

Stand Firm, Wearing the Breastplate of Righteousness

By Mark Jarvinen

Last week we spoke of Satan and his forces as the enemies of our souls, who attack Christians by dividing them as individuals in their allegiance to Christ, and by dividing them corporately through doctrinal or personal disputes within the body of Christ. To counteract these ploys, we need to stand firm, wearing the belt of truth, learning to think and to live according to the truth of God's Word. The truth believed and applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit will allow us to walk in integrity, hiding nothing, and therefore not allowing Satan a foothold in our lives.

The next piece in the armor of God is the "**breastplate of righteousness**," which will serve as our focus today (**Ephesians 6:14b**). Of what significance was a breastplate in a Roman soldier's armor? Called a "**coat of mail**," it covered the front and back of a soldier's body from the neck to the thighs. This piece of armor protected all the vital organs from injury, but especially the heart. If the heart is pierced, the soldier dies.

In spiritual warfare, evil forces seek to get at the heart of our resistance with **doubts** and **confusion** about our true status in Christ. Just as the heart is the wellspring of our physical lives, pumping the life-giving flow of blood to the entire body; **we refer to the heart in spiritual terms as the wellspring of our life in God, the control center of our inner person, the seat of the mind, will, and emotions, where the Spirit of Christ indwells us.** It is here where the enemy assaults us with confusion and doubt concerning our

relationship with God. And if the enemy can get us to doubt our salvation, he will not have much trouble with us. We will be paralyzed in battle and rendered ineffective in our service for Christ.

What is Satan's strategy in bringing confusion and doubt into a believer's life? Last week we learned that Satan is a "divider." **This week we see him as a "denouncer."** In other words, he assaults believers with lies and accusations in order to cause them to doubt their salvation. Satan is out to destroy our effectiveness as witnesses for Christ in the world by tormenting our minds, reminding us of our past mistakes and sins. When we begin to dwell on these past sins, we forget the forgiveness we have received and feel unworthy to serve the Lord. If we give in to this thinking, Satan has us living in defeat, instead of the victory that is ours in Christ.

This is precisely why Paul counsels Christians in **Ephesians 6:14**, to stand firm with the "**breastplate of righteousness**" in place. As believers in Christ, we possess a righteousness or "**acceptability with God**", that properly understood, helps us ward off the accusations of Satan and live free in the Gospel. It is my experience as a pastor that a person who has genuinely received Christ as Savior can still be hazy, or even confused about what it means to be right with God. These are the individuals that become prime targets and easy prey to the schemes of the enemy.

What's involved with standing firm with the breastplate of righteousness in place?

I. WE MUST UNDERSTAND OUR NEED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Do you remember the immediate reaction of Adam and Eve after they first ate of the forbidden fruit and fell into sin? **Genesis 3:7** says, "***Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked;***" **In other words, sin caused them to be ashamed.** What did Adam and Eve do when they realized they were naked? They sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. What does this symbolize? Certainly an attempt to cover up their shame. But on an even deeper level, it was an attempt to patch together their own righteousness or acceptability to God and each other. That's what humanity has been trying to do ever since.

But this attempt to patch together their own righteousness didn't work. In **Genesis 3:8** Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden. Instead of running to meet Him as they would have done earlier, they hid from the Lord. Their sense of guilt and shame was overpowering and their fig leaf coverings (their patched up righteousness) didn't do the job. Whereas once they had been supremely and profoundly acceptable to God; now they were unacceptable, and they knew it. This problem of an innate sense of shame and unacceptability before God has affected humanity ever since. And today, just as in every generation past, people desperately attempt to patch up their own righteousness, their "**designer fig leaves,**" in a futile attempt at acceptability. In real life, these "fig leaf outfits" take on many possible forms, e.g. moral uprightness, philanthropy, community service, status, possessions, physical appearance, you name it. The mistaken notion by many is that "**I will do the best that I can, and God will make up or overlook what's lacking at the end of my life.**" This is a perversion of the truth. Jesus taught us that you can't put new wine in old wineskins. Not one iota of self-effort will do. If

we try to stand against Satan with a righteousness of our own, he'll have us for lunch. What we need is not our own patched up righteousness, but a righteousness that comes from outside ourselves, something that only God can give us. Isn't it ironic that the same God who was sinned against in the garden, is the only one who can give us what we really need to regain our acceptability with Him? This leads to my second point

II. WE MUST GRASP THE MEANING OF IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans is an important book in the Bible for gaining an understanding of "**the righteousness of God.**" Romans 3:20 says:

"No one will be declared righteous (acceptable) in his (God's) sight by observing the law;"

In other words, no patched up righteousness will do. Verse 21 - 22 goes on to add,

"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...."

The word "**impute**" from the Latin means "**to put within, or to place on one's account.**" As a person stakes his complete confidence in Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice for sin through his death on the cross, God marks the ledger account of his life, previously in debt because of sin, as "**paid in full,**" with the righteousness of Christ. Paul speaks of this in **II Corinthians 5:21**, writing,

"God made him who had no sin (Jesus) to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

God transfers our sin onto Jesus, and Jesus' sinless obedience to God is transferred to us. This transfer is called the "**Great Transaction**" because without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness. We are declared righteous (acceptable) by God on the basis of Christ's righteousness, not our own. This great transaction is called "**justification.**"

I hope you see the significance of this. Our acceptability before God is nothing of ourselves - it comes solely on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice. God accepts those who believe on the merits of Christ's perfect sacrifice for sin, not anything intrinsic to us. Satan, therefore, has no basis upon which to accuse us, because we aren't presenting God with our own patched up righteousness, but Christ's perfect righteousness which has been credited to our account, having become ours as a gift of God's grace.

And so **Satan, the denouncer**, comes against you, a child of God, with his accusations. What do you do? **Warren Wiersbe** tells of a woman who called him on the phone after a radio broadcast saying "**When I was younger, I sinned grievously against the Lord. Now I've been asked to teach a Sunday School class, and I don't think I'm worthy. What should I do?**" Wiersbe asked her, "**Are you a Christian?**" She quickly responded, "**Oh, yes, I have trusted Christ for my salvation.**" "**What did the Lord do about those sins you committed as a young lady?**" She said, "**Well, I guess they're forgiven and gone.**" "**THEN SERVE THE LORD,**" he urged her. Don't let past memories put you on the shelf. Make sure your breastplate is firmly in place.

Besides these memories of past failures, Satan can use your feelings to accuse you. It's hard to explain, but on most Monday's throughout my pastoral career I have felt more drained than usual. In fact, I resonated with an article one pastor wrote for **Leadership Magazine** in the early years of my ministry in which he shared how he adopted the phrase "**never on Monday,**" as his slogan to live by. His point was that after expending a great deal of emotional and spiritual energy on a Sunday, Monday was not a good day for him to deal with problem issues or difficult decisions. His reserves were depleted and his mood was low. The author didn't say it, but Monday's for pastors are an opportune time for Satan to attack. There's an ebb and flow in all of our lives. We would do well to recognize our down times and make sure to secure our breastplates. I think its fair to say that when we are run down from a lack of sleep, or practicing poor eating habits, or not getting enough exercise, we have a greater tendency to give in to feelings of depression, self-pity, or anger. Don't be surprised if Satan's accusing voice is thrown somewhere into the mix in times like that. We need to take these thoughts and feelings captive to Christ. He puts them under the blood of Christ. Nothing Satan can say or do will change our position in Christ. The devil can rob us of our joy only if we allow him to.

A side note here. **It is important to distinguish between Satan's accusations and the conviction of the Holy Spirit.** Keep in mind that God convicts us of sin in love to build us up; whereas Satan accuses in hatred to tear us down. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to convict us, Satan uses feelings and memories to accuse us. When God convicts us, it draws us closer to Him, but when Satan accuses, it pulls us away from Him. When God

convicts, it's so we will look ahead and have hope. When Satan accuses, he wants us to look back and give up.

Another way that Satan may seek to accuse us is through others. As I study Scripture, I notice that everyone who ever attempted to serve the Lord was falsely accused. **Nehemiah** had a vision to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem after many years of Babylonian captivity. He was accused of trying to become a king. **David** was the brunt of lies from false accusers in Saul's court. **Moses** was accused by his own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, of misusing his authority and trying to Lord it over everybody. **Paul** was in and out of Roman and Jewish courtrooms on trumped up charges made by enemies of the Gospel. Even **our Lord** was labeled as a glutton and a wine-bibber, condemned to death by the very people he came to save. **WHAT CAN YOU DO WHEN OTHERS ACCUSE YOU?** Turn to Christ. He is on our side and He will justify you. **Romans 8:31, 33-34** says:

"If God be for us, who can be against us? ... Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

Therefore, we've seen that Satan uses our own memories and feelings with which to accuse us, not to mention the attacks and criticisms of other people. In addition, Satan even uses our circumstances to bring us down. **Job's life is a classic example of Satan using circumstances to accuse a righteous person.** Remember Job's friends? They believed that his trials and suffering were a direct result of some sin in his life. They accused him again and again of hiding his sins. Suffering is not always the result of sin in

one's life. One of life's mysteries is why bad things happen to good people. God had his reasons for allowing Job to suffer as he did. Moreover, God never abandoned Job in his suffering. **Romans 8:35 & 37** have always encouraged me where it says:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

At age 31, Martha and I left the first congregation I had served in **New Jersey**, after three years of ministry, with two small children and a U-Haul truck, to begin a new ministry in the midwest. From the very start, things did not go as planned. We became discouraged. Satan began to harass my thoughts, suggesting that I had missed God's will. I reasoned, **"Perhaps, if I had prayed more fervently and sought better counsel, these hardships wouldn't be happening."** I've since learned that while some difficulties may be the result of our own actions, and God allows adversity to discipline us, **He doesn't arbitrarily use circumstances to punish us or desert us in our hour of need.** When we feel that God doesn't care and that He is punishing us for some sin or failure on our part, know that Satan is working through circumstances to accuse or harass you. However, our trials can't defeat us if we remember who is on our side guarding our hearts, using the breastplate of righteousness to protect our thoughts and emotions.

Remember In whose righteousness you stand today. Only in the righteousness of Christ can we stand firm in the face of the enemy. If you've placed your trust in Christ, this breastplate is in place and the victory is yours as you take your stand in the righteousness that Christ provides. **A-men.**

