dei*, that by which God makes us strong; *sapientia Dei*, that by which He makes us wise.

And now, in the same degree as I had formerly hated the word 'righteousness of God', even so did I begin to love and extol it as the sweetest word of all; thus was this place in St. Paul to me the very gate of paradise.... In the strengthened armour of such thoughts I began my second interpretation of the Psalms....

Main Points:

1. Righteousness outside of Christ is valueless

Clothed in our righteousness is to be clothed in filthy rags

Good deeds are highly praised by the world.

Why does God consider them filthy rags?

Self is enthroned on good works

Motives – gratifying selfish desires

Our own righteousness will not stand, Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 23:6.

Our own goodness or righteousness will not withstand the attacks of the enemy. Isaiah 64:6 ‘all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags’.

Paul considered the righteousness of the law as rubbish

Paul held his righteousness to be of no value, Philippians 3:6-9.

Paul’s testimony. Philippians 3:6-7 ‘Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.’

Paul had previously associated his righteousness with the Pharisaic standard of keeping the law.

When he had assessed righteousness by how well he kept the Jewish religion he thought he was blameless.

This righteousness is highly valued by religion.

But it is worthless.

Because the law condemns the thoughts as well as the outward actions.

Jesus revealed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

Jesus revealed the sinful nature of ‘adultery in the heart’.

The breastplate of righteousness is the righteousness of Christ.

It has nothing to do with self righteousness.

Only the righteousness of Christ is sufficient. Philippians 3:8-9 ‘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’.

2. The righteousness of Christ our justification, 2 Corinthians 5:21.

- Justification is a legal declaration
- It means to be declared righteous

We are declared to be righteous through faith in Christ alone - Justification.

We stand firm in Christ’s imputed righteousness.

- Righteousness for justification is through imputed righteousness. Romans 3:28, ‘Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.’
- Justification means being declared righteous, Ephesians 2:8-9. Justification is when God declares the sinner righteous on the basis of the atoning blood of Christ. The righteousness of Christ is credited to our account and has nothing to do with our own works. Romans 4:3 ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.’

Story: The Court

The picture is of a courtroom where the prisoner is on trial.

The evidence shows that the person is guilty.

The defence council agrees.

The sentence is death.

The defence council says the death sentence has been carried out already.

The condemned person has been executed. The accused was crucified with Christ.

The person who now stands before the court is not the same person.

He or she is a new creation raised in newness of life. 2 Corinthians 5:17

The person is justified in Christ. Romans 5:1

Church History

John Wesley's conversion (trusting Christ alone)

John Wesley Journal

May 24, 1738.

'I think it was about five this morning that I opened my Testament on the words : "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that you should be partakers of the Divine nature. . ." Just as I went out, I opened it again on these words : " You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

'In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation ; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. I then testified openly to all there what I now felt in my heart.'

Story: What does justification mean?

A prisoner who has served his sentence still has a record.

The sentence cannot make a guilty man innocent.

The person will always be guilty.

A person justified is a person found innocent.

No matter how long a person pays for doing wrong it cannot change the fact he or she did it.

A Christian is a person who has trusted in the death and resurrection of Christ.

I am no longer condemned because I have been crucified with Christ through faith and raised a new creation.

Justification can only happen by becoming a new creation in Christ.

3. The righteousness of Christ our sanctification, Ephesians 4:24.

We are seen to be righteous by the process of Sanctification.

We stand firm in Christ's imparted righteousness and walk in the Spirit.

- Sanctification is the process of being changed into the likeness of Jesus on a day by day basis, 2 Corinthians 3:18. Growing as a Christian means to become like Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit

should be seen more and more in our lives. It is becoming like Christ by walking in the Spirit, Galatians 5:25. Colossians 3:10 ‘And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.’

- Sanctification is the life of Christ working in the believer. We are to walk in newness of life by putting on the new man. This means putting on the resurrected life of Christ. It is the same message in John 15 in which describes Himself as a vine and his disciple the branches. We are righteous because Christ is our life, Colossians 3:4.

NEW LIFE

The picture is new life

The life of Christ in the believer.

Process – producing the fruit of righteousness.

John 15:1 'I am the vine

You are the branches'

The fruit of righteousness is produced by cultivating the life of Christ in the believer.

The life of Christ in us should produce the fruit of holiness, prayer and a desire to know the scriptures. A close relationship with Jesus will produce a life where His love is able to reach out through us.

4. The righteousness of Christ is our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27)

The righteousness of Christ our glorification, Romans 8:30.

Stand firm and always ready knowing that our redemption will be complete when Jesus comes again.

We will be changed into the likeness of Jesus, 1 John 3:1-3.

Glorification is the completed work when true believers will be changed into His likeness.

Colossians 3:4, ‘When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory’.

Romans 8:11, ‘If the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in us then He will also change this mortal body into a glorious body made in His likeness,’

The righteous will be seen to be the Lord’s, Malachi 3:16-18.

The day of the Lord’s coming will be a wonderful day for those who are walking in ‘newness of life’ when He comes.

Matthew 25:1-13 ‘The parable of the ten virgins’.

Only half had oil in their lamps.

The people need to be ready for His coming.

Jesus is coming soon.

‘Lift up your heads, your redemption draws nigh’, Luke 21:28.

The world is filled with problems – economic, terrorists, disasters, and many sorrows but the Christian can rejoice because the Lord is coming soon.

Summary:

We must put on the righteousness of Christ as a breastplate

1. Our own righteousness has no value. It is His righteousness alone.
2. God declares a sinner righteous as the imputed righteousness of Christ justifies the unrighteous. The condemned sinner is justified by faith - crucified with Christ and raised in newness of life.
3. The imparted righteousness of Christ is the life of Christ in the believer. The healthy Christian is being changed into the likeness of Jesus on a day by day basis. The righteousness of Christ our sanctification.
4. The righteousness of Christ our hope of glory. When Jesus comes we shall be changed into His likeness.

We are saved by His imputed righteousness.

We are being changed by His imparted righteousness working in us.

Until the day when we will physically be changed into His likeness.