

Righteous Protection

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Date: 20 October 2024

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[0 : 00] Thank you, men.

If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians chapter 6 is a story in Greek mythology about a great hero named Achilles. The legend is that his mother, when he was a baby, dipped him in the river Styx to coat his entire body with an invincible shield.

And when she dipped him, she held him by the tip of his heel so that only one portion of his body was not covered by those empowered waters.

In the course of the great battle of the Trojan War, Achilles was struck in the heel of all places with an arrow and was slain. It was the one uncovered point on his body where he was vulnerable.

And ever since then, men and women have been vulnerable by an injury to the Achilles. I promise you, it hurts. That's just mythology, my friend.

[1 : 17] What we're talking about these days is a real war. But a real war that if we're not careful, we can be very vulnerable to. It's an unseen war that is stoked by the devil and his demons.

That is the undercurrent to much of the conflict and the difficulty that is seen and surrounds us today. We need not be vulnerable to that.

I think there's power in knowledge, but only if you put that knowledge to use. We've studied the schemes of the evil one.

Now we study protection from it. The Apostle Paul called it the armor of God. And he encourages us to make sure we're buckled up.

Make sure we're plated. Make sure we're shielded. Make sure that we're properly footed. Make sure we're armed. Last week we looked at the belt of truth. That it is imperative that we not only believe in Christ, but that we commit our lives to such a belief.

[2 : 24] That we live it out. And the reality is that that kind of, like a belt, kind of holds everything together. Today we look at what the Apostle Paul calls the breastplate of righteousness.

When he says in Ephesians 6 verse 14, The breastplate was a key piece of the armor of a Roman soldier.

It was often called a thorax. It was a breastplate that typically was made of bronze, which covered the front of the body. Although there were earlier versions, more primitive versions of it, that were made of thick metal.

Sometimes with bone and metal, excuse me, thick leather. Excuse me, let me say that again. Made with thick leather, with bone and metal sometimes sewn in.

More affluent officers may have made one of, have one made of chain mail, which is a small metal rings linked together to form a chest armor.

[3 : 30] But the breastplate usually started below the neck and went to the top of the thighs. It was made to protect the vital organs, primarily the lungs and the heart.

Now with our lungs, we breathe in and out. We take in air and we exhale. And if we take in bad air, we'll pay for it.

In the same way, spiritually, if we take in polluted stuff, we're going to suffer. You can't hang out in evil, negative, unwholesome atmospheres and it not affect you spiritually.

You're going to breathe it in. It's going to affect you. Let me just say that in the last days before a national election of such significance, I encourage you to be careful how much of the propaganda you breathe in, okay?

It's a big election. But what if it doesn't go your way? What if it doesn't go the way that I want it to?

[4 : 43] What are you going to do? If your person loses the election, what are you going to do? I'm going to tell you something. On November the 6th, whoever's going to be the president next year, on November the 6th, I'm going to get up and I'm going to make me a good, strong cup of coffee and I'm going to walk my dog and I'm going to read my Bible and I'm going to seek the face of the Lord and I'm going to trust his hand regardless.

My trust is in God. The Oval Office does not change that. And I pray that America will make the best decision of two poor choices in my opinion.

And I don't care to discuss that. But we need not be consumed with it. The world's consumed with it. But our hope is in Christ, folks.

Let's not miss the perspective here. Don't take in too much of that mess. You'll be mad at the world. Now, my old adage is, and I think y'all live by it, don't spend more time watching the news than you spend time with the Lord.

Because it will change your perspective. There's a lot that's worse, however, than watching the news and taking that in. And the things that are worse than that, stay away from them.

[6 : 07] There's no need in it. Be careful what you take in. Protect the air in which you breathe. Take in good air. Stay away from the unhealthy. The breastplate protected the lungs.

It also protected the heart. And in the Greek mindset, the heart was the seat of a person's will, of their emotions, of their beliefs, of their attitudes.

And the reality is, although we understand some things, anyway, about cardiology, the reality is when we talk about the heart, we talk in the same way as the Greek mindset.

When you want somebody to give their all, you say, put your heart into it. When you get your heart broke, you say, somebody broke my heart.

Or you'll say, I believe it with all my heart. Or even when you really want somebody to know you're telling the truth, I crossed my heart. That's when you know it's settled they got to be telling the truth.

[7 : 12] Especially with the needle in the eye. But that's a different subject. When Paul talks about having the mind of Christ in Philippians chapter 2, he speaks of how feelings and attitudes should be like Christ.

Philippians 2, 5 says, having this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. I believe it's best summarized in Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23 through 25.

It says, keep your heart with all vigilance. For from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech and put devious talk from you.

Let your eyes look directly forward and your gaze be straight before you. Don't look to and fro. Look straight ahead. Righteousness protects what we take in.

Righteousness protects what we breathe out. It also protects our heart, how we feel, how we respond. Well, what kind of righteousness am I talking about? Well, I'm glad you asked.

- [8 : 12] Because it's not all the same. I want to share with you quickly three types of righteousness. And I want to be clear, all righteousness is not the same.
- One, there's insufficient righteousness. That's when we just try to do the right thing. We just do it in our own strength. And some think that they're righteous because of their religious efforts.
- Jesus spoke of that in a parable in Luke chapter 18, verses 9 through 14. He said this, And he pointed at the guy next to him at the altar.
- Don't do that if you come to the altar today. Don't point at the guy next to you, okay? He said, I fast twice a week. I grieve tithes. I give tithes. And maybe grieve. But anyway, I give tithes of all that I get.
- But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to the house. He's justified rather than the other.
- [9 : 26] For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. And the one who humbles himself will be exalted. We give, we serve, we worship. We do those things. I want you to hear me this morning.
- We do those things not to pay back, not to be sufficient, but to obey. To trust God and obey.
- Obey the Lord. Trust everything else with the Lord. I want you to listen to what the Apostle Paul said. He said in Philippians chapter 3, 4 through 7, he said, If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.
- Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteous under the law of blameless.
- But whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ. Now, to put it in our language, that's like him saying that I was dedicated to the Lord as a child.
- [10 : 27] And I came from a family that was pillars in the church. And I was trained in all the programs of the church. And I volunteered. I worked in areas. And nobody even saw me doing it.
- I did stuff nobody even recognized. Then I served in leadership. I was a deacon. I taught a life group. I took some Bible classes. I might even worked on staff.
- The reality is, so much similar to what he said, all of that can come in the way. All of that stuff can set us back from what really matters. Paul explains his insufficient righteousness in Romans.
- When he says Romans, in Romans 7, verse 15, He said, For I don't understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
- Have you ever been there? Don't look at me smugly. You've been there. I know you have. Listen to what he goes on to say. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh.
- [11 : 26] For I have the desire to do what's right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I don't do the good that I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Of course we've been there, because our own righteousness is insufficient.
- We can't do this alone. We're not good enough, period. And then there's also imputed righteousness. That's a theological term, a word we don't use very much anymore, but I want to explain it.
- When someone submits his or her life to Christ, Christ, excuse me, God imputes Christ's righteousness into our lives. When Christ died on the cross, he was sinless.

He was perfect, but he took on our sin. When we become Christians, we're sinful and we're unrighteous, but when we become a child of God, we are made right. We take on his righteousness, and we receive his ascribed, our imputed righteousness.

Again, the apostle Paul, who God used to build our theology off the teachings of Christ and the law of God.

[12 : 38] He speaks a lot about this. And let me just say something about the apostle Paul. Just due to some conversations I've had in circles recently, I want you to understand that some try to separate the words of Jesus and the words of Paul, and they say that what Jesus said is what's important, and that somehow Paul is just a commentator along the way, not so much.

He had his problems. Don't pick portions of God's word to value over other portions.

This is God's word. Period. It is God-breathed, inspired, and we are able to see the life of Christ through the gospels.

We're able to see his teaching and see what he shows us and how to live. And then God brought up the apostle Paul trained in all these ways that he spoke of to share with us how do we apply what we see in Christ's life?

How do we apply what we hear him teach? How do we apply that to our life? That's where our Christian theology comes from. Paul, and with the help of a couple of other fellows, but the reality is most of it comes from Paul.

[14 : 01] So don't ever try to separate that somehow if Jesus didn't speak of this, then the Bible must not speak of it. That's not true. That's not true. That's just a little side note.

That's free. That don't cost a thing. Don't pick portions of God's word to value and others to not. That's the word of God. God uses it all. It's all inspired.

And what the apostle Paul says in Philippians chapter three, verse nine, is that when we gain Christ and are found in him, we don't have, notice how he says this, a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God, that depends on faith.

In other words, as children of God, we have got what we need to live for Christ. We have righteous protections. That means that when we're saved, we're set apart, the Holy Spirit indwells us with the righteousness of Christ.

Christ went to the cross sinless. He died his death for sinners. And when we accept his truth in our lives, he imputes righteousness into our lives.

[15 : 14] We are wired into it. He took our sin. We take his righteousness. The great theologian of the 16th century, Martin Luther, called it the glorious exchange when we hand him our sin and he hands us his righteousness.

Christ has credited us with righteousness. Not on what we've done, but on what he's done for us.

When we lost power, when Helene came through, we have a generator hooked up and the generator kicked in and was working wonderfully for the first 30 hours. And then it died.

I went out there and laid hands on it. It didn't work. And I just had faith the power was going to come back on and if we find some kind of supplemental help, then the reality is we'll just go without it longer.

So we'll just bear it. And we bore it. And it was dark. And I told you last week about the solar lights. And we just hung on, lost our food in the refrigerator and all that stuff.

[16 : 23] And several people in the church offered us generous. They did. And I said, no, we'll be all right. We'll be all right. We'll be all right. Well, finally, several days later, somebody said, Pastor, I'm bringing a generator and I'm going to wire it into your house.

And I don't want to hear nothing else about it. I said, all right. He said, I'll bring you some gas. So he brought me some gas. I said, how often am I going to fill that thing? Every three hours? No, no, no, no, no. About every 12. So he hooked me up and we had lights and as it got warmer, we had ceiling fans and we were thanking God for the lights and the ceiling fans.

We even got the sin box lit back up and was able to watch some TV, you know. So not watching sin. But anyway, but we got that taken care of.

Some of y'all don't remember what they called it. But anyway, but you know what? What if all that would have been wired in and we just said, nah, we just don't bother.

As it gets hotter outside, we ain't going to cut those ceiling fans on. We're not going to cut a lamp on. We're just going to sit here in the dark. We've got the capacity.

[17 : 35] It's been wired in, but we're just not going to utilize it. Well, that'd be kind of dumb. So it is for the Christian.

When we are in Christ, we're made right. We've been justified. Romans 8 verse 1 says, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

When we come to Christ, Christ makes us free. Now, that freedom and that credited righteousness needs to reflect in our lives.

And that's the last type of righteousness. That's empowered righteousness. That's living out what we have within us as believers. Imputed righteousness changes our position.

Once we're saved, we are in Christ. Our position has changed. Righteousness has been fastened on. Now we have to utilize it.

[18 : 37] Now we're empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. Now we have to practically live that out to daily depend upon his lead. And right living is what keeps Satan from getting an easy opportunity to attack.

So let me ask you, is there a place that you go that makes you more vulnerable to fall into sin? If there is, stop going there.

Is there a person that Satan uses to lead you into temptation? If there is, stop hanging with them.

Now, if they live in your home, that's a different matter. Satan divides families. God does not. But is there a time of day or a situation or a conversation that makes you more vulnerable.

If there is, notice that. And as the great theologian Barney Fife said, nip it in the bud. Get rid of it.

[19 : 54] Make the necessary changes to live right. And when we do, we're plated. Now, if we're plated with right living, if our minds are set on Christ and our eyes are fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith as Hebrews 12, 1 and 2 says he is, then we grow more like him with each defeated temptation.

This kind of utilize, this kind of living utilizes the strength that we have in Christ and makes us much stronger to the next attack of the evil one. And believe me, Satan will try his best to defeat you.

He don't want to give you a headache. He wants to ruin your life. And he can force us to, he cannot force us to sin, but he works overtime to try to find our weakness.

He loves to strike a spark that leads to a full flame of fire of temptation and failure. However, when we come to Christ, old things are passed away.

behold, all things are new. We have a strength to squash the flickers of failure and weakening the force of temptation. Matthew 5, verse 6, Jesus said, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.

[21 : 09] Is that what we're hungry for? Does all of our lives reflect that? I know it reflects it on Sunday morning at 1030, but does all of our lives reflect that? In the Song of Solomon, it talks about building a wall to protect the vineyard, but it warns and says it's the little foxes that spoil the vines.

And what it's talking about when you try to keep the deer and whatever other kind of animals they may have fought to keep out, if they leave cracks in that fence, little foxes will get through there and they won't eat the grapes off the vine.

they'll eat that tender part of the vine around the bottom and they eat all the way around it and they kill the whole vine. You lose all the fruit. And that's what Solomon says in there.

He says, it's the little foxes that spoil the vines. And quite honestly, fruitfulness, our fruitfulness is hindered by the little things in our lives. Like the little cracks in the breastplate that exposes the heart.

If you've got a little bitter in you, it'll expose you. If you've got a little look that you look too long at, it'll expose you. If you have a little selfishness in your life, it'll expose you.

[22 : 21] If you have a little self-reliance, it'll expose you. Are you crooked? Just a little bit. It'll expose you. All of these things will throw us off in our walk with God and exposes us to an enemy that loves to attack.

Not only does he love to attack, but he also loves to accuse. He's called the accuser of the brethren. And our cracks leave room for his insults. And be clear, if you're not living it, the world will know it.

Your witness will be affected. And even if the world doesn't know it, nobody but you knows it, you will fail to be a witness because you're hindered, because you are weakened, because that weakness has been exposed to the evil one.

And I promise you, the devil will remind you of it often. He'll not only tempt you, he'll dog you out. And he'll remind you of it often.

The reality is that we settle for second best instead of God's very best in our lives too often. We wreck our lives with hypocrisy by not applying that which we know to be true.

[23 : 38] Matthew 6 verse 33 says, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things. You know what that is? That means everything else. The Lord will provide the rest. If we'll seek him, whatever else you're worried about, he'll take care of that.

That means we seek him every day. Are there going to be crazy days? Yeah. Yeah, there's going to be crazy days. Does God understand when crazy days come along?

Yes, of course he understands that. However, we're speaking of more than just Christian lip service. We're talking about more than just showing up. We're speaking of maintaining a nurturing relationship, seeking him daily, seeking the right things of God daily.

Right living is the breastplate that deflects the blows of condemnation and the shots at compromise. That's what deflects many of these blows. It's not in our strength.

It's in the armor of God. It's not in our self-reliance. It's in our dependence upon him. Never underestimate your influence and do not let the devil tell you today that you are done, that you've already messed up, that God can't use you, that there's no starting over.

[24 : 57] There's a Greek word for that and it's baloney. It ain't true. It ain't true. You put on a breastplate of righteousness today, you get it right today and watch how God will use you.

Martin Luther, that 16th century theologian I mentioned, said this. He says, because sometimes we don't think about the influence that we can have as Christians. We don't see it. Why don't you listen to what he says?

The pagan does tremble at the rustling of a leaf. He feels the hound of heaven. That's what he called God, the hound of heaven. He sniffs us out and finds us. We don't find him.

He finds us. He feels the hound of heaven breathing down his neck. Listen to this. He feels crowded by holiness even if it is only made present by an imperfect, partially sanctified human vessel.

God uses imperfect vessels. Thank God. Amen? We'd all be hopeless if not. I want to read that again. I want you to get the full picture here.

[26 : 05] The pagan does tremble at the rustling of a leaf. You think he don't feel God moving in his life? He feels it. He feels the hound of heaven breathing down his neck. He feels crowded by holiness even if it's only made present by an imperfect, partially sanctified human vessel.

Back in the mid-70s, one of the leading golfers in the PGA went golfing one day with Gerald Ford, the president of the United States at the time, Jack Nicklaus and Billy Graham.

He's a pro golfer. He played with Jack, but he was blown away by being with Ford, the president, and Billy Graham. And after he finished, he was standing next to Jack Nicklaus and somebody said, what was it like playing with the president and with Billy Graham?

And he said, Jack just started cussing and carrying on. And then he said, I don't need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat. And he went to the practice team.

His friend followed him and in fury, he just started beating the balls. His neck was growing red. He was somewhat in a tirade.

[27 : 22] And finally, the pro golfer just got silent and settled down. And that friend said, was Billy a little rough on you today?

And Jack replied, no, he didn't even mention religion. It's astonishing that Billy Graham had not said a word about God, about Jesus, or about religion.

Yet the pro was angry when he left under the conviction that came from being in the presence of a man of God, Billy Graham. the righteousness of God is where our victory is.

It's where our hope is. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I want to ask you today, if you've never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, the reality is what I speak of is something foreign to you.

I'm not going to tell you by coming to church you get that. It only comes through a relationship with Christ. If you've never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, I want you to know it'll change your life when you do, for real.

[28 : 42] We'd love to guide you in that, and so I encourage you when we stand and sing in just a moment to come, love to start that process with you, sharing with you what it means to give your life to Christ.

Maybe you've done that but never acknowledged it publicly. We baptized several last week. We'll do it again. Have you ever acknowledged Christ through baptism? If you haven't, you come. We'll line that up.

Maybe God's drawing you to First Baptist Church. God's doing a wonderful work here and we're thankful. Maybe God's leading you to be a part of that. If He is, you come. Or maybe God's just showed you some cracks in your armor, showed you some things aren't right that you need to get right before the Lord.

You do that. You can do that where you are. You can do it at His altar. You can do it with the pastor praying for you. I don't know what God's told you but I know you'll never be happy unless you do exactly what He's told you. So just be obedient.

Heavenly Father, I love you and I ask for you to guide us right now to just simply be obedient and follow your lead in everything that we do in this very moment. In Jesus' precious name, amen.

[29 : 48] Amen. Amen.