



The Spiritual Armor

Part 4: The Breastplate of Righteousness

As we continue to examine the resources that God has given us to provide protection from Satan and all the entities of darkness that serve him, we come next to the breastplate of righteousness. In this case His resource is one of insight and instruction rather than an outright gift, as this is one of the pieces of the armor that we have a responsibility to “put on” (Eph. 6:13-14). The righteousness we have from Christ as a gift when we place our faith in Him for salvation is what makes possible our acceptance before God and entrance into His family (Rom. 3:21-22; Phil. 3:8-9). We still have the responsibility, however, to *practice* righteousness in our daily lives if we are to be protected from the enemy and maintain fellowship with God (1 John 1:8-9). This personal responsibility is similar to the obligation we have upon receiving a driver’s license. The license gives us the right to drive on the roadways of the nation, *but* if we want to avoid the consequences of legal penalties and/or personal injury, we have to obey the laws established to ensure safety on those roads.

The fact that the practice of righteousness is represented in the spiritual armor as the breastplate, protecting our life-sustaining chest area, indicates its great importance to our spiritual protection. Willfully engaging in sin (James 4:17) would seemingly be as crippling to our spiritual defenses as entering a battlefield without wearing a bullet-proof vest. We become an open and easy target for the enemy. No wonder he is so invested in trying to entice us into sin (1 Thes. 3:5; 1 Peter 5:8). Not only does it give him an inroad into our lives, but it also hinders our fellowship with God and access to His power through prayer (Ps. 24:3-5; 34:15-16; 66:18; 1 John 1:6-7).

While sin is often blatantly obvious, at other times it can be very subtle and even camouflaged as a seeming righteousness. Through the use of religious spirits Satan is quite masterful in counterfeiting the righteousness of God in a person’s life. The Pharisees in the Gospels provide a prime example of this. By dutifully aligning their behavior to a legalistic code of conduct, they produced the *appearance* of a godly lifestyle. Jesus, however, knew that it did not emanate from their hearts and referred to them as “sons of hell” (Mat. 23:15; 25-28; NASB), clearly indicating the source of their “pseudo-righteousness.”

Christians today can fall into this same legalistic trap if they live their lives by following an external set of godly “rules” rather than allowing true righteousness to flow spontaneously from a heart redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ and submitted to the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament saints only had an external Law to follow, but when Jesus ushered in the New Covenant through His own death on the Cross, His permanent forgiveness of our sins allowed the Holy Spirit to enter our lives and write God’s righteous standards on our hearts (Jer. 31:33-34; Heb. 8:10-12; 10:16-17). This is the source from which God desires our practice of righteousness to flow, motivated by the love of God, which is also poured out within our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). While perhaps subtle from an outward perspective, this inner distinction regarding the source of our righteousness is enormous in its effect on both our intimacy with God and our defensive strength against the enemy (Gal. 3:1-5).

Walking in righteousness is not an automatic process, however. Our minds must be actively engaged with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:5-6), who will work in conjunction with the Word of God to move us through an ever increasing sanctification process. As we read, study, and meditate upon the Word, God’s standard of righteousness will penetrate deep into our hearts and minds, transforming the operating system of our lives and enhancing our ability to recognize sin (Josh. 1:8, Ps. 1:2-3; 119:9, 11; John 15:3; Rom. 12:2; 1 Peter 2:2). In this way we will be able to escape the corruption of our flesh as well as the temptations of the evil one and the world system he operates (Rom. 8:5-9; Gal. 5:16; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 5:19).