

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

◆**Intro:** Righteousness. What is it? In the 70's it was a popular term for something totally cool. One sandy, blond, young man might watch another of his sort ride a wave on a California coast and reply with amazement, "Righteous, dude! Like, whoa!" For others, the only use of the term they know would refer to someone who thought they were better than the rest of us. These folks would be considered "self-righteous." Other's may have heard the term in a church setting, and so think of it as being relegated to religious life, as though religion has only to do with a few, certain hours in a week. Let me suggest that righteousness has to do with life moment by moment. Lets see if an illustration helps.

◆As a youth when my family lived in the hills of Makakilo, HA, there was a neighborhood bully who would skateboard past our house several times a day and curse at us, or threaten us, or glare darkly as he went by. We complained to our mother. I'll never forget her reply. It went something like this. "The Bible says a soft answer turns away wrath. Get out there and watch for that boy. When you see him, think of something nice you can say." We did. We parked ourselves on the curb like towns people waiting for the July 4th parade and waited in the Hawaiian sun for said bully to venture within range of our nice words arsenal. When he came skateboarding by we peppered him with compliments. "Man, you're good at boarding." "Way to go, man." "Will you check him out." Who knows, one of us might even have broken into a "Righteous, duuude!" I don't really remember. What I do know at this point in life is that our mother was encouraging us to actually be "righteous." That is righteousness is doing

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

and being the right thing. If ever you encouraged someone with the imperative, “Do the right thing.” you were exhorting righteousness.

◆Ok, a quick refresher. In this series we are in spiritual boot camp, trying to learn how to take out the enemy, satan, sin, wrong, and lies –all of which suck from us life and joy. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6 that the real essence of being human is a spiritual thing. He reminded us that we can give footholds to the devil, and other spiritual forces in our lives. That we are in a war between good and evil at all times, in all places.

◆Have you ever felt bombarded by thoughts you didn’t want to have? Have you ever desperately wanted things you knew were wrong to want? Have you ever experienced fears, and hopelessness you couldn’t seem to chase away? Have you despaired for another caught up in destructive behavior that they couldn’t, or wouldn’t see? These are signs of the spiritual warfare going on all around us. (Eph.6:11-12) Today, we look at weapon #2: the breastplate of righteousness.

◆**1. What is the breastplate?** First of all, just so we know, a breastplate for a first Century Roman soldier consisted of a chest covering made of several connected metal bands so as to be flexible in some ways, but also protect the vital organs from spear thrusts, arrows or the blade of a sword. The closest comparison in our day would be a bulletproof vest worn by soldiers or police officers.

◆At least one thing is clear: there is something about righteousness that can protect our beating hearts, and our loved ones from evil events, and offer us victory over the crises of everyday life. Now again there are a few options as to what Paul is referring to with this image. Option #1: The

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

Breastplate of righteousness is God's goodness that is our defense.

Option #2: The Breastplate of righteousness is refers to our actual good acts of obedience that keep us from the torment of evil.

◆A. Christ's Righteousness: the Bible is abundantly clear that no man, woman or child has it within themselves to lead a good enough life to merit the attention of God, let alone forgiveness of sin, or promise of reward, or the hope of eternal life. So let's just put that to rest. Christianity is different from all other religions in that it is not about doing the right thing to get God to like us and bless us. It is about Christ alone, who did the right thing in our place; lived a perfect life, died to pay off our sins for us.

◆People get this confused all the time. They think by attending a worship service they are racking up points with God. They are not. They think that buying cookies they don't want from the Girl Scouts they don't know helps balance the scales for sleeping with the neighbor's daughter. It doesn't. If we think this way, we don't understand God at all. God is totally holy. No bad blood gets into his heaven or onto his calendar. None. None of this nonsense that if in the end you did a little more good than harm you can run for office in heaven. You can't. All that is less than perfect goes to the grave yard. In comparison to the standard of heaven,

◆“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No-one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.” Isaiah 64:6, 7, NIV.

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

◆Here's how our catechism puts it.

◆*Q & A 62 Why can't our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of our righteousness? A. Because the righteousness which can pass God's judgment must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law. But even our best works in this life are imperfect and stained with sin.*

◆In our text, Isaiah sees that all we do is separate ourselves from God more and more (v2, 9).

◆“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” Isaiah 59:2, NIV. “So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.” Isaiah 59:9, NIV.

◆He sees that once we do a wrong, it's is always a part of us. We are a person-who-did-wrong! (12)

◆“For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities.” Isaiah 59:12, NIV.

◆He explains that it is not within a man to work salvation from sin.

Salvation can only come from one without sin! (16).

◆“He saw that there was no-one, he was appalled that there was no-one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him.” Isaiah 59:16, NIV.

◆**1)** How do I receive this salvation, you ask? It's really simple, yet requires a great act: I can be saved when I repent of my sin, and accept by faith Christ's righteousness. That is, I must put on Christ's righteousness as a breastplate.

◆““The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,” declares the LORD.” Isaiah 59:20, NIV.

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

◆ *“Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood...” Romans 3:20-25, NIV.*

◆ David Rich put it, “A young man once told me, "It's like a heavenly bank account. As long as I make more deposits than withdrawals, I'm in good shape." I shared the biblical reality with him: the very first time he made a withdrawal, the account was emptied and closed forever. He thought that was a bit harsh. But I explained that I didn't make the rules; God did. And I shared this truth with him not to depress him, but to make him aware and appreciative of God's mercy. If you're a believer, your account has been closed, and a new one opened in Christ's name. You're wealthy, but you can't make another deposit or withdrawal. As Christians we just get the benefits of this new account, living off the interest—or, to put it another way, living off the blessing granted us by the blood of Jesus. -David Rich, 7 *Biblical Truths You Won't Hear in Church*

◆ An old tale speaks of a man who died and faced the angel Gabriel at heaven's gates. The angel said, "Here's how this works. You need a hundred points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you have done, and I will give a certain number

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

of points for each of them. The more good there is in the work that you cite, the more points you will get for it. When you get to a hundred points, you get in."

◆"Okay," the man said, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart."

◆Gabriel replied, "That's wonderful. That's worth three points."

◆"Three points?" said the man incredulously. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my money and service."

◆"Terrific!" said Gabriel, "that's certainly worth a point."

◆"One point?" said the man with his eyes beginning to show a bit of panic. "Well, how about this: I opened a shelter for the homeless in my city, and fed needy people by the hundreds during holidays."

◆"Fantastic, that's good for two more points," said the angel.

◆"TWO POINTS!" cried the man in desperation. "At this rate the only way I will get to heaven is by the grace of God."

◆"Come on in," said Gabriel

◆Do you want to take back ground from Satan? Do you want to rid your life of *resident evil* and the *viruses* that keep destroying your joy? The way to shoot the devil in the head always begins with repentance of sin. That's when he loses authority in your world. It's the last thing he wants us to do. He'd advise "Try harder. Promise yourself you'll never do it again." That way when you do, you'll be discouraged! You'll despise yourself on the inside while you pretend on the outside that "you got this!" Do not try harder. Ask Jesus to win in you instead.

◆Biblically speaking, when it comes to defeating the accusations of evil, the temptations to give up and dive in, the only righteousness that protects you is God's. When satan tries to drag you down by reminding you of your sins, your best defense is the blood of Christ that paid them off already!

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

◆B. Option #2 is that the Breastplate of righteousness is about my doing the right thing. This option is also true but be careful how you understand it. My righteousness is a cooperation with God's. While it does nothing for my justification in his sight, it does miracles for my experience of the good life. It's kind of like going to a foreign land to work in a factory there. They hired you. They flew you there. They give you a salary and a place to stay all because you're the owner's son. Now you can get up and go to work speaking English, but it will be hard. Much better to cooperate and speak the language there. Your job will work better. That's what our righteousness is like. When we do "what is right" life in the world made by God works better, do not doubt it! Put it another way *every time I chose to do right I win more daily victory over evil in my world.* Of course there are exceptions, but ordinarily speaking, every time I do the right thing, according to God's code, I bring joy, peace, blessing and the destruction of evil. While we do not have a part in our justification before God, we do have a part in our sanctification, that is, our experiencing of God and our growth in holiness. Let's glance at Proverbs 10 for a moment. Find it in your Bible. Then let's scan through it...

◆"The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked." Proverbs 10:3, NIV.●

◆"Blessings crown the head of the righteous, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked." Proverbs 10:6, NIV.

◆"The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked." Proverbs 10:11, NIV.

◆"The wages of the righteous bring them life, but the income of the wicked brings them punishment." Proverbs 10:16, NIV.

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

- ◆“The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.” Proverbs 10:20, NIV.
- ◆“The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment.” Proverbs 10:21, NIV.
- ◆“What the wicked dreads will overtake him; what the righteous desire will be granted.” Proverbs 10:24, NIV.
- ◆“When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm for ever.” Proverbs 10:25, NIV.
- ◆“The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing. The way of the LORD is a refuge for the righteous, but it is the ruin of those who do evil. The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land. The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.” Proverbs 10:28-32, NIV.
- ◆Now, can we draw any conclusions from these? Indeed we can! God supports you when you do the right thing. It makes your life secure. Doing the right thing brings blessings in your world. So, my ultimate protection of righteousness is God’s gift to me, but when I imitate God’s righteousness, this also protects me from the devil and his attempts to drag me down.
 - ◆It’s like the parable of the fish desiring freedom. For days he swam along the coast line, watching the creatures on the shore, and in the trees, and in the air hopping, walking, flying, running. “I want to run on the land.” he said to himself. “I’m sick of being constrained by this foolish ocean. I don’t feel right in the water. I want to identify as a land creature.” So with that he dove deep, gathered speed and shot up like a missile landing on the beach. He last words were, “At last, gasp, gasp, I’m free at last!” Freedom is not having every option.

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

Freedom is being who and what you were made to be. Doing what you were made to do. That is also righteousness.

◆ Conclusion: Summing up how to put on the breastplate of Righteousness.

◆ *“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, NIV.*

◆ First we put on Christ’s righteousness by repenting of sin and asking for his forgiveness, as we’ve already seen. Using the spiritual armor is just as real. But lets unpack true repentance. True repentance involves other things like ...

◆ A. Confession: saying it out loud to God and the spirit realm that you were wrong. Saying it out loud to another person you wronged. This drains the wound you may have created. Without actual confession (not mere feeling that you did badly), sin builds up on the soul like soap scum and hard water deposits on you bathroom faucet. It’s affect is like barnacles on a boat hull; it weighs down and slows down the functions of the soul.

◆ B. Renouncing: openly declaring that you hereby turn your back on that wrong; openly rejecting the lie of satan that you believed (like that you would be happier pointing out your brothers faults, or that life would be better if you took more for yourself, etc.) Now don’t miss

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ISA.59

Spiritual Warfare #2

this. There is power in renouncing our sins, and any involvement in other people's sins. When we do wrong, watch depravity, hang around with darkness –it's like giving evil powers permission to come near. You could say it's like a hunting call. It attracts the attention of the wild creature so it comes looking for you. Verbal renouncing and rejecting in Jesus name is like shooting it.

◆ I encourage you to review your day. Look for the places where you touched up against evil. If you can't think of any, ask God to reveal to you anything not in harmony with his will for your freedom. Keep the ledger clean.

◆ C. A final part of repentance is obedience. Do the things God says. Live rightly or "in righteousness." The paradox of Cross is that in losing your life you save it, and in obedience we are free. Oh, by the way, that Makakilo bully never bothered us again. Turns out God's word was right, or should we say, "righteous."