

## Rules of Engagement

### Breastplate of righteousness

#### Small Group Questions

**Opening: What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word 'righteous?'**

- 1. Read Revelation 12:7-12. Satan is called the great deceiver (vs. 9) and the accuser (vs. 10). Describe his methods of deceit and his methods of accusation. Which of these two methods are more effective toward you?**
- 2. Read Job 1:6-12; Luke 22:31-34. What stands out to you in these two examples of Satan's attempt to destroy us? Agree/Disagree Satan cannot get to us with God's permission. Explain your response**
- 3. The breastplate of righteousness has a twofold significance: Imputed Righteousness and Practical Righteousness. What's the difference between these two?**
- 4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. What does it mean to you that God has credited you sin to Christ's account and his righteousness to your account?**
- 5. If someone were to ask you, "How can I live a more righteous life?" What Biblical advice would you give them?**
- 6. How does practical righteousness protect the believer?**
- 7. Read 1 John 1:9 For the believer confession of sin is not for God's benefit but for yours. Why?**
- 8. Read Romans 8:1, 33-34. How hard is it for you to embrace the fact that you are completely forgiven?**
- 9. What is the most important and practical principle you learned from this teaching on the Breastplate of Righteousness?**

We've been talking about the issue of spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is the cosmic conflict waged in the invisible, spiritual realm, the heavenly places. In this series we are talking about how that conflict gets fleshed out in our everyday existence.

**Ephesians 6:10-14, (P. 979)**

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

Last week we memorized the first piece of armor: The Belt of Truth. Say with me the belt of truth, 1,2,3, the belt of truth. The truth of God and the truth in you, guided by God's truth becoming a person of truth. Putting on the belt of truth protects you from the deception of Satan. Armor piece number two, repeat after me: The breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate of righteousness. Now, let's put those two together: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness. Ready? 1,2,3 the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness.

**Romans 13:14 (ESV)**

**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ**

Putting on the armor is putting on Jesus. You do not battle on your own, in your own armor, in your own strength or with your own methods. The armor is the Lord's because the battle is the Lord's. So why is this important? Revelation 12 calls Satan the accuser of the brethren.

**Satan's Arsenal: Accusation**

**Luke 22:31-34 (P. 882)**

**Revelation 12:10-11 (ESV)**

**And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.**

Revelation 12 describes the spiritual conflict between Michael, the arch-angel and the dragon. Notice the last phrase of that passage. Satan stands there accusing you, and accusing you. And it doesn't take much, does it. You've got overt sin and covert sins. Sins of commission and sins of omission. You can do the right thing for the wrong reason and the wrong thing for the right reason. Our ability to sin is limited by our own imagination and ingenuity. And Satan just keeps running a tab and reporting to God. It's like the guy who said to his friend, when my wife and I argue she always gets so historical. You mean hysterical, his friend said. No, I mean historical. Every time we fight she brings up every wrong thing I've ever done. That's Satan. He brings up every wrong thing you've ever done.

**Luke 22:31-34**

**"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, Remember the story of Job. Job was a righteous man, obeyed God, honored God, there was no one like Job on the face of the earth. And Satan accused him. He's not that noble. He's not that good. He said to God, if you'd take your hedge of protection**

away from him, if you stopped blessing him so much he'd turn on and curse you. And so God gives Satan permission to get to Job. Jesus says to Peter, Satan wants to get to you. He wants to sift you. You sift wheat in order to separate the good from the bad. Satan wanted to sift Peter to get to the bad stuff. You need to remember a couple of things. One - Satan can't do anything that God doesn't allow, he needs permission. So the question is, why would God give him permission? That leads us to the second thing: it's in the sifting that faith and character are built in your life. Satan wanted to sift Peter to grab hold of all that was bad. Jesus allowed that sifting to occur so that all that is good could be accomplished in Peter's life. Paul says to be aware of his schemes. He's scheme is to take all that's bad and present it to God as an argument for your rejection and condemnation. He just accuses you and accuses you and accuses you. He heaps on the guilt and shame and says, you'll never measure up, you'll never get it right, why would you ever think God would have anything to do with you? Jesus says, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you

Jesus, the Son of God. Satan is standing there arguing his case against you and Jesus is standing right there as well, our great advocate, interceding on our behalf.

<sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Jesus says to Peter, if you will hold on to me through the testing of your faith, Romans 5, suffering produces perseverance, character and hope. You are being sifted every day of your life, Satan is tempting you and attacking you, and accusing you. But you have an advocate, someone interceding on your behalf. And with every accusation Jesus counter argues: I covered that. I paid for that. I redeem that. I died for that. Got that one, bought that one, got it covered.

### **The Believer's Armor:**

#### **Zechariah 3:1-10 (P. 794)**

Zechariah, the prophet has a vision that illustrates what the breastplate of righteousness is all about. Zechariah is a post exile prophet. The Israelites are returning from 70 years captivity in Babylon and much of the tone and tenor of his writing are echoed in the book of Revelation. Zechariah has a vision,

<sup>1</sup> Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. <sup>2</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?”

Referring to God's deliverance of Israel from Babylon. Jesus steps forth as our advocate, the lawyer for the defense and he's never lost a case. Joshua has a problem.

<sup>3</sup> Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.

Joshua, the High priest, set aside to represent the people. His priestly robes are filthy, the word used here, isn't dirt, it's dung. The high priest set aside to be holy is defiled with disgusting filth. It's one thing to walk through the mud puddle, it's another to walk through a dairy barn. You know what I mean, and he's standing before the Lord. Satan's accusation is justified.

<sup>4</sup> And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.”

This is the first teaching on the breastplate of righteousness. It is called imputed righteousness.

### **1. IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The Bible is clear, Romans 3:10 none is righteous, no not one. 3:23 all have sinned.

#### **Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)**

**All of us have become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.**

To impute means to attribute, assign or credit to one's account. Have you ever had a company send you someone else's bill? You've got to call 'em up and say, "hey, this isn't me. I'm not paying this." They assigned someone else's debt to your account. That's the glory of the gospel: when you trusted Christ for your salvation, God took your sin and assigned it, he credited it to Jesus' account. Jesus said, I'll take your clothes, you take mine.

#### **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Erwin Lutzer, the onetime Pastor of Moody Church in Chicago describes it this way. Imagine a book titled, "The Life and Times of Jesus Christ." As you open the book, you discover an account of every good thing Jesus Christ ever did. Alongside that book is another book entitled, "The Life and Times of [insert your name here]. In that book is a detailed description of every wrong action you've ever committed, every evil thought you've ever had. When you trust in Christ as your Savior, God exchanges the covers of those two books. He places the cover of "The Life and Times of Jesus Christ," around your book of life. And what's more, He places the cover of your book around Jesus' book. So, when God opened Jesus' book He saw your sin. And when God opened your book He saw Jesus. Someone described justification as God sees us, just as if I'd never sinned. Imputed righteousness. Imputed righteousness exempts us from the judgment of God. It does not exempt us from the accusations of Satan. He can't take your eternal life, but he will continue to attack your abundant life. Practical righteousness is the second aspect of our breastplate.

### **2. PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS**

#### **2 Corinthians 6:3-8**

Zechariah 3:5

<sup>5</sup> And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head."

Some of suggested that this symbolizes the mind of Christ. Satan attacks the mind, but 1 Corinthians 2:16 tells us we have the mind of Christ.

So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by. <sup>6</sup> And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua, <sup>7</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here."

Here's a commandment with a promise: live rightly, receive blessing. Do what is right, receive what is good.

In 2 Corinthians 6 Paul called practical righteousness a weapon for the right hand and the left.

#### **Ephesians 4:22-24**

to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,<sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Practical righteousness is just that, it's practical. You put off the old, you put on the new. You've got a new cover to your book, so the story needs to be rewritten.

### **Ephesians 5:9**

<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),

How do you do that?

### **James 1:21 (NIV)**

**Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.**

The Word of God is to your spirit what food is to your body. The Word of God produces the life of God in you. The term righteousness means having the character of being right or doing right. But you are powerless to 'be' right. God has taken care of that for us in Christ. In Christ we are righteous. You are powerless to be right. What's more you are powerless to do right. And God has taken care of that too. When you became a Christian the Spirit of God came to dwell in you. And the more you surrender to His presence and power, the more of his character, Paul called it the fruit of the Spirit.

The more of his character, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control - it just starts showing up in your life. Jesus said, by their fruit you shall know them.

### **The Rules of Engagement:**

The breastplate of righteousness is a defensive weapon against the accusations of the enemy. He accuses you. He uses your life against you to discourage and defeat you. So, here's what you do.

#### **1. EMBRACE THE GIFT**

Ephesians 1:20 Christ is seated in the heavenly places; 2:6 you have been raised with Christ and seated with Christ in the heavenly places. You are in a position of righteousness and Satan can't mess with that. People who travel internationally understand the importance of having the right papers. A lot of you have had the hassle of dealing with border patrol questioning your papers, making sure you have the right to enter. Legally, positionally, you are in the heavenly places right now. Satan constantly wants you to doubt your position in Christ. With every failure, every sin, Satan accuses you. But Jesus is your advocate, so there's no haggles at the border. Satan cannot take away your position. He can't take your eternal life but he can mess with your abundant life. So what so you do about that?

#### **2. PURSUE THE CALLING**

**1 Timothy 6:11; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 John 3:10**

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy to pursue righteousness. 2 Peter 1:5 tells us to pursue righteousness. 1 John 3:10 tells us to pursue righteousness. Do what is right. Do what is right. Do what is right. You cannot keep Satan from accusing you. But you can keep those accusations from sticking. But I don't always do what is right. Ok, so here's what you do.

#### **CONFESS**

Confess it. Get honest. Come clean.

**1 John 1:9 (NIV)**

**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Most political historians who covered the Watergate scandal in the 70's would agree that Richard Nixon wasn't thrown out of office because of the break in, he resigned because of the cover up. Think about it: you confess it before your enemy has time to accuse you, you've just stolen their thunder. You've taken their material. What does Satan have left? Facing the truth, living in the truth. The truth sets you free. It frees you from unnecessary guilt. It frees you from the shame that discourages and defeats you. For the believer, confession is not about salvation, you already have that. Confession is about dependence. It keeps you focused on the cross. It keeps you grateful for grace. It reminds you of your position in Christ so that you can pursue your relationship with Christ.

**James 5:16**

Says to confess to one another. In the context of biblical community we come clean with each other. Why? Because you need the body of Christ to confirm to you that you are in the Body of Christ. The body of Christ is Christ to you. The power of confession frees you from the accusation of guilt. But there's the more: Confess, and then repent.

**REPENT**

**Ephesians 4:17-24**

Repent means to turn. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4, it's not enough to take off the old, you've got to put on the new. First, you get honest. Then you get serious.

**Ps 119:104-105 (NIV) I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore, I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.**

When Word of God planted in you produces the life of God in you. We generally think of repentance in negative terms. It's something we've got to give up, get rid of, walk away from. Instead of thinking of repentance as something we turn from, think about it as something you turn to; putting off the old, putting on the new. Who is responsible for taking out the trash at home? How many enjoy taking out the trash? Nobody enjoys it. It's a stinky job. But you've got to ask yourself - do you want the stink outside or inside? Life is so much better when the house doesn't stink. Right? And Satan just uses that trash to remind you you're not worthy of the abundant life Jesus promised. So don't let him win. Take out the trash. And then, move on.

**MOVE ON**

**Romans 8 (NIV)**

**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

I am forgiven. When Satan accuses you, you repeat: I am forgiven. Look at what Paul says later on in that chapter:

**Romans 8:33-34 (NIV)**

**Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.**

Satan can say whatever he wants. You're forgiven. He can accuse you of anything. You're forgiven. He can charge you of everything. You're forgiven. Guilt and shame

has no place in your life. You're forgiven. No one can separate you from the love of Christ. You're forgiven.

**Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)**

**The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;**

**his mercies never come to an end;**

**<sup>23</sup> they are new every morning;**

**great is your faithfulness.**

**What Must I Do to Stand Firm?**

Stand firm in the grace of God. Stand firm in the truth of God. With the breastplate of righteousness securely in place; walk in the freedom of forgiveness.