

**The Believer's Armor, Part 2: The Breastplate of Righteousness**

Scripture: Ephesians 6:14

Code: 1956

We've been studying the great truth in this text related to the believers' war with the forces of hell as Paul has outlined for us in the book of Ephesians the tremendous power and resource of the Christian. He doesn't want us to get over confident. He doesn't want us to dwell with any illusion that because of our resources it'll be easy, because we've been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, because we are able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think, because we can be filled with the Spirit of God, because we can allow the Spirit to fill us with His might, because all of these resources are ours, and because we have the very truth of God in our hands, and because God's ultimate sovereign design is to produce good works does not mean that it'll be easy to live the Christian life.

So having said all of that, he has yet to say this in verse 10. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand firm against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies.

"Wherefore take unto you whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girded about with truthfulness, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, with which ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked *one*. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

Now, in this passage as we have seen for the last several weeks, the apostle Paul outlines for us the strategy, the plan, the enemy, the whole area of the believers' warfare, and the sum of it all is that we must, as it says in verse 11, "put on the whole armour," repeats in verse 13, "take unto us the whole armour," if we are to be victorious.

This, then, is a passage of critical nature in the life of a Christian. No matter how adept your theology is, no matter how solid the foundation of our comprehension, no matter how much you know about the Scripture, how much you have of information regarding God's truth, you are still potentially a loser because this is a war that is won and fought really on a day to day basis.

So all of the resources that you have intellectually, in addition all of the resources that you have spiritually, and the power and presence of the Spirit of God, can be set aside even by a believer to the point where we begin to lose the battle. And so does Paul remind us that we must be very much aware that the Christian life is war, and the sooner we learn it, the sooner we will experience the victory that God has for us.

In Luke, I'm reminded of a verse that is related in another context, but perhaps will give us some food for thought. Luke 14:31 says, "What king, as he going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" Now, just that thought, what king ever entered into a battle without a careful examination of his resources and a development of his strategy? In essence, that is exactly what we're doing in Ephesians chapter 6. Having the given that we are in war, we must also add to the knowledge that this is war a careful evaluation of the strategy, the plan, the enemy, and the resources available to us to win the war, and nothing short of total commitment will do it.

Now, we saw last time if you'll look back at verse 14, the first piece of armor. Paul says as he envisions a Roman soldier in his full battle regalia, "Stand therefore, having your loins girded about with *altheia*." And primarily what we said he has in mind here truthfulness or an attitude of readiness, commitment without hypocrisy.

The term here, "having your loins girded," is associated in Hebrew thinking with the idea of readiness or preparedness. A Jewish people for literally centuries have indicated a readiness to move out with the phrase "gird up your loins." When they left the land of Egypt at the time of the Passover, they were instructed to gird up their loins. This is a very common phrase in Jewish thought. The apostle Paul is calling for the very same thing in a spiritual sense.

Peter says for example in 1 Peter 1:13, "Gird up the loins of your mind." In other words, get your mind ready for the things of God, that's what Paul is saying. A Jewish person preparing for a trip wouldn't go on the trip with his garments flowing in the breeze. He would gird his loins with a belt, pull his garments through that, so that he was pulled together ready for motion, for movement. The same thing was true of a Roman soldier. He would take his tunic, pull it up through this belt that was tied tightly so that his garment wouldn't get in his way as he was in the battle. So what our apostle Paul is telling us is that we must have a readiness for the battle. We must be prepared and committed for it. So we suggest to you the idea here is commitment.

You know, one of the things that happens - and we discussed this as elders in the last couple of days - as a church begins to grow like ours, people begin to be added on a periphery that's further and further out, further and further away as the church gets larger, and larger, and larger. It seems as though there is, on a general basis, a diminishing of commitment at the extremities because those

people don't feel a part of the core and they become sort of spectators. The commitment level begins to diminish, and it becomes incumbent on us to constantly challenge people to commitment, because the more grace grows the greater the potential impact, the greater the resistance of the enemy, the more desperately the commitment is needed, you see?

Jerry Mitchell gave me a privilege this week of having lunch with he and his friend General Zonich Shaham, who spoke to the Homebuilders class, I think, last Sunday, and he is an Israeli general who has a string of battle credits as long as your arm and is quite a man - not a Christian man, a very Zionist orientation, one who believes in the sovereignty of the state of Israel, and who has a high regard for the great tradition in history of that great people. And I was privileged to have lunch with him, and to tell you the least of it, he is indeed a fascinating person.

I asked him several questions about many things, and then he said to me, he said, "I appreciated your sermon. I came in and heard you preach last Sunday." He said, "I appreciate what you said about commitment, because," he says, "commitment is the whole issue with us." He said, "People think we are a super people, or that we have super intellect, or super strength, and that's why we win. But it really is commitment." And then he added, "And by the way," he said, "what you said about girding up your loins meaning commitment, and readiness, and preparedness is exactly right. We still use that phrase."

He said, "Let me give you an illustration of this." He said, "I have a friend in the San Fernando Valley who is a Jewish man, and he had a son, and his son desired to come to Israel to live there. And so he came to live, I think, on a kibbutz." And he said, "After several years there, I guess two years or something, he reached the age where he would have to enter the military or return to the United States." And he said, "Frankly, feeling like other Americans, he would choose the life of ease and return to America rather than get into the Israeli army." He said, "I was surprised to find that he entered the army. Well, the next thing I knew, I received a letter from him asking for a private appointment with me because I knew him, and I assumed that like any American boy he would say, 'Look, General, you know me and I know you. Let's make this thing as easy as we can. Find me a desk job, get my feet up on the desk,' and so forth and so on, and he was going to come to ask a favor. Well, he did."

He said, "He showed up at the office and this was his request. He said, 'General,' he said, 'My assignment in the army is too easy.' He said, 'This isn't what I want.' He said, 'I want to be in the finest, most strategic, diligent, difficult regiment in all the Israeli army. What is it and how do I get in it?' " And the general informed him about the fact that it was a frontline crack regimen of paratroopers that have the most precarious duty and are the frontline, dropping into whatever the battle is going to be before anybody else.

He said, "That's the group." But he said, "What it takes to be in that group is incredible." He said, "It closes finally with four days of relentless all-day-long marching, climbing up the mount that leads to Masada in the middle of the desert, carrying a full pack. That's just the end of it all." He said "That's what I want." He signed up, and not long after that he completed the training, lying flat on his stomach unable to move his body for not one muscle would function, but he made it. General Shaham said to me, "That's why we win. We win because people like that are committed."

And that is essentially what the apostle Paul is saying to us in this whole concept of the belt of truthfulness. People this is war. The world deludes us with the good life, but we are in the middle of a spiritual battle, and we will win when you get serious about the battle. Grace Church is on the threshold of becoming a potential that is undreamed of in this city, and this country, and in the world. I believe there is no limit to what God can do other than our own lack of commitment. I think that's really where it has to all begin, as Paul has pointed out.

You'll notice again in verse 14 that he says a Roman soldier will also have on a breastplate, and Paul calls it the "breastplate of righteousness." No Roman soldier in his right mind would ever go into a battle without his breastplate. Even if he could fight off the personal foe that he was fighting with, he might get shot through with an arrow coming from the other forces and hit him in a vulnerable area. so he would always wear a breastplate. And surely in a hand-to-hand combat anyway he'd be vulnerable here, and there would be some blows that would be parried if he were protected.

And so Paul looks at a Roman soldier going into battle and he says not only is he committed and has his loins girded up, his belt is on, and he's serious about movement, he's going to get in this thing to win it. But he also has his vital area protected. Now, Roman soldiers had different kinds of breastplates. Some of the were made out of linen, a very heavy linen that hung down very low, and it would be covered with – they would take the hooves of an animal, and they would slice them into slices rather thinly, and then they would hang them, hooking them together, so that it was almost like a horn, using an animal's horn kind of material; either from the hoof or from the horn.

Additionally, they sometimes used a chain mail kind of thing. Sometimes they would use the linen and they would hang little pieces of metal on it. And then, of course, the most familiar one that we know about is the great molded metal, almost chest plate that goes all the way from the base of the neck to the top of the thighs, covering all that vital area, the one you see with the eagle on it or "SPQR" or whatever, and we associate it with the Roman soldier. This was, of course, to protect this very vital area.

Now frankly, I've tried through the years as I've examined the armor of the Christian to see if there's any hierarchy of priority, if there are any more important than others, and that's very difficult to do, well-nigh impossible, because you have to put on the whole armor, right? The whole armor. Each piece is specifically geared to accomplish some certain and absolutely essential factor. So we cannot

say that one is specifically ranking first, another second, and another third. And yet, it seems to me that the key to all of this is the breastplate of righteousness.

If there is not righteousness in your life, the chances are you're not going to have commitment. If there is not a genuine righteousness in your life, you're not going to have the shield of faith, the shoes of peace. You're not going to have the helmet of salvation and you're not going to wield the sword unless you are committed to righteousness in your life. And righteousness is just a way of saying "a right relationship to God." Unless things are right between you and God, that seems to me to be bottom line. Commitment actually is born out of that. It's when you get right with God that the commitment takes place.

Now let me just talk about this concept of the breastplate of righteousness for minute. Obviously, you know that in a battle, the area you've got to protect is right in here. The helmet would protect the head area, and in the kind of battle that they would fight - hand to hand - they were using a short sword and it wouldn't be the kind that you could cut somebody's head off with, so this was the vital area here. What they were endeavoring to protect was the heart area up here, and then the lower area, which the Jewish people used call the "bowels." It meant the midsection where all the other organs are, the functional organs of the body. So a breastplate covered two vital areas: The heart and the bowel area.

Now, to the Jew this had a great significance. Symbolically, the heart represented the mind, the Bible says, "As a man thinketh in his - " what? " - heart, so is he." Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts. The heart is the thinking aspect of life. The heart in Hebrew terms or symbols means the mind. "The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Thinking is associated with the heart.

The bowels are associated with feelings and emotions. It talks about the bowels of compassion, or shutting up the bowels of love and not loving someone properly. And this is because emotions give us feelings in our stomach, don't they? Emotions hit us in the stomach. We ache in our stomach when certain emotions are felt. And so to the Hebrew, this is a good way to demonstrate it. The heart then means the thinking process, and the bowels refers to the emotions.

And if we can draw that across to our imagery in terms of the armor, this is what we're saying. Satan wants to attack a believer in two areas, primarily. One, in his thinking; two, in his emotions. One in the way he thinks and feels, another in the way he responds emotionally. And the believer must be protected, because this is where Satan makes his attack. He feeds your thinking processes with false information. He feeds your emotions with false information. He wants to cloud your mind with false doctrine, lies, religious untruth, anything he can, and he wants to appeal to the wrong parts of your emotions. He wants to illicit evil emotional responses. He wants to twist and pervert your affections.

And so the sum of it is this, people. Listen. If you protect your thinking and your feeling from the attacks of Satan, you're impregnable. He'll try to confuse your mind with false doctrine, or he'll try to confuse your emotions that make you long for, lust for, feel after, and have affection for the wrong things.

Now, if you just take the mind and emotions together they encompass everything that causes us to act. They encompass the concept of knowledge. That's the first key to responding. You've got to have a certain amount of knowledge. Understanding, conscious, will, desires, drives, affections, feelings, emotions, all those things that cause us to act are protected by the breastplate of righteousness.

Satan moves into your life and he has some things he wants to do. He wants to snatch away the Word of God from your mind and fill it with lies, right? Fill it with perversion, fill up your mind with garbage, fill up your mind with a morality that isn't God's, fill up your mind with a theology that isn't God's, fill up your mind with all kinds of untruth and half-truth. So he attacks the mind. He wants you to wrongly understand things. He doesn't want you interpret things rightly. He wants you to say about sin, "Oh, it's not so bad," so he literally drowns you in a sea of it, so you become very tolerant of it, and he entertains you with it, so that you don't think it's as evil as it really is.

So he has you laughing at sin on your television or in the movies. He has you hearing it put to beautiful tunes and music, so that it clouds and confuses the clear thinking of your mind. From there he moves to destroy your conscience, to get you to do things that you shouldn't do to sear a conscience that once warned you that soon will not warn you any longer. He wants to debilitate your will, breaking down your will. He wants to confuse your emotions by causing you to feel wrongfully toward things. He wants to corrupt your desires. He wants to draw your affections to the wrong things. And all this attack comes by Satan in that vital area, and simply does the apostle Paul say it's protected by righteousness, by righteousness.

I've noticed in recently reading the paper that New York City Police Department has a fundraising drive to buy bulletproof vests for all their officers. We can understand that. That's the vital area. That's the way it was with the Roman soldier. That's the vital area. That's the way it is with the believer. That, too, is the vital area. Protect your thinking and your feeling, and you're impregnable against Satan.

Now, what is the righteousness of which Paul speaks? What is he really talking about? There are only three possible things to consider. One would be self righteousness, two would be imputed righteousness, and three would be practical righteousness. Either he's talking about our own self righteousness, he's talking about the righteousness of Christ given to us, or he's talking about living out the righteousness of Christ given to us. We'll look and see which is the case.

Let's look first of all at the concept of our own righteousness. There are some people who think they're all right just because they're good folks, you know? Why? What does Satan ultimately want to do somebody? Think about it. What is Satan's ultimate goal with individuals? Well, I'll tell you what it is. Satan's ultimate goal is to draw men into hell with him, to keep them back from coming to God. He does not want to populate God's kingdom. He does not want people bowing to Jesus Christ. He does not want citizens of heaven. He wants to populate hell. And so Satan's ultimate goal is to destroy, to put into hell. Now, this is what Satan will do.

But there are some people who say, "Well, my own righteousness will be sufficient to prevent that." Satan wants to mess up your life all along the way, and there's some people who think they're good enough to handle it. In the time of the Bible, the Pharisees were that way. They thought they were good enough. They thought they could make it, and that's why in Matthew 5:20, Jesus says, "Except your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes of Pharisees, you'll never enter the kingdom." They were wrong. They weren't good enough. "For by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of - " what? " - works." You can't do it. And yet they thought they could.

In Luke chapter 18 we find the typical attitude of a Pharisee, a legalist, somebody who thinks he can make it by his own goodness. We have people like that today. In fact, every religious system in the world apart from Christianity is based on the fact that man can do it himself, that he can be good enough on his own. So in Luke 18:9, a certain parable the Lord tells, "Two men went into the temple to pray; one is a Pharisee, and the other is a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector." In other words I'm so glad I'm so good. I'm so happy about me, aren't you? I've done it on my own. I've arrived. I'm self-righteous.

"I fast twice a week, - " and you only had to fast several times a year, but he was really going at it " - I give tithes of all that I possess. There in the corner was the tax collector, beating on his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." Jesus said, "I tell you, that's the man that went down to his house justified, *rather* than the other: for everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted."

Another words for "justified" is "made righteous." Who was really righteous? The man who thought he could do it on his own or the man who knew he couldn't? Jesus said the man who knew he couldn't. You could call the story "A good man that went to hell and a bad man that went to heaven."

As long as you think you can do it on your own, you're stuck with your self righteousness, you do not have a breastplate. You will never defend yourself against Satan. He'll cast you into hell forever. Even though God has the ultimate right to do that, Satan is the one who allures. All the best you can do

doesn't make it. Isaiah 64:6 says, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." That's the best we have. If you hope by your goodness to get in to heaven, you are the most deluded person of all.

In Romans 3:10 we read these very provocative words. "There is none righteous, no, not one." If it had just said, "There is none righteous," somebody would have said, "Except me." So the Bible says, "No, not even you. Not one." "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." The word "unprofitable" means "to go sour like milk." The whole human race has gone sour. There's nobody righteous, nobody good in the whole thing. As a result, it says in the end of verse 19, "every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world is guilty before God." Why? Verse 23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Self righteousness is not the breastplate of righteousness. You will be a victim of the forces of hell for sure if you're trying to cover yourself in your own righteousness. I think maybe the best illustration of this is to have you turn to Philippians 3:4, and I want you to see how Paul deals with this.

Paul starts out looking at the view of self righteousness, and he says in verse 4, "Though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh." Now, in other words, if self righteousness were possible, if I could get into God's kingdom by being good enough, if I could do it, then I of all people would have a right to give it a good shot. I could have confidence in the flesh. I could say, "I've been a pretty good guy." "If any other man - " he says " - thinks he has reason for which he might trust in the flesh, I *have* more."

In other words, if you're going to look at it in terms of human righteousness, I can probably outstrip most other people. I'm probably better than the good ones. Why? Verse 5. "I was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel - " in other words, I was a real Israelite, and boy, even from circumcision on, everything happened right, starting with it on the right day, the eighth day. "I am of the tribe of Benjamin - " and by the way there was no more Jewish tribe than the tribe of Benjamin. You study Benjamin in the Old Testament, you will see how they figure all through the plan of God, and dealing with that nation as a very special tribe.

Benjamin, for example, according to Genesis 35, was not only a son of Israel, but the son of Israel's most beloved wife, Rachel. Of the two favorite sons, Benjamin and Joseph, it was Benjamin alone who with Judah formed the reconstituted Israel in 1 Kings chapter 12. It was Benjamin who restored Israel after captivity, Ezra 4:1. It was Benjamin that was God's chief agent in the deliverance of Israel in the time of Esther from the wickedness of Haman. Now Benjamin is a very special tribe, very special tribe. So he said, "I have a real pedigree. I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews - " if you've ever seen a Jew, I'm one. I'm one. He says this. " - as touching the law, I'm a Pharisee - " Not only am I a Hebrew, and a real Hebrew, and one out of the tribe of Benjamin, but I belong to the strictest, most religious, legalistic sect in the whole system. I'm a Pharisee. "Concerning zeal - " you never met a



more zealous Jew. I “persecuted the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

That is amazing. He says, “If you’re going to count on self righteousness, look at the guy who’s got more going for him than anybody else. If self righteousness was the way in, I would really lay claim to it.” Verse 7 begins with a key word, Philippians 3:7. What is it? “But.” “But what things were gain to me humanly - ” on my own “ - I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things loss - ” all of that stuff means nothing, it’s useless in 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* manure, that I may win Christ, - ” now here’s the key in verse 9 “ - and be found in Him, not having of mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

In other words, Paul says, “My own righteousness is useless. I must have the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Christ.” And when you become a believer, when you become a Christian, you reach out your hand of faith, take hold of the hand of God through Jesus Christ. At that moment, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to you. God clothes you in the righteousness of Christ. God puts over you, as it were, a canopy of the absolute holiness of Jesus Christ.

And from that moment to the eons of eternity when God looks at you, he sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. God puts a veil over you, and every time he sees you, he sees you as righteous in Christ. That’s “imputed righteousness” the theologians called it. Your own is useless. Paul says, “I count it all *but* manure.”

Augustus Toplady wrote, “A debtor to mercy alone of covenant mercy I sing, nor fear with thy righteousness on my person and offering to bring, the terrors of law and of God with me can have nothing to do, my Savior’s obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.” God doesn’t see them as we stand clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

But there’s even another step. You know something? You can’t be covered and protected by the righteousness of your own life. And you want to hear this? Even the righteousness of God granted to you in salvation is only the basis of your breastplate. You must take it a step further. We’re in Philippians 3. Look at verse 10. Paul recognizes that he has imputed righteousness, that the righteousness of God in Christ is his, but it doesn’t end there.

He then says, “That I may know him, - ” it’s a purpose clause, in order that I may know him “ - the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” Verse 12, “Not that I have already attained, either were already perfect: I follow after.” Verse 13, “I count not myself to have apprehended: - ” “I press - ” verse 14 “ - toward the mark.” What I’m saying,

in summary, is this. He says, "I have the imputed righteousness of Christ, but I still press. I still learn. I still move ahead. I still hunger after something.

And what he is really saying is this. Imputed righteousness is only that which makes practical righteousness possible, not necessarily a reality. Now we're getting to it, folks. I hope you're hanging in there.

Listen. When you were saved you were given the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That righteousness will cover you for all eternity. But in order for you to live the kind of life that wins the battle over Satan, you must apply righteous principles available to you in his righteousness to the matter of your daily living. There are Christians, you know, who think that because they have the imputed righteousness of Christ, it doesn't matter what they do.

I'll never forget hearing my father tell a story about a man who was in the ministry, and he was with him one time, and he swore a string of curse words. And he said to him in shock, "Whatever possessed you to say that?" He said, "Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm covered by the righteousness of Christ. That's just my old nature. What are you going to do with your old nature anyway?"

On another occasion, the man said that he decided he'd like to visit a nude bar, to which someone in his company replied, "What do you mean? What do you mean you want to do that?" "Well," he said, "It doesn't really matter. You see, I'm covered in by righteousness of Christ. That's just my old nature."

You can't dichotomize that. You can't separate that out. Because we're covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ doesn't guarantee that we live every moment as we ought to. It only guarantees that we can, right? That we can. It's a difference between position and practice. Your position is secure forever, but your practice doesn't always match up. That's the real issue. And so Paul says, "Sure. I've been given the righteousness of God, but that doesn't mean I've attained. That doesn't mean I've apprehended. That doesn't mean I've arrived. I now must - " as he says in chapter 2 " - work out that salvation so that I can accomplish what God wills to do in my life."

Now, folks, that's when you get the breastplate. The breastplate is on when we are living a righteousness and holy life. Sure, the foundation is from Christ, absolutely. Count Zinzendorf wrote that great hymn translated by John Wesley. I love to sing it, and you've sung it too. It goes like this, "Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are my glorious dress. 'Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head. Bold shall I stand in that great day. For who ought to my charge shall lay, fully through thee absolved I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame. Oh, let the dead now hear thy voice. Now bid thy banished ones rejoice. Their beauty this, their glorious dress, Jesus thy blood and righteousness."

He's right. The standard is his righteousness. That which covers us is his righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. Romans 3 goes on about none righteous, none righteous, none righteous; and in verse 22 it says, "but the righteousness of Christ is given to us." The perfection of Christ become ours, and our standing before God is perfect.

We can never attain God's standard righteousness on our own, and so it comes as a gift from Jesus Christ. Oh, what a fantastic thought it is. But it's not imputed righteousness that Paul is majoring on here. That's not the major thought here. It's what the old Puritans used to call "imparted righteousness." You've got to put it use.

You can live a righteousness life. It's a matter of daily, moment by moment choices. Practical righteousness puts the armor on. Paul is saying, "Oh, how much I want that," Philippians 3:10. "Oh, I want to see that. I want to reach the prize." And the prize is Christlikeness. I want my - watch this one - practical righteousness to match my positional righteousness.

Holy living is the breastplate, beloved. You know what I believe? I believe that somewhere along the line this is a forgotten commodity in the church. You know, this is the bottom line problem. If you don't live a holy life, you lose. You say, "Well, what do you lose?" Number one, you're going to lose your joy. I'll promise you that. If you do not live a righteousness life, God withholds from you his blessing. First John says, "These things are written that your joy maybe full." But the idea is they're written so that in obeying them your joy will be full. No obedience, no joy.

I'll tell you, the reason Christians are sad so often, and the reason they have sorrow in their lives is not because they need psychological counseling because they've got some kind of relational problem, it's just a lack of personal holiness. I really think this is the bottom line. And the church today has pretty well ignored this, and we've substituted programs, seminars, counseling. Listen, if you've got problems in your life, the first place to look is at your own holiness. If you've got problems in your marriage, that's the first place to look. And I'll guarantee you right now if you're not living a holy life, you'll have problems, because God withholds his blessing.

David knew it. When David was in sin and he said to the Lord, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." I've got my salvation I just lost the joy. I just lost the joy. And it is a matter of righteous life. As I see it in Christianity, we're running around tying on paper armor. You know, when you go to the restaurant and you've got your little kids, and they come and they put that thing around their neck? I see that as the typical modern Christian breastplate. Absolutely useless. It's made up of a system, or a method, or a program. You know, my life is having problems, our family is having problems. Well, what you need are about 10 or 12 sessions with a counselor. And so they put on the paper breastplate. That's not what you need. What you need is about 10 or 12 hours in the presence of God until you sort out the unholy characteristics in your life and get right with him. That's what you need.

And that's what I pray for Grace Church. Listen, people. We don't need any more programs around here. We don't need any more methods. What we do need is holiness in our lives. That's the bottom line. And we are a society drowning in a sea of immorality, materialism, and humanism that is engulfing us to the point where we are so much victimized by it that we easily bypass the area of personal holiness, and even in the name of Jesus Christ, under the banner of ministries, we substitute paper armor: Programs, techniques, methods. I call it "Christian stuff," just stuff that has no ultimate effect on the real issue.

Look at your own life. You've got problems in your family? Check your own holiness. Are you faithful in reading the Word of God? Is your prayer life what it ought to be? Are you loving your family the way you should? Are you speaking for Jesus Christ unashamed in your society and your culture, wherever you are? Are you giving to the Lord what you ought to give sacrificially and taking care of the stewardship of all the rest of it that you keep? Are you living a righteous life in categories of your life as you've outlined them, and as God has in his Word?

Because if you're not, why would you expect your life to go well? If it did, then God would defeat his own purposes, right? That's where we need to go. But, you know, people want to find an answer at the extreme. They'd rather wear a paper breastplate than deal with the real issues. If there's disobedience in your life, if there's sin in your life, and it's unconfessed and unrepented of, and you just keep doing it, if you have wrong attitudes, you harbor resentments, and there are problems, and you never get them straightened out, if you have wrong thoughts that you cultivate, if what you say isn't what it ought to be, if your deeds aren't what they ought to be, and you just keep living like this, I'll promise you, gilt edge guaranteed, you're going to have trouble. You're going to lose your joy.

Another thing that's going to happen is you're to lose your fruitfulness. You're going to become nonproductive. You're going to shrivel, as it were, as a branch on the vine. And I'll give you a third thing. You're going to lose your reward, too. John says, "Look to yourselves that you lose not the things that you've wrought, but that you receive your full reward." Some of you are going to diminish to capacity for service to God throughout eternity in heaven.

And I'll add one other thing. You'll bring reproach on God's glory. Why would you want to live like that? Are you so ungrateful to God that you would, number one, live a sinful life, an unrighteous life, and forfeit the joy that he wants to give? Would you say "no" to his gifts? Are you so ungrateful to God's potential in you that you would live an unrighteous life and say "no" to the thing he wants to produce through your life? Would you say "no" to God in terms of what he wants for you to enjoy throughout all eternity in his heavenly kingdom by restricting yourself? Would you say "no" to God, who seeks glory in the midst of men, by living an unrighteous life that brings down his name?

See how foolish it is? And it's all an affront to him. God, as it were, stands on the end of heaven, the edge of heaven. His hands are filled with blessing. Those blessings include joy, fruitfulness, ultimate rewards, and glory for himself. And would you turn your back and chase your own sinfulness? Listen, people. As I intimated earlier, we have never even begun to see what God could do with this church, in this place, in this country, and around the world, if we begin to really get our lives in harmony with the righteous principals of the Word of God. And I'm talking to me as much as anybody else.

That's the bottom line. If you've got problems, they are problems directly related to that area of your life. I'll tell you, if things are right in your life and you're righteous before God, you probably won't even have too many trials, because there's not a whole lot to refine. So God has laid out for us simplicity in his Word. It's amazing to me how Christians always want to ignore the bottom line simplicity and substitute a superficial answer for what is a very clear biblical solution.

Well, what I'm trying to say is get your armor on, folks. This is war, and I'll never be contented. I'll go down breathing my last breath saying, "Lord, I want to win this last battle." I believe that God wants us to accomplish all we can with the potential he's given us, and I think that involves every one of us making this commitment.

Listen, I want to have you just think with me for another minute or two. In 1 Peter 2:11 Peter says this. "Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* - " now he's on his knees begging them " - as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

Now Peter is saying, "This is war, and unless you get yourself committed to righteousness - " and by that I don't mean you never sin. I mean there is a decreasing frequency of it, and when you do, you confess it, you repent of it, and you turn from it. You deal with it before God. You are honest enough to evaluate your life. He is saying, "I beseech you, abstain from fleshly lusts, for they are warring against your soul." When you fall to them you lose, and there goes joy, and there goes fruitfulness, and there goes reward, and there goes ultimately God's honor in the face of the world.

That's the negative. "Abstain from fleshly lusts." The positive is in verse 12. "Having your behavior honest among the Gentiles." Be committed. Live a righteousness life. Live a life above reproach. Listen, in Hebrews 11:13 it says they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Hey, we are. We're strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and we don't understand that enough. You know, we have got ourselves so rocked into this earth, we are locked in concrete here. We get into the whims of the earth and the world's things, and we get all involved in loving the world and the things of the world, as John said. Instead, the people in the book of Hebrews, it says that they, "looked for a city whose builder and maker was God." That Paul says to the Philippians that "our citizenship is in heaven." Jesus says, "The world isn't where we belong. The world hates us. We're not of the world. We have no part in the world." And yet we get entrenched and we lose our perspective. We don't see ourselves living in the heavenlies, fighting a spiritual warfare, pursuing a

righteous life with all of our energy dependent upon his resources.

Listen, absolute end of stupidity for a Christian is to become engulfed in the world system. In 2 Timothy 2:3 Paul says, "As a good soldier endure hardness - " take it when it's tough. Verse 4 then says, listen to this, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life." What he's saying is this. You can't be in the army and be a civilian. You can't be both, and if you've come to fight for the commander and to serve the Lord, then get out of the system.

There are enough resources in this church spiritually, intellectually, in terms of spiritual gifts, in terms of acts of fellowship and ministry, in terms of finances to do beyond what we could even conceive – beyond what we could even conceive - if we had the commitment and if we were righteous. I don't want you to do things because you feel pressured to do them. I want you to do them because they flow out of a holy life, you see? You know what I say? If the believers, number one, have the belt on and are committed at all cost, and, number two, are living a holy life, you don't have to say much of anything because out of that holiness will come all the responses that are prompted by the Spirit of God. That's why I resist all the high pressure tactics used in Christianity. They're bypassing the real issue, which is genuine commitment and true holiness.

So we should present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable under God. Holy. We should, as Paul said in Colossians 3, set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. We've got to have the breastplate on, people. We've got to do what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:34. He says, "Awake to righteousness, and stop sinning."

And you know, just the littlest thing can do it. When a commander starts to fight a battle with another army, the first thing he does is send out an advanced group and they establish a beachhead, and then from that beachhead the infiltration takes place. What Satan wants to find in your life is just a little crack in the dam, and that's all he needs to burst the whole dam. It's the little foxes that spoil the vines. Be aware, and remember this, too, that in the end, you're going to win. In the end, you're going to be victorious. No sense in forfeiting all of the great things that God has for you now.

I pray that you would be full of joy. I pray this church would be filled with joy. I pray that this church will be filled with fruitfulness. I pray that this church will be filled with productive ministry and rewarded in glory. I pray that God will be lifted up, and I know it will happen when we're committed to real righteousness. Because the resource is there in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

In closing, the words of John Newton. This is what he wrote. "Though many foes beset you round, and feeble is your arm, your life is hid with Christ in God, beyond the realm of harm. Weak as you are you shall not fade, or fainting shall not die. Jesus the strength of every saint, will aid you from on high. Though unperceived by mortal sense, faith sees him always near. A guide, a glory, a defense, then what have you to fear. As surely as he overcame, and triumphed once for you. So surely you that

love his name shall in him triumph, too.” Let’s pray.

Father, we have that ultimate confidence that we will triumph. But we know that even that ultimate confidence cannot protect us now if we’re unholy. So we ask that you would gird us, that you would cover us with the breastplate of righteousness that comes from obedient hearts. Oh God, make us obedient to your Word, to see that we can live holily, justly, blamelessly in the midst of a crooked and perverse world. And we’ll thank you for the privilege in Christ’s name, amen.

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