

EPHESIANS #101 6:14B 6-7-15

The Breastplate of Righteousness

(Ephesians 6) When I was in high-school I obviously had too much time on my hands. I know that must be true because in 10th grade I memorized an entire book. No, I'm not talking about Philippians or James. I memorized something much more socially useful. I memorized the entire volume of the classic work entitled, "101 Elephant Jokes." Did anyone else in here read that? *When did the elephant sit on the fence? When it's time to get a new fence.* It was a real page turner and enriched my life beyond measure. I thought of it this week as I began my sermon preparations because this week's study in Ephesians marks #101 in the series. I now know not only 101 elephant jokes, I know 101 Ephesian sermons. I will let you be the judge of which is greater. We only have about five studies left as we wrap up with this wonderful portion on the armor of God which He supplies to His soldiers as they fight in His name.

Ephesians 6:**10-17** *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ¹⁵ and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* Our text for today is **14** *Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

Very early one morning an LA motorcycle policeman named Bob Vernon saw a red pickup speed thru a stop sign. Officer Vernon turned on his emergency lights and radioed that he was in pursuit. The pickup pulled over and the officer approached. Meanwhile in the truck the driver had begun to panic, thinking that the cops must already know it was him who had just robbed a convenience store. The sack of stolen money was at his side and his hand was on the gun he had used in the robbery. The officer said, "Good morning, sir, may I see your -" Officer Vernon

never finished the sentence. The driver shoved his gun toward the policeman's chest and fired from just inches away. The cop was knocked flat seven feet away. A few seconds later, to the shock of the criminal, the officer stood up, pulled his revolver and fired twice, the second shot tore thru the door and ripped into the leg of the driver who immediately surrendered. What saved Bob Vernon's life was dozens of layers of Kevlar, the super strong fabric used for bulletproof vests. Only half an inch of it can stop bullets cold. Bob Vernon's story illustrates what is equally true in the spiritual world. The right equipment can save your life and can protect you against the assaults of evil. Today we look at the spiritual equivalent of a bulletproof vest. Paul calls it the breastplate of righteousness. God says to put it on. The imagery is taken from Isaiah 59:17a *He put on righteousness like a breastplate.* And it is taken from the equipment of the Roman soldier. The breastplate would be the main piece of protection for the torso or trunk of the soldier, covering his chest and stomach area. Thus, it protected the most obvious target of the enemy. I remember walking in Appomattox, Virginia among the graves of confederate soldiers killed just before the end of the Civil War. I wondered at the lack of armor given to those soldiers. No helmet, no vests. Their unprotected bodies invited the bullets of the opposition and resulted in untold thousands of deaths. God equips his soldiers better than that. He intends for us to endure to the end of the war with Satan. And so he gives us a breastplate of protection to secure our vital spiritual organs. Let's look at this gift of God for the battle under three headings.

#1 let's see what is meant by the word "righteousness." It is the breastplate of righteousness. Now that word applied to a Christian may refer to one of two things. Believers have both imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness. This is the same as saying that real Christians are both justified and sanctified. The first is a legal status or position. The second is a personal condition. And only one of those is perfect this side of glory. Which one is that? It is imputed righteousness; it is justification. Every true believer, by the grace of the Holy Spirit will develop a certain amount of personal righteousness or godliness but it will never be complete, it will never be something into which we may place our trust. The only righteousness that the New Testament wants us building our trust on is that legal righteousness which is a gift of God on the basis of faith. We have sung this morning one of my favorite hymns, that one about knowing Jesus which is taken from Philippians 3. Please look with me there. The apostle Paul is here describing a certain righteousness which he had obtained as a strict Jew. He

indicates that if you compared him to other men he would have scored very well **5-8** *circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.* Now listen to this **9** *and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.* In that verse the apostle distinguishes between two types of righteousness, one of which is worthless and the other of which is worth everything. The worthless kind he describes as a righteousness of my own. I think you know what he means by that. My own righteousness would be those things I am prone to look to in order to convince myself that I'm a good person, that I am okay with men and God. For Paul it was all the Jewish things he had to do. For us it may be the Presbyterian things we have to do. For Martin Luther 500 years ago it was the Catholic things he had to do. But Luther was a very introspective character who, in the monastery, took the time to analyze to death the breastplate of righteousness he was weaving by his pious acts as a monk. He saw, as I have seen, and Paul has seen, that his own righteousness, however it may stack up compared with others, is full of holes, flimsy and weak. Isaiah described our most righteous deeds as filthy rags. These things we do in hopes of being righteous are unable to stop the bullets of Satanic accusation or the arrows of human condemnation. That is why Paul said that in spite of all he did to get it, that he regarded his self-righteousness as so much rubbish, so much dung compared to what He found in Christ. And what He found in Christ was a righteousness of infinite value. Not a righteousness that was earned, but one that was given him. Remember the words of the song, "to possess by faith what I could not earn, all surpassing gift of righteousness." The valuable kind of righteousness is the kind that comes to us as a gift of God on the basis of faith. It does not change who we are, but it changes everything about our relationship with God. Before we have this righteousness God sees us in our sin as vile rebels deserving a swift and everlasting judgment. Once this righteousness is ours our God sees us as clean, pure, blameless and righteous in His sight. We are made legally just before the Lord. Our Shorter Catechism is so wonderful at this point,

summing up a great deal of Biblical teaching in one sentence. Look at it: What is justification? *Justification is an act of God's free grace whereby He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight.* That is the gift of righteousness, unearned, all of grace. The catechism goes on, *only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.* Just as Paul put it - a righteousness not of my own, but that which is thru faith in Christ. Now, if the righteousness isn't Paul's and isn't yours, then where does it come from? The catechism says it is the righteousness of Christ, imputed, credited to us. Gird up the loins of your mind and think with me here. What we were not able to do, namely to establish a righteousness of our own, the Lord Jesus did, by perfectly keeping the law of God. Jesus was totally, completely and perfectly righteous. And the whole point of what He did at Calvary was to offer His perfect righteousness to satisfy justice for us. The Scripture says that we owed a great debt of sin. The wages of sin is death, is separation from God, is wrath and Jesus took all of that for us. II Corinthians 5:21 *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* Imagine that you owe a \$20,000 debt at the local Sears store. Someone of tremendous wealth heads down there and pays the bill. By that act of another you go from being bound and in debt and in trouble to being free and clear and blameless. That is what Christ's death on the cross was all about. Our sin and guilt was given or imputed, or accredited to Him. His righteousness was imputed or accredited to us. This was the great transaction. And this is how we can now say Romans 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* To possess by faith what I could not earn, all surpassing gift of righteousness. The catechism calls it *the righteousness of Christ imputed to us.* I love how the great hymnwriters describe it. "Jesus Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress. Midst flaming worlds (that is, in the midst of judgement and devastation) in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head." Wesley says in that hymn that it is Christ's righteousness that covers us and equips us for all that we may face. Another great hymn says, "My hope is built on nothing less--" What is your hope built on today my friend? What are you looking to for salvation from your sin? What are you counting on to get you past the bar of divine judgement? What are you counting on to protect you from the forces of darkness? This great Scriptural hymn says, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." The last verse says, "When He shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found, dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless -- (Do you see the connection now

between being in Christ by faith, and being faultless?) --dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.”

Well, I am reluctant to leave this glorious theme, but so we must for having seen now that this righteousness which serves as our breastplate is nothing less than the very righteousness of Jesus imputed to us and received by faith alone, we move now to look at the particular assaults this breastplate is designed to withstand. This is major point #2: the attacks it repels. You see, the only reason we put on a breastplate is when we are under attack and we are asking here, “what attack does righteousness repel?” I offer two suggestions. It seems to me that the Lord supplies us with armor specifically designed to handle the attacks of our enemy. And the breastplate of righteousness is specifically designed to resist the attacks of fear and guilt. Let’s think first about fear. When Zacharias announced the coming of Christ he said in Luke 1 that Jesus was coming **74-75** *To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.* And our ability or inability to serve the Lord is directly linked to the fear factor. Fearful Christians are unfruitful Christians and ineffective soldiers for the Lord. Therefore, it is one of Satan’s chief goals to rob us of our confidence and fill us with fear. But he can only do that if we listen to his lies. If we listen to the word of God, if we understand the gospel and its meaning for us then we will be courageous because we will see ourselves protected by, covered by, shielded by righteousness. Proverbs 28:**1** *The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion.* There is a wealth of Biblical psychology contained in that verse **1a** *The wicked flee when no one is pursuing.* Paranoia is founded in guilt. Courage is found in righteousness. **1b** *the righteous are bold as a lion.* Bold as lions, not intimidated by the persecution of the raised eyebrow, not held captives by the opinions of men. Jesus had this fascinating word for us in Luke 12:**4** *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.* “No more!”, you say, “What is left?!” God says a lot is left. **5** *But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!* Jesus says, “Don’t let the fear of being killed control you. That’s all they can do.” Ever been afraid to ask someone something? I sure remember the fear I had as a young man to ask a girl out for a date. How many times did I pick up the phone and put it down before I found the nerve to call? What do you say to somebody in that position? Go ahead, the worst that can happen is that they will say, “no.” As an insecure teen I didn’t find that very

comforting, frankly. Well, how does this sit with you. Jesus says to us about our enemies, “all they can do is kill you.” He speaks as if it is a little thing but the ultimate fear for us is the fear of death. But Jesus says that what is infinitely more fearful is the judgement associated with that death. There is something in death to be feared but it is not the dying but the standing before God in judgement. And righteousness speaks to that fear. When you go thru judgement what you must have is righteousness. Proverbs 11:**4a** *Riches do not profit in the day of wrath..* You can’t buy your way into heaven. You can’t bribe the eternal Judge. **4** *Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death.* Is that the first death or the second death? The second death which is the lake of fire. Righteousness eliminates the danger of death and therefore eliminates the fear of death and with it every other fear. The fully-equipped soldier of Christ is to fight His battles with confidence, with courage. Why? The answer is found in that hymn we quoted earlier. “*My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.*” Listen as it goes on, “*I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus name.*” What is the sweetest frame? The word “frame” there means “feeling.” Webster’s definition #5: *a particular state or disposition, a mood.* We talk about a frame of mind. What the hymnwriter is saying is that I dare not trust my feelings, no matter how pleasant, warm and glowing they are. How many have been deceived by their feelings? How many have thought all to be well with their souls because they sang a hymn and felt better, because they heard a preacher with delight? But friend, if your confidence is found in feelings you are in big trouble. If you go into battle having put on the breastplate of sweet feelings you will find yourself very soon desperate and fearful, unable to locate your armor in the heat of battle. The enemy will attack, your sweet feelings will dissolve and you will be left asking, “Where did the feelings go? Why am I abandoned in the midst of the battle?” And the answer God gives is that you never put on the breastplate of righteousness, you never built your confidence where it should be built, on the blood and righteousness of Jesus. You dare not trust the sweetest frame. Lloyd-Jones says, “*Your highest frames, your best feelings, can be most treacherous and may desert you at any moment; and then the thing on which you were leaning entirely having vanished, you wonder whether you are a Christian at all. The only remedy is the breastplate of righteousness.*” What sweet feelings we know must be the outcome, the result of those objective realities of the gospel upon which we build our faith, our hope, and our confidence.

Well, let's move on to see that righteousness not only delivers from fear, but secondly it delivers from guilt. These two are closely tied, because our fears are connected to our guilt. Proverbs 28:1a *The wicked flee when no one is pursuing.* Why? Because they are guilty, they are plagued of conscience. 28:1b *The righteous are bold as a lion.* Why? Their conscience is clean, they know that stamped over their lives in unfading blood red are the words, "forgiven," "pardoned" even "righteous." So great is this cleansing from guilt that vile, wretched sinners like David, and Peter and Paul and I with them will be able to stand before God, before the pure and Holy Creator, without fear. Hebrews 10:19 *we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus.* The confidence flows out of this reality, that Christ has regarded my humble estate and has shed his own blood for my soul. It is the breastplate of righteousness. Wesley wrote this: "Bold shall I stand in Thy great day, for who aught to my charge shall lay, fully absolved through these (referring there to Christ's blood and righteousness) I am, from sin and fear, from guilt and shame." And listen, if Christ's blood makes us ready to endure the fearful judgments of God, how much more are we prepared to endure the assaults of Satan and the accusations of men!! As I preach today I am so full of our great hymns. We sing this, "Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control, that Christ has regarded my humble estate and has shed his own blood for my soul. It is well. It is well with my soul." And there is nothing left for the devil to do about it, but distract me from that reality. This is what he does when he comes along to discourage me over my failures and remind me of my sins and drag me down into the pits of despair. He says, "who are you Dan Hendley? Soldier of the Lord. HA! You are pathetic and puny and last I heard couldn't even follow orders." It's sort of like the taunting Goliath did when David came out to fight. Remember? Goliath engaged in some trash talk with David. He compared David to a little stick and cursed him, but what did David do? He did precisely what we must do at moments like that. He didn't flex his muscles for Goliath. He said, "I come in the name of the Lord of hosts." I wonder what David was feeling at this point. Back with the army David spoke quite boldly. It seemed David was full of confidence, but that confidence has a way of dissolving before a mighty foe doesn't it? But David did the right thing. "I dare not trust the sweetest frame." I don't put confidence in my confidence. "But wholly lean on Jesus name. On Christ, the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.

Look at the teaching of Colossians 2:**13** *When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions. Listen **14** having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.* I spoke with a pastor once who had been brought up before our Presbytery under formal charges by some of the elders in his church. They accused him in writing of 45 specific occasions of sin. Can you imagine? He was sharing with me about God's grace for this trial and he said this verse in Colossians came alive to him. It speaks of the certificate of debt, consisting of decrees against us, hostile to us. And what happened to that record of our debt and our guilt? Dear friend, read what it says and rejoice! Verse 13 says God has forgiven all our transgressions and as for that record of our sins He has removed it from us having nailed it to the cross!! When the enemy accuses you and attacks you don't bother arguing that you really are a good person. You point Satan to Calvary. You remind him and thus remind yourself that your sin, not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross and you bear it no more. Satan knows this. Colossians 2:**15a** *When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities.* How did Jesus disarm these spiritual forces of darkness? He did it at Calvary by taking our sin away. Don't think that Christ's death was a victory for Satan. Quite the contrary. Because of it Satan no longer has a certificate of debt to dangle before us and fill us with fear. Christ has taken our sin on Himself. Christ has imputed to us His righteousness thus delivering us from both fear and guilt.

We need to be brief on our third and last point. We have seen what the breastplate of righteousness is and what attacks it repels, now let's see how we must put it on. Like all the pieces of armor, the breastplate won't help if it's not on. In this case, we equip ourselves with the armor by remembering the gospel. ® This is something we think too little of, but the Lord teaches us often about remembering. We are called by word and sacrament and song to constantly remind ourselves and each other of the gospel, of the truth of imputed righteousness, the reality of our forgiveness. And this is most important when Satan attacks us and seeks to discourage us. Imagine if Officer Vernon had forgotten to put on his protective vest on that fateful LA morning. Or imagine this. Imagine that you were the one shot and knocked down at point blank range. There you are on your back wondering if you are going to die. Ever been there spiritually? And you're thinking, "I can't survive two gunshots at point-blank range. This is too much for me." When suddenly you remember (that's the key) you remember that you

aren't trusting in your own righteousness - you have a breastplate given by God, made up of the Righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's when you stand and shoot back at the enemy. That is when you have victory. Some of you can't do that. Some of you are unable to remember the gift of Christ's righteousness because you have never received it. And I want to invite you this morning, maybe for the first time, to put on the breastplate offered by the Lord, to receive what Paul called a righteousness from God on the basis of faith. And faith is the key. Faith is the way we put on this special gift. By a simple movement of the soul you say to the Lord, "I give to you all of my sin. I give to you all of my old self-righteousness, and I humbly receive the righteousness of Christ. I call on your name, Oh Lord. I ask for your pardon." Most of you remember the old TV show, "Let's Make A Deal." People didn't come on that show empty handed did they? They had to bring something to trade with Monte Hall for what was behind the curtain. But those selected brought junk and walked out with treasure didn't they? Nobody ever chose to keep the stuff they walked in with. They knew Monte offered great deals. Do you trust Jesus that much? Do you trust Him enough to say, "I will trade in my sin and my worthless righteousness for your priceless gift?" If you know that much about Jesus then let's make that deal right now. Pray with me.

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I know that there is a certificate of debt, of hostile decrees that has my name on it. And I can't pay that debt. All my finest deeds could never cover the moral debt I owe. I must have your gift of righteousness or I have no hope. Just now I reach out to you in faith asking for that gift and believing it is now my own. Thank you, and now prepare me to fight well in your name and for your glory. To you my King I swear allegiance this day and forever. Amen."