

# **THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**

## **(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND NINETEEN)**

### ***“THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”***

#### **EPHESIANS 6:10-14**

*10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

*11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

*12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

*13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

*14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.*

The **New English Translation** renders verse **14** in the following way:  
*“Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness.”*

In our last Lesson we stated that in verses **11** and **13**, Paul urges the believers in Ephesus to put on, or take unto themselves, “*the whole armour of God.*” The phrase, “*the whole armour of God,*” is a translation of the Greek word **panoplia**: (**pan-op-lee’-ah**), which refers to the complete set of instruments used in offensive and defensive

warfare. In verses **14-17**, Paul itemizes the offensive and defensive instruments that believers are to employ in spiritual warfare. The items of armour appear in the order in which a soldier would put them on before engaging in physical warfare.

The first piece of equipment listed is the “**Belt of Truth.**” Paul says, “*Having your loins girt about with truth,*” or, “*Fastening the belt of truth around your waist.*”

The Roman Soldier’s belt was his “badge of office.” It was worn with the tunic at all times and formed the central piece of his armour, holding all the rest securely in place. The belt tied tightly around the waist indicated that a soldier was ready for combat. Conversely, to slacken the belt equated with the soldier going off duty, something that is never to be the case with a Christian soldier.

We noted that “**truth**” is the belt that must be fastened around the waist of a believer. The word “*truth*” is a translation of the Greek word **alétheia**: (**al-ay’-thi-a**), which refers to, “what is true in any matter under consideration (opposed to what is feigned, fictitious, or false); what is true in things pertaining to God and the duties of man, (moral and religious truth); sincerity of mind and integrity of character, or a mode of life in harmony with divine truth.”

The idea is of the unveiled reality lying at the basis of, and agreeing with an appearance; the manifested essence of a matter. Truth is the correspondence between a reality and a declaration which professes to set it forth. Words are true when they correspond with objective reality. Persons and things are true when they correspond with their profession. Hence a truth is a declaration which has a corresponding reality. Since God is Himself the great reality, that which correctly sets forth His nature is pre-eminently the Truth. Obviously whatever God says is “**the truth,**” and “**the Truth**” is actually embodied in the Person of Jesus Christ!

We must faithfully hold to the truth of God’s word, but it is also necessary for the truth to hold us. We must apply the truth of God’s Word to our daily lives and test everything by comparing it to that fixed and unchangeable standard.

The second piece of equipment listed is the “*Breastplate of Righteousness.*” Having girded his loins with the “*belt of truth,*” the Roman soldier would next fasten on his breastplate.



The Greek word translated “*breastplate*” is **thórax**, which, according to **Thayer’s Greek Lexicon**, refers to, “the part of the body from the neck to the navel, where the ribs end.” According to the same authority, the word also describes, “a breast-plate or corselet consisting of two parts and protecting the body on both sides from the neck to the middle.”

The breastplate was made of hard leather, bronze, or iron, and consisted of two parts, one for both the front and the back. They were connected by leather straps or metal bands passing over the shoulders and fastened in front, and by hinges on the right side. The breastplate served as protection for some of the most important parts of the body.

Underneath the breastplate was the heart, lungs and other organs necessary for life. Therefore, if a soldier did not wear his breastplate, he was vulnerable to an attack that could result in instant death. The Greek historian **Polybius** tells us that the breastplate was known as a “**heart-protector.**”

One commentator notes that, “As the soldier covers his breast with the breastplate to make it secure against the disabling wound, so the Christian is to endue himself with **righteousness** so as to make his heart and will proof against the fatal thrust of his spiritual assailants.”

The word “*righteousness*” is a translation of the Greek word **dikaíosuné: (dik-ah-yos-oo'-nay)**, which refers to a state that conforms to an authoritative standard or norm, and is therefore in keeping with what God is in His holy character. **God’s character is the definition and source of all righteousness.** God is **totally** righteous because He is **totally** as He should be. The righteousness of human beings is defined in terms of God’s righteousness.

As it relates to human beings, **dikaíosuné** describes the righteousness that is acceptable to God and thus is in keeping with His holy character. In short, the righteousness of God is all that God is, all that He commands, all that He demands, all that He approves and all that He provides through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the perfectly Righteous One.

It is my opinion, that in the context of this verse, the righteousness spoken of is both a **justifying** righteousness and a **sanctifying** righteousness. When a sinner is regenerated and as a consequence, believes the Gospel and places his or her trust in the Lord Jesus Christ,

he or she is **declared** righteous or is **justified** by God the Father. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to such a person, and as a result, he or she stands perfectly righteous before God in a **positional** sense. Paul informs us of this in **2 Corinthians 5:21**. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God.*”

In **Philippians 3:8-9** he says,

*8 More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!<sup>[ii]</sup>—that I may gain Christ,*

*9 and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness—a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ’s faithfulness.*

**(New English Translation)**

As far as Paul was concerned, **justification** or **positional** righteousness was not only a **past event**; it was also a **present reality**. Concerning this, **Jerry Bridges** the American theologian wrote the following:

“This is where so many Christians miss it. They can look back to the day that they trusted Christ. And if you press them on that they will say, ‘Yes, I was justified at that time.’ But today they seek to live their lives as if it depends upon them. In their mind they have reverted to a performance relationship with God. And so the thinking is, ‘if I had my quiet time and if I haven’t had any lustful thoughts and these kind of things, then I expect God to bless me today.’ We want to pay our own way. We want to earn God’s blessings. The apostle Paul didn’t do that. Paul looked outside himself and saw himself clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He saw himself declared righteous...”

For most Christians it's a performance relationship. That is why we need a daily appropriation of the Gospel, because it is our nature to drift toward a performance relationship."

But in his reference to the "*breastplate of righteousness*," Paul is not only peaking of **justifying** righteousness; he is also speaking of **sanctification** or **practical** righteousness. This righteousness is the product of the Holy Spirit in the life of the surrendered saint. It is the righteousness spoken of in **Philippians 2:12-13**:

*12 So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, **continue working out your salvation** with awe and reverence,*

*13 for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God.*  
(**New English Translation**)

It is the righteousness spoken of in **1 John 3:7**: "*Little children, let no one deceive you: The one who **practices** righteousness is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous*" (**New English Translation**).

Paul is referring to both the **imputed, positional** righteousness which is the possession of all true believers, as well as the **practical** righteousness which results from their exalted position. It is the righteousness of both **standing (position)**, and **state (practice)**. It is not enough that we have the **imputed** righteousness of Jesus Christ; our daily walk must be consistent with our position.

To summarize we may say that, the "new man," who is clothed in the robes of Christ's righteousness, and is therefore **positionally** righteous, needs to **practice** what this privileged position entails. Paul speaks of this in **Ephesians 4:1**: "*I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called*" (**New English Translation**). In other words, the believer is to manifest a **practical** righteousness each day toward God and toward men in his or

her everyday life. Every believer is clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and by virtue of that has been made the righteousness of God, but he or she must also **manifest** integrity and uprightness in his or her personal life. We must live **rightly** before God and man, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the “*Breastplate of Righteousness*,” **Expositor’s Bible Commentary** says the following:

This attribute [righteousness], must be understood in its full Pauline meaning. It is the state of one who is right with God and with God's law. **It is the righteousness both of standing and of character, of imputation and of impartation, which begins with justification and continues in the new, obedient life of the believer. These are never separate, in the true doctrine of grace.** ‘*The righteousness that is of God by faith*’ is the soul's main defence against the shafts of Satan. It wards off deadly blows, both from this side and from that. Does the enemy bring up against me my old sins? I can say: ‘*It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?*’ Am I tempted to presume on my forgiveness, and to fall into transgression once more? From this breastplate the arrow of temptation falls pointless, as it resounds: ‘*He that doeth righteousness is righteous. He that is born of God doth not commit sin.*’ **The completeness of pardon for past offence and the integrity of character that belong to the justified life, are woven together in an impenetrable mail.**”

When a believing sinner places his or her trust in Jesus Christ and is “born again,” or “born from above,” the very righteousness of Christ is put to his or her account, and this never changes. As the believer continues to walk with the Lord and yields to the in-dwelling Holy Spirit, sanctification occurs and he or she increasingly becomes conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. He or she becomes increasingly Christ-like. Paul speaks of this in **2 Corinthians 3:18**. The **New English Translation** renders the verse in the following way: “*And we all, with*

*unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, which is from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

The breastplate symbolizes the believer’s **righteousness in Christ** as well as his or her **righteous life in Christ**. Satan is the accuser, but he cannot accuse the believer who is living a godly life in the power of the Holy Spirit. The life we live either fortifies us against Satan’s attacks or makes us more vulnerable to these onslaughts. When Satan accuses the Christian, it is the righteousness of Christ that assures the believer of his salvation. But our **positional righteousness in Christ**, without **practical righteousness in the daily life**, only gives Satan opportunity to attack us.

The breastplate offered special protection for the heart. A warrior without his breastplate was dangerously exposed to the thrust of the enemy. There is no more effective protection for the heart than a walk in righteousness consistent with our position in Christ. If we are not living righteously we are easy targets for the enemy’s missiles.

A person who is conscious of being in the wrong will tend to cower or run away from the enemy; a person who is conscious of being in the right tends to be courageous and is able to withstand the onslaught of the enemy and stand his or her ground. Practical righteousness involves a consistent safeguarding of the heart. It is not something that we piously and fraudulently parade one day a week. It requires integrity and vigilance, as the following Scripture passages indicate. The passages reflect the rendering of the **New English Translation**:

**Psalm 19:14**

*“May my words and my thoughts be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my sheltering rock and my redeemer.”*

**Psalm 139:14**

*23 Examine me, O God, and probe my thoughts. Test me, and know my concerns.*



*24 See if there is any idolatrous way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.*

**Proverbs 4:23**

*“Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it are the sources of life.”*

**Matthew 6:19-21**

*19 “Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and devouring insect destroy and where thieves break in and steal.*

*20 But accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and devouring insect do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.*

*21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

**Mark 7:17-23**

*17 Now when Jesus had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable.*

*18 He said to them, “Are you so foolish? Don’t you understand that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him?*

*19 For it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and then goes out into the sewer.” (This means all foods are clean.)*

*20 He said, “What comes out of a person defiles him.*

*21 For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder,*

*22 adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly.*

*23 All these evils come from within and defile a person.”*

Brothers and sisters, we must not view righteousness as something that we do for God. Instead, we must view righteousness as the **result** of our surrender to Him, and our adherence to His truth-the truth contained in

Scripture. The person who is lacking in integrity can offer no successful defense to the devil. A dishonest person is vulnerable at every point.

When we live righteously, conducting ourselves in conformity to the truth of who God is and what He has said, life becomes a spiritual breastplate which protects our heart as we fight the spiritual war that we are engaged in every day.