

# The Breastplate of Righteousness

## Ephesians 6: 10-14b

**10** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. **14** Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness

In our last study, we observed the necessity of putting on the Belt of Truth. Without our commitment to the absolute truth of the Scriptures, there is no truth of which we can be sure and which we can defend. Paul, however, in verse 14b, shows that mere doctrinal commitments are not sufficient to defend us against the wiles of the evil one. We must also have an experience of truth in our practical lives. Paul is interested in explaining how we can be defended against three major schemes of Satan: 1) his accusations 2) his allurements and 3) his deceptions. Paul then shows how the breastplate of righteousness protects us against all of these wily schemes.

We note that in the Roman world, the soldier would put on the breastplate that would extend from his neck down to his belt line, covering his vital organs. Paul is saying there is a breastplate we must use in order to cover vital aspects of our spiritual lives. This breastplate is a breastplate of righteousness. The words “righteous” and “righteousness” occur more than 550 times in the Bible, showing us that it is obviously a very important concept in God’s Word. Righteousness simply means “conformity to rule/law,” especially with regard to relationships. God Himself is righteous because He always acts in conformity to His own Word and He faithfully maintains His relationship with His people. If we are righteous, we too abide by God’s Word and seek health in all of our relationships, especially with Him. This righteousness becomes our breastplate.

### **I. We have a breastplate against the accusations of the Devil.**

One of the Devil’s favorite techniques is to condemn or accuse us, and he has plenty to work with! But Paul explains how we have a breastplate of *legal* righteousness that comes not from our own religious performance, but rather from Christ Himself; that is, our legal righteousness is an alien, imputed righteousness. This issue of righteousness has divided the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches for 500 years. The Roman Catholic church teaches that the righteousness that justifies us before God is based on the *infusion* of Christ’s righteousness in our lives; Protestants believe in infused righteousness (we call it sanctification) but we believe the righteousness that justifies us before God is the *perfect* righteousness imputed (reckoned) to us by mere faith in Jesus Christ. We, therefore, have a perfect record before God, and impenetrable standing that Satan’s accusations can never disturb. Without this breastplate of legal righteousness, we stand condemned. Look at Paul’s testimony in Philippians 3 in which he says considers all his religious attainments as rubbish compared to the joy of knowing the real, full, complete righteousness of Christ imputed to him.

### **II. We have a breastplate against the allurements of the Devil.**

The Devil seeks to tempt us with partial truths and seductive opportunities by making us think that certain behaviors will be delectable and enjoyable. We find out later that his offerings are destructive and bitter to the taste. This is why we must walk in practical righteousness. This is probably the main point the Apostle Paul is here making. Our righteousness is not only a matter of having the full righteousness of Christ imputed to us, but it is also a matter of walking with Jesus in practical righteousness. In Matthew 5: 16-18, Jesus teaches us that our practical righteousness must exceed that of the clergy of His day. When we embrace and live out practical righteousness, we develop our own intuitions so that we can sense righteousness and unrighteousness when they

are presented to us. If we only have doctrinal commitments, with no practical righteousness, we have no real knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong.

### III. We have a breastplate against the deceptions of the Devil.

The Devil seeks to lead us into despair and cynicism about the future; that is, the Devil wants us to deny that our beliefs and our conduct make any difference at all and to deny that there is any reality to Heaven and Hell. We believers are often told that we are “on the wrong side of history,” but sometimes history is on the wrong side of history! Those on the *right* side of history will find out one day that God has provided new Heavens and a new earth that is suffused with His righteousness and we shall see before us the very likeness of the “Righteous One” Himself. This faith in the righteous future that God has provided protects us from the cynical deceptions of the evil one.

With this breastplate of righteousness, we are protected from the accusations, allurements, and deceptions of the evil one, and God, who graciously desires our fellowship, allows us to arrive safely at home.

### Discussion Questions

1. How do we achieve a righteous standing before God?
2. How does our “legal righteousness” guard us from despair when Satan accuses us?
3. What is practical righteousness?
4. How does our practical righteousness defend us against the allurements of Satan?
5. What are the primary deceptions Satan uses to get us off the right path?
6. How can we defend ourselves from his deceptions?

### Going Deeper

1. In what ways have you not fully taken up the breastplate of righteousness?
2. What practical steps can you take to put this piece of armor on fully?