

When my Dad was teaching me to shoot, it wasn't something that was so much for fun (although we did have fun) – it was a necessity. The seasons would turn dry, and the roos would get pretty thick on the wheat, and give it an absolute hammering. And every night, we'd have to go out in the old EH ute, and thin them out a bit... And having a fair bit of pride, I like to shoot 'em in the head, but Dad always said "Just shoot 'em in the chest – haven't got time for fancy stuff – don't shoot 'em in the gut though – it takes them too long to die. Shoot 'em in the chest, and it won't be long and they'll be dead.

In your chest, is your heart, your lungs, all of the biggest arteries and veins, your spinal column and spinal chord. Come down a bit lower, you've got liver and kidneys... A chest wound, is quite likely to be fatal.

*And that's why armour – it doesn't matter what sort of armour it is – is **usually** designed to protect the upper torso. Bullet proof vests are designed, to protect your chest. The breastplate, found on many types of medieval and ancient armour, could be made out of iron, bronze, or thick leather, and it was designed to guard the upper torso... - because if you get hit by a sword or an arrow in the chest, you can't keep fighting for very long – you very quickly bleed out, or if it goes into your lungs, you drown in your own blood....*

I hope that introduction hasn't been too ghastly for you... Battle is a ghastly business... And protection against chest and upper abdomen wounds, is critical...

Today we're learning about the second piece of God's armour – the breastplate of righteousness. And just as the Roman soldier had a breastplate, to protect his heart from arrow,

sword and spear, we Christians in the spiritual battle – well we have to protect our hearts too, and **our** breastplate – **our** heart’s protection – is “righteousness”.

Verse 14 says: ¹⁴ **Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth** (we talked about that last week), **and having put on the breastplate of righteousness...**
What does that mean? – What does it mean to “put on” righteousness???

Well, 3 months ago (to the day actually), we were in Ephesians Chapter 4, and I gave a message on “Transformed – and living as the transformed creatures that we are.”

When you become a Christian – when you repent of your sin, and ask for the forgiveness of God, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, ... what happens????

... Well, all of the accumulated sin – every bad thing you’ve ever done – your past wrong attitude toward God – every evil thought – every vile action – every bitter, or profane word..... all of this – is taken away.... Your history – your record of guilt – is expunged. (God hits the ‘Delete’ button on the memory)

At the cross of Christ, an amazing exchange takes place. All of our sin, flows to Christ – He took every bit of our sin, on the cross. But it’s more than that, because then the righteousness of Christ, flows to us...

Imagine you’ve worn the same outfit for 3 years straight, and it hasn’t been washed – there’s mud and grease and grime –

poo & spu & stew... - it's just gross..... But then someone says "Come to me and I'll clean you up." ... You take off your filthy clothes, have a long shower with some kind of caustic soap... And then when you dry off, there's a brand new, spotless outfit for you to put on...

Well that's an image for what happens when we come to Christ... He takes off the sin, cleans us up, makes us spotless.... And then He gives to us, His righteousness, to put on...

And so in God's sight, God does not see our past sin – what He sees, is the righteousness of Christ... No matter how hard **I** try to do the right thing, I could **never** be good enough to be in the presence of a Holy God... But, clothed in the righteousness of **Christ**, Hey, we're welcome.

But in Ephesians, to "put on" righteousness, is more than that – it **begins** with this imparted righteousness of Christ, but it's more than that. It is a personal righteousness. It is the uprightness of our character¹. And hence the message 3 months ago, "transformed – and living as the transformed creatures that we are"... God doesn't clean us up, so we can go back and wallow in the mud again. He cleans us up, so that He can transform us into something better - a holy people, belonging to God.

God has shifted us from unrighteousness to righteousness, and therefore we should live as the transformed creatures that we are. In Ephesians 5, Paul actually says "**Be imitators of God**".... And of course, we imitate God, by living righteous lives.

By the way, in Isaiah 59, God Himself, is described as putting on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head... When we put on righteousness, we're imitating God...

So that was really the lesson (in a nutshell) 3 months ago... What's different about this part of the letter? Is Paul just repeating himself?... No, he's not repeating himself. Paul is summing up the letter (that's why it's coming up again), but he is also trying to get us to understand, the spiritual significance of the battle between righteousness and wickedness...

It's interesting you know, in Isaiah 59, the reason that God is putting on **His** breastplate of righteousness and helmet of salvation, is because of the evil that's going on in society...

Forces at work in society set out to ruin – they preyed upon – anyone who shunned evil. It had gone beyond only acting against those who stood up and spoke out against the evil in society... And society had begun to prey upon anyone who merely did the right thing.... On a personal level, when anyone chose to do the right thing, instead of the wrong thing, that made them a marked man (or a marked woman).ⁱⁱ

And God looks around – who can stand against this – who can step in and make it right??? But there was no one, and so He saw that He was the one to do it...

Let me read it for you: Isaiah 59:14–17 (ESV)

- ¹⁴ Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands far away;
for truth has stumbled in the public squares,
and uprightness cannot enter.
- ¹⁵ Truth is lacking,
and he who departs from evil makes himself a
prey.
YHWH saw it, and it displeased him
that there was no justice.
- ¹⁶ He saw that there was no man,
and wondered that there was no one to intercede;
then his own arm brought him salvation,
and his righteousness upheld him.
- ¹⁷ He put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

What forces could possibly be at work – that **anyone** who does the **right** thing, – is made a target???? And **that's** what today's reading is about. The schemes of the devil – Spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm – target the righteous.

- When you're the only one at the party not getting drunk, and others begin to mock you – that's an attack from the evil one.
- When it seems that everybody else is sleeping around, and those who wait for marriage are seen as 'abnormal', that's a spiritual battle.

- When it seems you're excluded from the group because you don't join in on the filthy talk, that's a spiritual battle.
- When society says that sexual perversion is normal, and those who reject that are charged under the anti-discrimination act – that's a spiritual battle.
- When bible teachers preach the truth, reject the validity of other religions and subsequently get charged under the religious vilification act – that's a spiritual battle.

Back in chapters 4 and 5, Paul gave us a few examples of those things that are incompatible with righteous living:

- Falsehood
- Persistent anger
- Theft
- unwholesome talk
- Bitterness
- Rage
- Anger
- Brawling
- Slander
- Malice
- Unforgiveness
- Sexual immorality
- Any kind of impurity
- Greed
- Obscenity
- Foolish talk
- Coarse joking
- Drunkenness
- Debauchery

And they're just examples – that's **not** a definitive list

The call to discipleship, is to take off these things, and to put on righteousness... It's not a legalistic list of do's and don'ts... - it's a recognition that we are no longer once we once were. We once used to be a child of the devil – we were sold out in slavery to sin. But now you're a child of God – covered in righteousness...

But the devil wants it back the way it used to be....

The devil, wants Christians to get caught up in sin – do you know why??? Because it makes God look bad, and it leaves us weak and vulnerable...

The boss I had before I went to Bible college, was not a Christian. But he, like most people in the world, observes and discerns the character of those around him. And whenever he saw a Christian who said one thing, and yet lived an unrighteous life, well didn't he used to let me know about it? And so he should.

When those who profess to be Christians, live unrighteous lives – that makes God look bad.

What would you say, is the biggest issue that damages the credibility of the Christian church in Australia today?

- Pretty high on that list, would have to be the abuse of children by leaders in the church, and particularly the clergy
- Also pretty high on the list, would have to be the greed or opulence of the institution, or greed (once again) of its pastors and ministers
- Something else that gives God a bad image, would have to be adultery or fornication within the church

All of these things, reflect badly on God.

Some schools expel their students, for behaviour they committed outside of school. Why? Because they represent their school everywhere they go – particularly if they're in a school uniform...

We represent Christ, wherever we go. You are never... **not** representing Christ. That's an enormous responsibility... What you do, will either glorify God, or bring His name into disrepute.... That's why Paul said ^{4:30}**do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**.... And that's exactly what happens when we embrace evil instead of righteousness.

So, is it really that important? Does it really matter if I'm not the most saintly person in the world? Does it really matter if I do start doing what everybody else is doing???? I mean, after all, won't God forgive me when I confess my sin later on???? Does it really matter???

Well, let's look at it this way: Would you stand in the front-line, staring at the enemy lines before you, archers have their arrows nocked and their bows drawn... They're aiming in your direction... The infantry have their swords sharp, and at the ready...

What madness would possess one, to say "Hmm, I find this breastplate so restrictive... I reckon I can get by without it.... Would you really take it off??? I've still got a helmet. Still got a sword and a shield. Do I really need this breastplate thing??? Would you really take it off and leave your heart vulnerable???"

When disciples of Christ, neglect their personal righteousness, that leaves them weak and vulnerable.

Mighty men of God – powerful preachers and evangelists, have been taken out of the battle, because they weakened with greed, lust or power...

The devil – one of his names is “the accuser”. He accuses us before the throne of God. *Somebody once said, “If you throw enough mud, some of it’s going to stick”.*

Well let me tell ya, accusations can only stick if they have substance. When Satan lies in his accusations against you, it won’t stick, because the breastplate of righteousness guards you against those accusations...

But if there’s truth in the accusation, then it’ll stick alright, and the guilt will get to you; and you’ll be taken out of the battle. The spiritually weak and wounded are no threat to the devil. The righteous are – because when the people of God, live by the righteousness of God, they are a spiritual force to be reckoned with.

My prayer for this church, is that we would be a people who are characterised by righteousness – that we would be a people who stand strong for God, in His service.

Only what’s pure – nothing corrupt allowed in my heart...

Amen.

ⁱ Foulkes Francis Tyndale NT commentary (p.182)

ⁱⁱ Motyer, J.A., 1999. *Isaiah: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.