

BE ON GUARD: THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Ephesians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 16:10-14

My friend Jason Chew had to wear an IOTV (improved outer tactical vest) every day while he was stationed in Afghanistan. It weighed between twenty and thirty pounds, but he did not need to be reminded to put on his vest. He knew that in a war zone the battle could come at any time. Every soldier knew that what seemed cumbersome and heavy at times could save their life if they were attacked. Jason said that when a person put the vest on every day, they got used to it. It was part of their uniform. No one would think of leaving on a mission without it.

Group Discussion. Do you feel sometimes that doing the right thing in obedience to God is cumbersome—almost an annoyance—like wearing a heavy vest? Talk about what those moments are like.

Personal Reflection. When do you feel safest, most protected? Where are you and who is around you at those times?

The next piece of armor we are called to take up is the breastplate—a heavy metal plate that covered the front and back of the body and protected vital organs like the heart, lungs, and liver. The breastplate was held in place with leather straps and hooked on to the leather belt just below it. It shielded the body from arrows and blows from a sword. Wearing the breastplate could mean the difference between life and death. The early church father Jerome said, “One who has put on a sturdy breastplate is difficult to wound.”* *Read Ephesians 6:14.*

1. What is the breastplate made of in this passage?

What image does a “breastplate of righteousness” evoke for you?

2. The Bible uses the word *righteousness* in two ways. First, we have the righteousness of Christ given to us by God’s grace when we believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. We are in a right relationship with God because the penalty of our sin was paid in full on the cross. The second kind of righteousness comes as we live rightly before God and the world. It doesn’t save us, but it reflects God’s character and demonstrates our obedience to God’s Word. Reflecting on this, what do you think the breastplate of righteousness is meant to symbolize?

3. How might the devil and the evil forces under his control try to attack your vital organs—your heart, your spirit, your emotions, your ambitions, your attitudes—as a Christian?

4. Think of a time in your life when you were not living according to God’s design and you fell into one of Satan’s traps of discouragement, deception, or sinful behavior. How did you get back to a better place?

5. Followers of Jesus should have an awareness of living under the protection of Christ’s righteousness given to us by God’s grace. What effect does this truth have on your daily battle with evil?

Read 1 Corinthians 16:10-14.

6. In this section of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul is making some specific requests and sharing his plans. What requests does he make in regard to Timothy?

7. What four commands does Paul give to those who seek to live righteously in a world system that opposes them (v. 13)?

Rewrite the commands in your own words, inserting your own name into them.

8. Which of these commands do you most need to hear today and why?

9. Now focus on the command in verse 14. How does it expand the meaning of the other commands?

10. **Armor Assessment.** At times, ancient armor was adorned with a symbol. What symbol or design would you put on the breastplate of righteousness that God offers to you and why?

11. Does it make you feel more vulnerable or more protected when you realize that God's breastplate covers your innermost thoughts, feelings, and desires? Explain.

12. Every day we are called to pursue right living as we face the world. We don't strive for perfection (an impossible quest) but a life that pleases the Lord. What can you do to remind yourself to consciously, intentionally seek right living each day?



Give thanks for the promise of righteousness, that is, having a right relationship with God, because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Pray for the willingness to live outwardly what God has declared us to be.

NOW OR LATER

The Lord is often pictured in the Old Testament as a divine warrior. Isaiah 59:15-19 is one passage that describes him that way, and it forms the background for the armor of God in Ephesians 6. Read Isaiah's words. Then read the passage again and identify the parallels with Ephesians 6 that you discover there. Do not miss the powerful teaching of the passage: our armor is the Lord's own armor, provided to us as a gift and empowered by the Spirit to ensure our victory.

*Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3.6.14.