

Intro: Standing firm against the devil and his schemes means that we put on the breastplate of righteousness. The question is, “Whose righteousness?” Often we read this passage and think that the best way to defend against the devil’s schemes is to perform righteously, according to the Word of God. Now, that is good and right, to do right according to the Word of God, but the righteousness spoken of here is part of the armor of God. That is, it does not belong to us, nor is it sourced in us. We just “put it on”, we don’t produce the righteousness. In fact, this breastplate sits outside of us, around us, protects us. It is an alien righteousness, that which is given to us by someone else. This righteousness is the very perfect obedience of Christ that is given to those who believe in Him. In Him, and by our union with Him by faith (see the “in Him” passages throughout Ephesians and Colossians), we are counted as having fulfilled the Holy Law of God. We are wrapped up in Him, complete in Him, having our sins atoned for by His blood and our righteousness fulfilled by His obedient life. In this we are freed up to truly rejoice in the greatness and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s look at the text this morning.

Stand Against the Devil by Putting on the Breastplate of Righteousness

- i. What is “righteousness”?
 - i. The state or quality of being righteous
 - ii. That which renders one *acceptable to God* and *approved by Him* as being *perfectly in-line with His will and character*
 - iii. The problem: Romans 3:10-11 – there is no one righteous, not even one understands and seeks for God

- ii. Objective: The Father has *imputed* Jesus’ righteousness to us by faith
 - i. This breastplate is not ours
 1. It is given to us by God, it is His armor
 2. It is alien to us: that is, it comes from another source, i.e. Jesus
 - ii. 2 Cor 5:21 – the great exchange: imputation vs. impartation
2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
 1. The positive and negative exchange in the Gospel
 2. Negative: Our sins were imputed to Jesus on the Cross
 - a. Christ became sin for us
 - b. Christ bore the curse of the Law for us (Gal 3:13)
 3. Positive: His righteousness is imputed to us
 - a. Rom 4:5 – faith in Christ is credited as righteousness
 - b. 1 Cor 1:30 – Christ is our righteousness
 - c. Rom 3:21-26 – God is Just and the Justifier (declared righteous) of one who believes in Jesus
 - d. Phil 3:9 – the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Jesus
 - e. Rom 4:25-5:1 – Christ was raised for our righteousness (justification)
 - f. Rom 8:1 – no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus
 - g. Col 2:13-14 – unrighteousness forgiven, having been cancelled at the Cross
 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

- iii. Subjective: We live in a right accordance with God’s character and revealed will
 - i. Phil 1:9-11 – filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes from JC

- ii. 1 John 2:29 – everyone who does what is right is born of God
- iii. 1 John 3:7,9 – the righteous live in righteousness, just as Christ is righteous
- iv. Matt 5:6 – those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied
- v. Eph 4:24; 5:9 – put on the new self, which is created in righteousness
- vi. 1 Tim 6:11 – pursue righteousness
- vii. 2 Tim 2:22 – pursue righteousness

iv. What are our enemy's goals in these attacks?

- i. Satan is an enemy of righteousness
 - 1. Acts 13:10 – son of the devil is an enemy of righteousness
 - 2. 1 John 3:10 – practicing unrighteousness reveals one as the child of the devil
- ii. Satan wants to enslave people in unrighteousness because righteousness glorifies God
 - 1. Phil 1:9-11 – righteousness through Christ glorifies God
 - 2. Rom 6:11-13, 17-18 – don't present your body for unrighteousness, but for righteousness, useful to God and glorifying Christ Jesus
 - 3. 2 Cor 3:9 – the glory of reconciliation in righteousness exceeds the glory of the Law
- iii. Satan wants us to doubt that the righteousness of Christ is enough
 - 1. Suffering: Hebrews 12:11 – yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness
 - 2. Accusing: Rev 12:10 – the "accuser of the brethren has been thrown down"
 - 3. Fear and Doubt: Luke 22:31-32 – Satan demands to sift Peter and ruin *his faith*
 - 4. Questioning God's Grace: 1 Peter 5:6-9 – the devil prowls looking to devour by doubting that *God cares for them and will not protect them*
- iv. Satan wants us to functionally place our righteousness in something besides Jesus
 - 1. Gal 2:11ff – Peter became racist because he was trusting his heritage and his cultural laws as the means by which he was accepted before God
 - a. Are we justified (righteous) by hearing with faith, or by the works of law?

v. The Devil's Strategy: Self-Righteousness

- i. Satan's accusations come in the guise of: "You are succeeding!" and "You are failing!"
- ii. Self-righteousness works by *performance* and *sacrifices* (just like Jesus' righteousness), even toward good things
 - 1. It can be a self-righteousness in even good things (hard work, morality, Bible-reading, prayer) that we twist into *saving things*
 - 2. It never operates by grace: you either perform and *feel* accepted, or you fail to perform and feel rejected
 - a. "If I succeed in my righteousness, then I am accepted." (devil's whisper of success)
 - b. "If I fail in my righteousness, then I am rejected, worthless, unloved by God." (devil's whisper of failure)
 - 3. Either way, the fundamental system remains the same: self-righteous struggle to attain God's approval through our own performance and sacrifice
- iii. It's not just the way "religion" works, it's the way the human heart works whether one is religious or irreligious, it wants to build its reputation, significance, meaning, and goodness based upon some system of performance-righteousness

vi. This is in contrast with God, who saves us by grace (you have been given the breastplate of Christ's righteousness to defend you against the accusations of the devil)

- i. God can only be responded to by repentant faith – a loss of *my own righteousness* and a complete dependence upon Jesus' righteousness *given to me by God's grace through faith*
 - 1. Jesus' performance and sacrifice makes us righteous

- a. The Law must be fulfilled for anyone to enter into the Lord's approval and acceptance
- b. The Law was fulfilled by Christ for us so that we receive it by faith
- 2. We lose our power and simply receive by faith the performance of Jesus
 - a. "I am accepted in Jesus, so I obey"
 - b. His glory and His righteousness in my salvation
 - c. His reputation is my desire
- 3. John Piper gives an example in *Counted Righteous in Christ*:

Suppose I say to Barnabas, my teenage son, "Clean up your room before you go to school. You must have a clean room, or you won't be able to go watch the game tonight." Suppose he plans poorly and leaves for school without cleaning the room. And suppose I discover the messy room and clean it. His afternoon fills up and he gets home just before it's time to leave for the game and realizes what he has done and feels terrible. He apologizes and humbly accepts the consequences. No game.

To which I say, "Barnabas, I am going to credit the clean room to your account because of your apology and submission. Before you left for school this morning I said, 'You must have a clean room, or you won't be able to go watch the game tonight. Well, your room is clean. So you can go to the game.'"

- vii. How do we respond to the devil's attacks questioning our surety before God?
 - a. Identify the Root of Self-righteousness under question
 - i. What are your "righteousnesses" that you tend to trust in to make you OK before God, whether they're religious or irreligious?
 - ii. What are the things that, if they're questioned or criticized, make you respond in anger or anxiety?
 - iii. Where am I struggling, trying to appear righteous to others, trying to build a reputation of "good", trying to attain the good favor of God?
 - b. Look to Jesus Again! See what He has already done for you: you are righteous in Him!
 - i. Robert Murray McCheyne: "For every one look at your sin, take ten looks at Christ!"
 - ii. Where does Jesus meet my failure or success in this accusation? How has He fulfilled the requirement *for me*?
 - iii. The gospel is the good news of grace!!!
 - 1. Jesus has performed it all and given us His righteous and perfect record (passive righteousness)
 - 2. Jesus has given His life in exchange for ours (atonement), His death paid for our failures
 - 3. We give up power, we cease performance-driven righteousness, we humbly receive His work for us into all joy!
 - c. Stanley Voke:

"What a relief it is when we see Jesus as the end of all of this! 'He is the end of the struggle for righteousness' – since He not only fulfilled the law for us, but was cursed for us as well. He not only attained our perfection but atoned for our imperfection. There is nothing more to struggle for! He has done everything for us, and God asks nothing now but our repentance and faith in Him."

Conclusion: Put on the righteousness of Christ that has already been given to you. Through your union with Him, by His grace, you are completely accepted by God due to the righteousness of Jesus Christ given to you by faith. He is your surety and your acceptance. Rest in Him and stand firm against the strategy, the accusation, and the lie of the devil. Jesus is your Redeemer and your Righteousness. Your standing before God is secure because His blood has paid for your sins and you are now wrapped up in His risen and righteous life before God the Father.

Resist firmly, O struggling warrior, the lies of Satan that there is more to be done before you are accepted by God.

Rest quietly, O struggling sinner, in the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Repent freely, O struggling saint, because your room has been cleaned, and your Father gives a greater grace.

Rejoice greatly, O struggling people of God, for your Savior is Jesus Christ the Righteous.