

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We are in the midst of discussing the Christian's Armor. In Ephesians 6:13 Paul commands us to "put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."¹ Last week we quoted the Rev. P.G. Mathew, who noted that we are to, "put on the armor once and for all. We are supposed to sleep with it, eat with it, work with it, come with it, and go with it."² We then looked at the first piece of that armor, the belt of truth. Dr. Spencer, I assume you want to move on to the second piece of armor?

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. In Ephesians 6:14 we are told, "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place". So the second piece of a Christian's armor is the breastplate of righteousness.

A breastplate is a piece of armor worn over the chest to protect our vital organs – the heart, lungs and so on. It is clearly an important piece of defensive armor. And, in this case, we are told that it consists of righteousness. But the question that should immediately come to mind is, whose righteousness?

Marc Roby: Well, I don't think that my righteousness would provide all the protection I need.

Dr. Spencer: Nor would mine. In order to get to heaven we need a perfect righteousness. But, praise God, that is what we receive when we are united to Jesus Christ by faith. In Romans 3:9-19 the apostle makes the point that all of us are wretched sinners. And he concludes in Romans 3:20 with the terrible statement that "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in [God's] sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."

Marc Roby: That statement totally destroys any notion someone might have that we can earn our salvation.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. But Paul immediately follows it up with a few of the most wonderful verses in all of Scripture. In Romans 3:21-24 we read, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Marc Roby: Hallelujah!

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² P.G. Mathew, *Power for Living – Part 3*, delivered Sunday, September 28, 2003 at Grace Valley Christian Center, available at <https://gracevalley.org/sermon/power-for-living-part-3/>

Dr. Spencer: Hallelujah indeed. That which was impossible for us to do, God has accomplished for us. We have a righteousness that comes from God – it is God’s righteousness, not ours. And it comes apart from law Paul says, which simply means that we don’t earn it by keeping the law. And Paul says that the Law and Prophets testify to this righteousness. Now, the Law and Prophets was a common way of referring to the Old Testament, which speaks of Christ and his redemptive work from beginning to end.

Marc Roby: And it is important to note that it was Paul who wrote this. Before his conversion he was a Pharisee, which was the strictest sect of Judaism. If anyone could have claimed a righteousness of his own, you would think it would have been Paul.

Dr. Spencer: In fact, Paul uses himself as an example. In Philippians Chapter Three he speaks about how zealous he was for keeping God’s laws. He even says that he was faultless with regard to legalistic righteousness. But then, in Philippians 3:7-9 he wrote, “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

Marc Roby: Well, if Paul considered his righteousness to be rubbish, that doesn’t give much hope to most of the rest of us.

Dr. Spencer: It wasn’t meant to. If we trust in ourselves, there is no hope. As he summed it up in the passage I just read from Romans, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22-23). But, praise God, he also wrote that we “are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:24) That is the glorious gospel of freedom. Jesus Christ redeemed us from our bondage to sin and we are justified in God’s sight based on the perfect, unimpeachable righteousness of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is all by grace. We merit eternal damnation, but because of God’s great love and mercy, we receive forgiveness, justification and adoption as children.

Marc Roby: And all of this is secured through faith in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Spencer: Yes. We must abandon any hope of saving ourselves or of meriting anything good from God and we must throw ourselves completely on his mercy, trusting in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. The Rev. Mathew summed it up well when he said that “A Christian who imagines he could stand before God in his own righteousness of good works is a Pharisee. In God’s sight, all our righteousness is like filthy garbage. A Christian’s breastplate is the alien righteousness of Jesus Christ, received as a gift by faith.”³

Marc Roby: And so the second piece of our armor then is the perfect righteousness of Christ.

³ Ibid

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. But that isn't the whole story. It also includes our own righteousness, imperfect though it always is.

Marc Roby: Can you explain that?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, the perfect righteousness of Christ is the only thing that can gain entrance to heaven. But as we have labored to show on many occasions, anyone who has been born again is a new creation in Christ Jesus and he *will* be sanctified. He will be made holy. Not perfectly in this life, but there will be holiness there. And that holy living provides protection against the attacks of Satan and the world as we discussed last week in relation to the belt of truth.

Marc Roby: That makes sense. If we strive to live an upright life it will protect us from many different kinds of harm.

Dr. Spencer: It certainly will. When we sin, we open the door to more sin. Many lies, for example, are told to cover up sin. And many sins are committed to cover up previous sins. Sin feeds on itself and leads to a downward spiral. The best way to avoid temptation to sin is to avoid sin itself! That may sound strange, but sinning virtually always leads to serious temptation to sin more.

Marc Roby: Yes, King David is a perfect illustration of that. After committing adultery with Bathsheba he lied and he eventually had her husband killed to try and cover up his sin.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is an extreme example to be sure, but it is a good one. There are many more examples from our own time and I don't really think we need to go over them. I'm sure everyone listening can think of times in their own lives when one sin led to others.

Marc Roby: Unfortunately, I'm confident that you're right about that.

Dr. Spencer: Christians do sin. But they can also repent and move forward. True, heartfelt, biblical repentance is a wonderful thing. It breaks the spiral of continuing sin.

Marc Roby: And that is a very good thing. Sin always produces guilt and misery, but true repentance then brings freedom from the guilt and misery and the ability to move forward and not continue sinning. Are we ready to move on to the next piece of armor?

Dr. Spencer: Yes. Let me read the complete sentence we have been looking at. In Ephesians 6:14-15 we read, "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."

Marc Roby: That is a somewhat strange phrase at the end of that sentence. We are to have our "feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." I think that needs some explanation.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. There are a couple of possibilities for what that means. Let me quote from Mathew yet again. He wrote, "As Christian soldiers, we need boots to march in, boots that give us sure footing, that we may take a solid stance and not slip. We are told these boots consist in 'the readiness of the gospel of peace.' The exact meaning of this statement is somewhat obscure.

It could be the boots are the peace we have from God, received through the gospel.”⁴ And Mathew then quotes from Romans 5:1, where we are told that “since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”.

Marc Roby: That is wonderful news, and certainly having peace with God provides solid footing for the Christian life. Many of man’s troubles are born out of his lack of peace. He runs after money, power, sex, drugs, all kinds of things in the hope of finding ultimate peace, or of numbing himself from the pain caused by a lack of inner peace.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that’s very true. But the verse could also be taken in a slightly different way. Quoting from Mathew yet again, “it could be that the boots consist in our readiness to proclaim the gospel that gives peace to sinners.”⁵

Marc Roby: Well, that also makes good sense. Perhaps the apostle had both meanings in mind.

Dr. Spencer: I think that is a reasonable supposition. We receive peace from God and we should always be eager to share that peace with others. Both of these things strengthen our own faith and help to make us able to stand firm.

And then, in Ephesians 6:16, we see the fourth piece of armor. Paul wrote, “In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

Marc Roby: Now that statement sounds a bit strange at first blush since it is by faith that we are united to Christ at all. Why would Paul need to tell us to take up the shield of faith?

Dr. Spencer: Because our faith must be active to be strong. It is like our physical body in that respect. If we stop exercising, we lose strength and stamina.

Marc Roby: I certainly know that to be true, especially as I get older.

Dr. Spencer: And so do I. But faith is the same. We can’t just say that one day we believed Jesus to be the Savior and that settles it for the rest of our life, so now we can forget all about the topic and go on with life. That would be wrong on many levels, but for one, our faith would grow cold and useless and we would not be able to withstand temptations and doubts.

Quoting from Mathew again, he wrote about the shield of faith, saying that “This speaks of the large shield that protected the Roman soldier’s entire body. It was made of wood covered with hide and bound by iron on top and bottom. When dipped in water, this large shield was able to put out incendiary missiles, which consisted of arrows dipped in pitch, set aflame, and fired.”⁶

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

Marc Roby: And our doubts and the temptations that are a natural part of life are all flaming arrows that come at us. We are told in 1 Peter 5:8 that our, “enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Dr. Spencer: And Mathew points out that if we have knowledge of and confidence in the word of God, our faith will be able to extinguish those arrows. But that knowledge and confidence require diligent effort. We must study the word of God. We must pray. We must attend a good church, listen carefully to the sermons and go home and put them into practice. We must seek out and enjoy good Christian fellowship, which will build us up in our faith.

Marc Roby: There have certainly been times when I have felt weak in my faith and was lifted up and strengthened by reading the word, or praying, or going to church, or having good Christian fellowship.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is true for all of us. In fact, when we don't feel like reading the word, or praying, or going to church, or getting together with other Christians, that is precisely when it is the *most* important for us to do so! We are in a very dangerous position when we are feeling like we want to just sit alone and feel lousy. Now, some people are more prone to such an attitude than others of course, but we all know what it is like to feel down and to not want to do much of anything. But that is a dangerous place to be, it gives Satan a foothold.

Marc Roby: And so the right response is to exercise self-discipline and do exactly the things we don't *feel* like doing at the time: read the word, pray, go to church, have good fellowship.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. Those are all means of grace that God provides to build us up in our faith so that we can stand against temptation. Understanding the word of God allows us to know when Satan is attacking us with lies. For example, think of a very new Christian.

Marc Roby: New Christians are usually quite zealous and joyful in their faith.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's true. But, sooner or later, they sin. And then the devil is likely to come put wicked thoughts in their mind. He will come and say to you, “If you were really a Christian you wouldn't have sinned like that.”

But if we are spending time in the word, we can say, “No, get away from me Satan. Christians do still sin. In fact, we are told in 1 John 1:8 that ‘If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.’ And I am genuinely grieved that I have sinned, but I have repented and I am told in 1 John 1:9 that ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.’”

Marc Roby: And James tells us, in James 4:7, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” That is a wonderful promise. If we are submitted to the authority of God's word and doing our best to walk in obedience and to resist the devil, then he will flee from us.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is a wonderful promise. But in order to meet the condition, we need to be in the word of God, we need good Christian fellowship and we need to avoid the fellowship of wicked people. As we are told in Psalm 1, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel

of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

Marc Roby: That, again, is a great promise from God. He watches over the way of the righteous. Obviously meaning that he watches over them to bless them.

Dr. Spencer: And when God blesses you, you are truly and eternally blessed. But having strong faith takes work. It requires that we put in the effort to use the means of grace that God provides.

Marc Roby: Very well, we have now seen four of the six elements of the Christian’s armor: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, and the shield of faith.

I look forward to discussing the last two, but I don’t think we have enough time left for today to start a new one, so let me remind everyone that they can send questions or comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We love seeing your comments and responding to your questions.

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