

The Breast Plate of Righteousness

INTRODUCTION.

- A. *“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. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness.”* (Ephesians 6:13-14a)
- B. After buckling his belt around his waist, the Roman soldier would have fastened the breastplate around his chest. There were two types of breastplates. The first type of breastplate was fashioned by joining several broad, curved metal bands together using leather thongs. The second type of breastplate was a type of chain mail, constructed by linking small metal rings together until they formed a vest.
- C. The purpose of both types of armor was the same—to protect the soldier's vital organs. If a soldier failed to wear his breastplate, an arrow could easily reach a soldier's chest, piercing his heart or lungs.
- D. The prophet Isaiah says that the LORD puts on *“righteousness as a breastplate.”* Isaiah also says that the LORD goes to battle against injustice and corruption, restoring peace and order to the land. (Isaiah 59:16, 17)
- E. God offers his own righteousness to every believer in Christ. Righteousness is not something that anyone can gain by doing good deeds. It comes from faith in Jesus Christ. (Titus 3:4,5; Philippians 3:8, 9)
- F. Putting on the breastplate of righteousness means:
1. Believing in Jesus and his righteousness, not our own. (Romans 4:3-5; Galatians 2:20, 21)
 2. Putting on the breastplate of righteousness means standing firm against injustice and corruption. (Leviticus 19:15; Hebrews 1:9)
 3. Putting on the breastplate of righteousness means knowing that God

promises his protection against the forces of evil for those who have faith in Jesus. (2 Thessalonians 3:3)

I. LET US TAKE A LOOK AT RIGHTEOUSNESS.

- A. When we look at the definition of the word Righteousness:
1. Thayer defines righteousness as “the state of him who is such as he ought to be”
 2. W.E. Vine defines righteousness as “The character or quality of being right or just; it was formerly spelled ‘rightwiseness,’ which clearly expresses the meaning”
- B. What are some ways that the word is used in the scriptures?
1. It is used to denote an attribute of God. (Romans 3:5, 25, 26)
 2. The word Righteousness is used by Christ to refer to what is right within itself; whatever conforms to the revealed will of God. (Matthew 5:6, 10, 20; John 16:8-10)
 3. Paul tells the Romans that the Gospel reveals righteousness. (Romans 1:16, 17) This is God’s method of saving sinners.
 4. The word righteousness refers to integrity, virtue, purity of life, correctness of thinking.
 5. It is used to describe man being made RIGHT with God through Jesus Christ. (Galatians 3:20-22)
- C. There is none righteous:
1. *“As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one;’”* (Romans 3:10)
 2. *“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”* (Romans 3:20)
 3. *“I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”* (Galatians 2:21) — The point made here is that righteousness cannot come from the deeds of the Law. This is HOW

the Pharisees tried to establish their own righteousness – by Law keeping.

4. All of man’s righteousness (self efforts to be right with God) is as “filthy rags.” (Isaiah 64:6)
- D. Works of (for) righteousness do not save or make one right with God. (Titus 3:4,5; Romans 10:1-4) Paul makes it clear that we cannot establish our own righteousness.

II. THE POWER OF PROPER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

- A. I am sure you have heard or read these words of Jesus:
1. “. . . *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” (John 3:3)
 2. Some things are so essential that they stand between a person and heaven (i.e., salvation).
 3. The new birth is one of those things.
- B. There is another thing that stands between a person and heaven. However, this one thing is rarely mentioned.
1. “*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matthew 5:20)
 2. Was Jesus correct in this statement? Are we to really exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees! After all the Pharisees were real workers and they were very religious people.
 3. So how is it possible that we must exceed their righteousness?
 4. Before we exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, we must know two things:
 - a. What constituted their righteousness, and
 - b. What is righteousness?
- C. Let’s examine the Pharisees and see if we can learn Jesus’ lesson about

righteousness.

1. The word Pharisees means “separatist.”
 - a. Their development began after the Jews returned from captivity under Zerubbabel. This was about 536 B.C.
 - b. They were a very large and powerful sect. They were doctors of the Law, etc. Their desire was to keep the Law pure, and to help the people keep it perfectly.
2. A division occurred during the Maccabean Period. This formed a group of Pharisees and a group of Sadducees.
 - a. The Pharisees were one group who demanded strict legal response to the Law.
 - b. The Sadducees were more involved in social issues.
3. The Pharisees respected and followed the Talmud (from the Hebrew word “to learn”). *The Talmud is a large collection of writings, containing a full account of the civil and religious laws of the Jews. It was a fundamental principle of the Pharisees, common to them with all orthodox modern Jews, that by the side of the written law, regarded as a summary of the principles and general laws of the Hebrew people, there was an oral law, to complete and to explain the written law.*
4. The Pharisees consisted of consisted of seven kinds or groups.
 - a. There were ***the Shechemite Pharisees***. They kept the Law for what they could get out of it.
 - b. There were ***the Tumbling Pharisees***. They walked with their heads bowed low so as to appear very humble.
 - c. There were ***the Bleeding Pharisees***. To keep from looking at a woman they walked with their eyes closed. From time to time they bumped into things and injured themselves.

- d. There were ***the Mortar Pharisees***. These men wore mortar board shaped hats which shielded their eyes from impurities and ungodly things.
 - e. There were ***the “what-am-yet-to-do” Pharisees***. They were ignorant of the Law; after they obeyed one command, they would ask, “Now what must I do?”
 - f. There were ***the Pharisees from fear***. They kept the Law out of fear of punishment.
 - g. There were ***the Pharisees from love***. They kept the Law out of love.
5. The Pharisees were very active in the practice of their religious beliefs. They were more active in the practice of their religious beliefs than most of us. **In Matthew 23**, Jesus describes some of their activities.
- a. As scribes they knew the Law of Moses and they taught the Law. (Matthew 23: 3, 4, 5)
 - b. The Pharisees even challenged Jesus. (Mark 7:1-7)
 - c. The Pharisees were earnest in religious matters. (Matthew 23:6, 7)
 - d. They closed the kingdom to some. (Matthew 23:13)
 - e. They were earnest about prayer and they made long prayers. (Matthew 23:14)
 - 1) They had 80 forms of prayer.
 - 2) They never went into or out of the house without prayer.
 - 3) They prayed on corners, at the Temple, at home, etc.
 - f. The Pharisees were also very generous.
 - 1) They gave tithes of all they possessed.
 - g. They practiced self-denial.
 - 1) They fasted two times a week (Monday and Thursday).
 - h. They were held in high esteem by countrymen.

- i. They were very zealous personal workers. (Matthew 23:15)
 - j. They were great takers of oaths. (Matthew 23:16)
 - k. They were clean outwardly. (Matthew 23:25)
6. Based on all this information about the Pharisees, can we hope to excel them?
- a. It seems that it would be hard to do and yet Jesus said that *“that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees . . .”*
 - b. The Pharisees were indeed busy people and very “religious.”
 - c. But in spite of all this they were headed for hell. *“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?”* (Matthew 23:33) Why were they going to hell? (Matthew 23:23, 24)
7. Can we DO more than the Pharisees? Must we do more than the Pharisees? It is not possible! Do works save? The answer is no!
- a. Was their righteousness the results of their deeds?
 - b. The key is in POSITION — not in PRACTICE. (Ephesians 2:4-8)
 - c. They were under the Law of Moses. Their goal was to keep rules or the letter of the Law and not the spirit of the Law.
 - d. Their righteousness was not out of love for they were self-sufficient. However, the righteousness that God demands makes love essential. (1 Corinthians 13:1-4; Galatians 5:6)

III. RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

- A. Finally, let us look at our Righteousness so that we have a complete understanding as to why Paul told us to put on the “breastplate of Righteousness.”
- B. Our righteousness, which exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, is not in a Practice like the Pharisees but it is in a PERSON and that is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

1. This is the good news of the gospel. (Romans 1:14-17)
 - a. The righteousness of God is His method of saving sinners.
2. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)
 - a. It means that we are made righteous in the sight of God; that is, that we are accepted as righteous, and treated as righteous by God on account of what the Lord Jesus has done. There is here an evident and beautiful contrast between what is said of Christ, and what is said of us. He was made sin--we are made righteousness; that is, He was treated as if He were a sinner, though He was perfectly holy and pure--we are treated as if we were righteous, though we are defiled and depraved.
 - b. The idea is, that on account of what the Lord Jesus has endured in our behalf we are treated as if we had ourselves entirely fulfilled the law of God, and had never become exposed to its penalty.
 - c. In the phrase “*righteousness of God*” there is a reference to the fact that this is His plan of making men righteous, or of justifying them. They who thus become righteous, or are justified, are justified on his plan, and by a scheme which he has devised. The idea is that all our righteousness in the sight of God is receive in and through a Redeemer. All is to be traced to Him. The whole plan, therefore, is one of substitution; and without such substitution there can be no salvation. Innocence voluntarily suffers for guilt, and the guilty are thus made pure and holy, and are saved. When God has given his only Son to the bitter suffering of death on the cross in order that we may be reconciled, it is the highest possible argument which can be used as to why we should cease our opposition to him, and become

his friends.

3. Our righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees through obedient faith in Christ. (Romans 3:22)
 - a. ***Even the righteousness of God.*** The apostle, having stated that the design of the gospel was to reveal a new plan of becoming just in the sight of God, proceeds here more fully to explain it. The explanation which he offers makes it plain that the phrase so often used by him, “righteousness of God,” does not refer to an attribute of God, but to his plan of making men righteous. Here he says that it is by faith in Jesus Christ; but surely an attribute of God is not produced by faith in Jesus Christ. It means God's mode of regarding men as righteous through their belief in Jesus Christ.
 - b. ***Through faith in Jesus Christ.*** This cannot mean that faith is the meritorious cause of salvation, but that it is the instrument or means by which we become justified. It is the state of mind, or condition of the heart, to which God has been pleased to promise justification. God has promised that they who believe in Christ shall be pardoned and saved. This is His plan in distinction from the plan of those who seek to be justified by works.
 - c. ***to all and on all.*** The plan was ample for all, was fitted for all, was equally necessary for all, and was offered to all. The apostle adds, therefore, that the benefits of this plan must actually come upon all, or must be applied to all, if they would be justified. They could not be justified merely by the fact that the plan was provided, and that the knowledge of it had come to all, but by their actually coming under this plan, and availing themselves of it.
 - d. ***For there is no difference.*** The apostle does not mean to say that

there is no difference in regard to the talents, dispositions, education, and property of men; but there is no distinction in regard to the way in which they must be justified. All must be saved, if saved at all, in the same mode, whether Jews or Gentiles, bond or free, rich or poor, learned or ignorant. None can be saved by works; and all are therefore dependent on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

- C. Faith (a composite term that includes belief, repentance, confession, and baptism) is the avenue for attaining righteousness through Christ:
1. *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”* (Romans 5:1)
 - a. ***Therefore, having been justified by faith.*** The apostle takes it for granted that he has proved that justification is by faith, and that the Gentiles have an equal title with the Jews to salvation by faith. And now he proceeds to show the effects produced in the hearts of the believing Gentiles by this doctrine. We are justified – have all our sins pardoned by faith, as the instrumental cause; for, being sinners, we have no works of righteousness that we can plead.
 - b. ***we have peace with God.*** Before, while under a sense of the guilt of sin, we had nothing but terror and dismay in our own consciences; now, having our sin forgiven, we have peace in our hearts, feeling that all our guilt is taken away. Peace is generally the first-fruits of our justification.
 - c. ***through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** His passion and death being the sole cause of our reconciliation to God.
 2. *“Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”* (Romans 5:18)

- a. **as through one man's offense.** Admitting this as an undisputed and everywhere apparent fact, a fact which no one can call in question.
- b. **judgment came.** This is not in the Greek, but it is evidently implied. The meaning is that all have been brought under the reign of death by one man.
- c. **to all men.** The whole race. The apostle does not explain the mode in which it was done, but simply states the fact.
- d. **through one Man's righteous.** This stands opposed to the one offense of Adam, and must mean, therefore, the holiness, obedience, purity of the Redeemer.
- e. **came to all men.** As the sin of Adam was of such a nature in the relation in which he stood as to affect all the race, so the work of Christ, in the relation in which he stood, was adapted also to all the race.
- f. **resulting in justification of life.** That is, his work is adapted to produce acceptance with God, to the same extent as the crime of Adam has affected the race by involving them in sin and misery. The apostle does not affirm that in fact as many will be affected by the one as by the other; but that it is fitted to meet all the consequences of the fall; to be as wide-spread in its effects; and to be as salutary as that had been ruinous. A certain kind of medicine may have an original applicability to heal all persons under the same disease, and may be abundant and certain, and yet in fact be applied to few. The sun is fitted to give light to all, yet many may be blind, or may voluntarily close their eyes. Water is adapted to the wants of all men, and the supply may be ample for the human family, yet in fact, from various causes, many may be deprived of it. So of the provisions of

the plan of redemption. They are adapted to all; they are ample, and yet in fact, from causes which this is not the place to explain, the benefits, like those of medicine, water, science, etc., may never be enjoyed by all the race.

3. *“For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.”* (Galatians 5:5)
 - a. ***For we.*** We who are Christians. It is a characteristic of the true Christian.
 - b. ***Through the Spirit.*** The Holy Spirit. We expect salvation only by his aid.
 - c. ***Wait for.*** That is, we expect salvation in this way. The main idea is, not that of waiting as if the thing were delayed; it is that of expecting. The sense is that true Christians have no other hope of salvation than by faith in the Lord Jesus. It is not by personal works, nor is it by any conformity to the law. The object of Paul is to show them the true nature of the Christian hope of eternal life, and to recall them from dependence on their conformity to the law.
 - d. ***The hope of righteousness.*** The hope of justification. They had no other hope of justification than by faith in the Redeemer.
4. *“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”* (Romans 10:10)
 - D. If a person is “in Christ,” he is RIGHT before God. There is no other way. (Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31)
 1. This is the only way a person’s righteousness can exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.

CONCLUSION.

- A. Are you right before (with) God?

1. How did you become right? (Romans 10:3)
- B. Do you have Christ's righteousness?
 1. How did you acquire it? By the Law? By works?
 2. You must be IN CHRIST. (Galatians 3:27)
 3. You must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. (John 3:1-5)
- C. Are you trying to exchange "law deeds" for salvation or righteousness?
 1. It will not work! (Galatians 2:21)
 2. *"You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."* (Galatians 5:4)
- D. We have a Savior. (Matthew 1:21; Acts 4:11-13; Hebrews 5:8,9)
 1. *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* (John 14:15)
 2. For all of these reasons, Paul says put on the *"Breastplate of Righteousness."*