

“Armored Saint: Breastplate of Righteousness”

Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 6:10-18

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All Scripture quoted from NIV unless otherwise noted

As we continue our series on what Ephesians 6 describes as the “Full Armor of God,” allow me to pause and remind you that the purpose of this armor is to give you a defense and a weapon in the spiritual conflict that is a reality, right here and right now. After all, no one wants to go into battle unprepared, right? So today, we will talk about the breastplate of righteousness.

Righteousness has been defined as “The quality of being morally right or justifiable.”^[1] By that definition, as long as something fits within some standard of morality, it might be deemed ‘righteous.’ But righteousness as we understand it – true, Biblical, Godly righteousness – means measuring up to the standard that God has set. That’s where we’ll pick things up today, by discussing some of the key attributes of what this ‘Righteousness of God’ actually is.

First of all, the righteousness of God is full coverage, not supplemental insurance; it is a covering, not a selective defense. The idea is not that, ‘You do your best, and God will pick up the slack.’ Just being honest, you are not – cannot – be doing anything that would earn you heaven. Certainly, it is important to work out your salvation as best you can (Philippians 2:12) but it is important that you realize that your actions don’t earn your citizenship in God’s kingdom. Rather, your citizenship in God’s kingdom is reflected in your actions. Your citizenship in heaven is the result of your faith alone, not your works supplemented by your faith.

Righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not because of faith alone (Rom. 3:22). Imagine drinking lemonade through a straw. It’s refreshing, right? But the straw is not refreshing by itself; what it is placed into makes a difference. Imagine using the straw to suck up sand... or salt... or hot sauce... or an ant. The straw by itself, or placed into an unsuitable substance, is not satisfactory. Likewise, faith alone is insufficient; what you put that faith in makes a difference. Some put their faith in their own ability to match up to some predetermined standard of morality. Others put their faith in the teachings of Buddha, Muhammed, Joseph Smith, Jim Jones, or David Koresh

Putting on the covering of righteousness means putting my faith in Jesus Christ. That’s the only way that I can be counted as being ‘righteous.’ Not that I will ever be perfectly righteous, but that I am counted/reckoned as one who is righteous – again, that means I am being counted as one who has perfectly kept God’s standard, for righteousness is a title granted, not a status earned (Rom. 3:24). Put simply, I cannot live up to the standard of moral perfection that righteousness demands – I need His righteousness, which I can’t earn and will never deserve.

In His amazing grace, God has allowed the righteousness of Christ to be imputed to all who receive Him as Savior. “Imputed” means credited to someone (or something). It means you having something credited to your account that wasn’t yours before, and that you did not earn or put there yourself. In a negative way, that’s what some scams do; promise you ‘free luggage’ or saying you’ve won a contest. You didn’t earn or deserve it; it’s just “yours” somehow.

The song Jesus Messiah refers to Jesus' righteousness imputed to us, saying, "He became sin who knew no sin, that we might become His righteousness." (A paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 5:21). To be clear, Jesus did not become sinful – sin was credited to His account, and He paid for it, even though it was not His – and I do not become righteous – sin was removed from my account, and although I am as guilty as can be, the judge let me walk as if I were innocent. That's what imputed righteousness is – a credit given, not earned or deserved.

Righteousness stands in stark contrast to the notions of universalism and "cheap grace" (Rom. 3:25-26). The righteousness that you and I can be credited with came through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Rom. 3:23, 6:23). Only those who are righteous are eligible to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 25:46). But because there are none who are righteous (Rom. 3:10), no one is eligible to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said perfection is the standard you have to live up to if you hope to enter the kingdom of heaven. But since you cannot possibly be perfect, is God giving you an impossible assignment? Yes! Yes, He is!

God demands the standard of perfect righteousness, but since that's impossible, you need a 'go-between' of sorts, and that's exactly what Jesus does. His sacrifice on the cross allows righteousness to be credited to your account, allowing you to stand before God free from any condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

If God's kingdom is reserved for those who meet the standard of perfection, it's not appropriate for you to be there – you don't fit in because you don't meet the standard of perfect morality. Jesus, and Jesus alone is perfect in morality and conscience, perfect in thought, word, and deed, perfect in righteousness before God, and therefore, worthy of entering the kingdom of heaven.

Righteousness is not 'doing the best you can'. That would be a poor substitute for moral perfection, wouldn't it? The righteousness that is spoken of in Romans 3 is that which the apostle Paul desired for himself, which he describes in Philippians 3:8-11 – **"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."**

Stop trying to hammer yourself into a shape that you simply cannot become. Confess your sin to Jesus and ask Him to forgive you; ask Him to transform you by the renewing of your mind and to reform you into a shape that is fitting for the kingdom of heaven. That shape is perfect righteousness, and you can't do it – neither can I. Each of us requires the breastplate-like covering of Jesus' righteousness to be credited to our spiritual "accounts".

Stop trying . . . and start trusting. Lean into the perfect righteousness that is credited to your account when you become a child of God through faith in the One who actually was, and is, perfectly righteous. He will be your covering when the accusations come. His righteousness imputed to you – credited to your account – is the only way that {you} will be fit for the kingdom of heaven and God's great and glorious eternity, which He desires for you.

[1] <https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+of+righteousness&oq=definition+of+righteousn&aqs=chrome.0.0i131i433i512j0i20i263i512j69i57j0i512i3j0i22i30i2j0i15i22i30j0i22i30.3625j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

Takeaways from this message.

Righteousness is always relative to a STANDARD.

The righteousness of God...

- ...is FULL COVERAGE, not supplemental insurance.
- ...comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not because of faith ALONE.
- ...is a TITLE GRANTED, not a status earned.
- ...is IMPUTED to all who receive Jesus as Savior.
...stands in stark contrast to the notions of universalism and 'CHEAP GRACE'.

God demands the standard of PERFECT righteousness.

- When I stand in perfect righteousness before God, I am free from any CONDEMNATION.

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. *What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today's passage/message? Why?*
2. **Define "Righteousness" in your own terms. What are the essential components? How do we become 'righteous' with God?**
3. **How is it possible to live rightly before God? What do Rom. 6:16-23 and Rom. 8:1-11 have to say about this?**
4. **What new flavor of ice cream would you most like to create?**
5. **What does the "Putting on" of armor indicate? What else?**
6. **What factors might cause your armor to be weak or ineffective? (1 Pet. 5:8, Heb. 3:12, Rom. 6:1-2, Heb. 4:6)**
7. **Those other passages referred to today are: 2 Cor. 5:21, Rom. 3:23, Rom. 6:23, Matt. 25:46, Rom. 3:10, Matt. 5:48, Rom. 8:1, Phil. 3:8-11, Matt. 25:23.**
8. *What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?*