

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Romans 11: 13 – 17ⁱ

The Armor of God

As soon as someone uses the phrase “the armor of God,” anyone who is reasonably acquainted with Scripture will immediately think of the text in Ephesians 6, verses 10 – 20—the text that led us to where we are in our series on prayer—where the Apostle Paul exhorts the church:

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Ephesians 6:13 (ESV)

This because:

¹² ...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

and, as we have seen,

—the devil, the world, and our own flesh—never stop attacking us...ⁱⁱ

and we need to be ready. We need to stand, “and having done all, to stand firm.” Noting Paul’s repetition of the word “stand”, John Stott comments:

This fourfold emphasis on the need to ‘stand’ or ‘withstand’ shows that the apostle’s concern is for Christian stability. Wobbly Christians who have no firm foothold in Christ are an easy prey for the devil. And Christians who shake like reeds and rushes cannot resist the wind when the principalities and powers begin to blow. Paul wants to see Christians so strong and stable that they remain firm even against the devil’s wiles...and even in the evil day, that is, in a time of special pressure. For such stability, both of character and in crisis, the armour of God is essential.ⁱⁱⁱ

In addition, this warfare in which we are engaged is not meant to be exclusively defensive. Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians 10:

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ... 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 (ESV)

See, even while the devil is going around “like a roaring lion” seeking someone to devour,^{iv} we are to be tearing down the strongholds that he has built in our culture and society. Yes we are to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”^v, but we do that by destroying the arguments and “every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.” It won’t be easy and it certainly won’t be accomplished without the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, but the good news is this, Christ wins. As the hymn-writer put it:

In His strength we dare to battle all the raging hosts of sin, and by Him alone we conquer foes without and foes within.^{vi}

As Jesus said,

¹⁸ ...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
Matthew 16:18 (ESV)

The Saints' War Against the Devil

So, because Christ wins, we win in Christ, but that doesn't mean that we are not in a war against the evil one, and to win, we need the armor of God—we need the panoply that God has provided for us; to stand in this spiritual battle, we need to put on Christ Himself. In 1655 the puritan, William Gurnall, pastor of a church in Suffolk, England wrote a book with the title, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, and the subtitle, "*The saints' war against the Devil, wherein a discovery is made of that grand enemy of God and his people, in his policies, power, seat of his empire, wickedness, and chief design he hath against the saints; a magazine opened, from whence the Christian is furnished with spiritual arms for the battle, helped on with his armor, and taught the use of his weapon; together with the happy issue of the whole war.*" (and some of you thought that I occasionally get carried away!). Regarding the armor of God, Gurnall wrote,

In heaven we shall appear not in armor but in robes of glory; but here [the pieces of armor specified] are to be worn night and day; we must walk, work and sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ. In this armor we are to stand and watch, and never relax our vigilance, for 'the saint's sleeping time is Satan's tempting time; every fly dares venture to creep on a sleeping lion'.^{vii}

So, we need to here the exhortation of Ephesians 6, and

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that [we] may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Ephesians 6:11 (ESV)

Our text in Romans 13, too. Verse 12:

¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Romans 13:12 (ESV)

The Righteousness of Christ

Of course, this morning we are particularly considering the breastplate of righteousness, as Paul refers to it in Ephesians 6, verse 14, arguably the largest and, some might say, most important piece of armor in the Christian's arsenal. Isaiah speaks of God Himself putting on righteousness as a breastplate when going forth in judgment against His adversaries,^{viii} and this in the context of a Messianic prophecy, Isaiah 59, verse 20:

²⁰ "And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the LORD. Isaiah 59:20 (ESV)

That Redeemer can be none other than our Savior himself who, in the words of R.C. Sproul, ...will come...bringing salvation to all who repent and turn from their sins.^{ix}

We see Him in The Revelation, chapter 19, where John wrote,

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. Revelation 19:11 (ESV)

So, surely, if God Himself is so armored—if Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, judges and makes war in righteousness—then we too must be so armored if we are to **be strong in the Lord** and in the power of **His** might. It should be obvious then that the righteousness with which we are armored must be the righteousness of Christ and not our own.

The Accuser of Our Brothers

In Ephesians 6, Paul made the point that the devil and all his host, are not only evil, and powerful (at least in comparison to ourselves), they are also cunning. Exhorting us to put on the whole panoply of God's armor, Paul said to do so that we might stand against the schemes of the devil, and later he would characterize those schemes as "the fiery darts of the wicked one".^x Preaching on this text, it took Martyn Lloyd-Jones just 7 sermons to get to the schemes of the devil, and then he spent 19 weeks preaching about those schemes. Among others, he listed cults, counterfeits, philosophy and vain deceit, discouragement, worry, anxiety, and a summary sermon in which he addressed

...the attack of the enemy upon us in the matter of self, or, the problem of self as it is made acute by the wiles of the devil^{xi}

all of which are subjects that deserve an entire sermon, but for now, understand that while he goes by many names, in Revelation chapter 12, "the great dragon...that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan" is also referred to as "the accuser of our brothers...who accuses them day and night". We've considered the chapter in the past and there's more to it, but when Satan discovered that he could not overcome the Lord Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman prophesied in Genesis 3, we are told that he

¹⁷ ...went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Revelation 12:17 (ESV)

Which, once again, is the same as saying,

⁸ ...Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)

And since Satan is not in any sense creative, we should assume that when he comes to steal and kill and destroy,^{xii} he does so using the same old strategies. If he fails with, "Did God really say?" then he turns to accusation, "Well, if God really did say that, then how come *you* don't live it?" The accuser of the brothers was thrown down, but he never stopped with the

accusations, and this is where we really need not our own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ Himself. The prophet Isaiah wrote,

⁶ But we are all as an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags... ^{Isaiah 64:6 (KJV 1900)xiii}

Now try to imagine facing a roaring lion, facing the devil himself, clad in nothing more than the filthy rags of our own righteousness... It's not a thought that leads to a happy end, and it's one of the ways that Satan uses to keep us weighed down with guilt and shame on the one hand, and self-righteous judgment on the other, because at the bottom line,

¹⁰ As it is written: "There is **none** righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. ¹² They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." ^{Romans 3:10–12 (NKJV)}

As we are taught in the Heidelberg Catechism:

Even the very best we do in this life is imperfect and stained with sin.^{xiv}

That's me, and that's you, and that's whoever it is you think sums up the very best of the very best of humanity. "There is none righteous, **no, not one.**" Well...there's One.

Our Lord Jesus Christ who was given to set us completely free and to make us right with God.^{xv}

So that, by the power of His divinity, he might...earn for us and restore to us righteousness and life.^{xvi}

Put On the Armor of Light

This and this alone—the righteousness of Christ—this is the breastplate that can defend us from the attacks and accusations of the evil one. If we try to stand in our own strength, if we try to stand in the filthy rags of our own righteousness, we will certainly fall, but in Christ we are right with God and heirs to life everlasting,^{xvii} and we are in Christ if we have come to trust in Him alone as the only source of eternal salvation and life. Lloyd-Jones wrote:

Because we can never attain to God's standard of righteousness, God sent His only Son into this world, in order that He might be able to give us His righteousness. He came, the spotless, sinless Son of God, and He rendered a perfect obedience to God's law, obeyed Him in every jot and tittle of the law. He lived a perfectly righteous life. But more than that; He made Himself responsible for our sins, He bore them in His own body and was crucified for them. 'God laid on him the iniquity of us all.'^{xviii}

and now, we are made right with God only by true faith in Jesus Christ. When that is true—when we have trusted in Him alone, this is the result (and please, say it with me):

Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had

never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.

All I need to do is accept this gift of God with a believing heart.^{xix}

Even so,

¹¹ ...you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ...

(put on the breastplate of His perfect righteousness),

...and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. ^{Romans 13:11–14 (ESV)}

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- i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).
- ii CRC (Christian Reformed Church), *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Publications, 1988), 76.
- iii John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 275.
- iv Cf. 1 Peter 5: 8.
- v *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 2 Cor 10:5.
- vi Margaret Clarkson, "For Your Gift of God the Spirit", at <https://hymnary.org/hymn/TH1990/339>, last accessed August 19, 2023.
- vii William Gurnall, quoted by John R. W. Stott, in *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 276.
- viii Cf. Isaiah 59: 15b – 19.
- ix R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1236.
- x Ephesians 6: 16, New King James Version.
- xi David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10–13* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 332.
- xii Cf. John 10: 10.
- xiii *The Holy Bible: King James Version, Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), Is 64:6.
- xiv CRC, *Ecumenical Creeds*, "Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 62", 40.
- xv CRC, *Ecumenical Creeds*, "Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 18", 18.
- xvi CRC, *Ecumenical Creeds*, "Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 17", 18.
- xvii CRC, *Ecumenical Creeds*, "Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 59", 38.
- xviii David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10–20* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 228.
- xix CRC, *Ecumenical Creeds*, "Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 60", 38.