

The Breastplate of Righteousness



Spiritual Warfare (Part 7)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as I continue to share with you on a theme of tremendous personal importance to all of us, the defensive armor that God has provided for us in our spiritual warfare against Satan and his kingdom.

Yesterday we looked together at the list of defensive armor which Paul gives in Ephesians 6:13-17. We saw that the six items which Paul lists are as follows:

First, the girdle of truth;

Second, the breastplate of righteousness;

Third, the shoes of the preparation of the gospel;

Fourth, the shield of faith;

Fifth, the helmet of salvation;

Sixth, the sword of the Spirit.

Yesterday I dealt with the first item, the girdle of truth. I explained how a Roman legionary used his girdle to fasten his tunic tightly to his body so that its loose folds would not hinder the free, effective use of his arms and legs, and how his very life might depend on it. In the same way, we need to fasten up all the loose, flapping folds of religious language and clichés and to be absolutely honest in all that we say and do. Otherwise, we will not be in a position to make effective use of the remaining items of armor. That is why Paul lists the girdle first, the girdle of truth.

Today I am going to speak about the second item, the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate, of course, protects, above all else, one absolutely vital organ of the human body, and we all know what that—heart. The Bible indicates that the heart is of supreme importance in our lives. I have always been blessed by the statement of Solomon in Proverbs 4:23:

> "Watch over your heart will all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life." (NAS)

I was a teacher in East Africa, in Kenya, for five years and I became acquainted with a number of the tribes there and learned a little of some of their languages. The one of the tribes was called the Maragoli tribe. And one day, on the wall of a student's dormitory, I saw this verse quoted in the Maragoli language, which is called Luragoli. And I translated it to myself literally and I have always remembered the translation. It said this:

> "Guard your heart with all your strength for all the things there are in life come out of it."

That has never left me. "Guard your heart with all your strength for all the things there are in life come out of it." What you have in your heart ultimately must determine the course of your life, for good or for evil. That is why it is essential that we protect our heart from all kinds of evil. And Paul speaks about the breastplate of righteousness as a protection of the heart.

We need to ask what is meant by righteousness in this context. Fortunately, Paul returns to this theme, armor, in another epistle, 1 Thessalonians. And in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, he says this:

> "But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love..." (NAS)

So there Paul describes the breastplate from another point of view. He calls it "the breastplate of faith and love." Put these two passages together, "the breastplate of righteousness" is a "breastplate of faith and love." And this tells us the kind of righteousness that Paul has in mind. It is not the righteousness of works, it is not the righteousness of a religious law, but it is the righteousness that comes only by faith.

Paul speaks about this kind of righteousness again in Philippians 3:9. He says:

> "...and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." (NAS)

You see, Paul there puts the two kinds of righteousness side by side. First of all, he speaks about a righteousness of his own derived from the Law. He says this is not sufficient. Then he speaks, as an alternative, of the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. That is the kind of righteousness which he has in mind when he speaks about the breastplate of righteousness that protects the heart. You see, as long as we are wearing a breastplate which is simply our own righteousness, believe me, Satan can find many, many weak points in that righteousness and he can penetrate it many times with his attacks and damage our heart. We have to put on a breastplate which is not our own righteousness but the righteousness of Christ.

In this context, it is helpful to look at 2 Corinthians 5:21. Paul says:

> "[God] made Him who knew no sin [that's Jesus] to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [Christ]." (NAS)

We have to be convinced out of Scripture and accept by faith that we have become the righteousness of God. That is the only kind of breastplate that can adequately protect our heart and our life. Now this kind of righteousness, Paul emphasizes, comes only through faith. Therefore it is a breastplate of faith and love. There is no other way to achieve this kind of righteousness.

I am always moved by the prayer of Jesus for Peter on the night before His passion when Jesus warned Peter that he was going to betray Him the same night. And in the context of that warning, Jesus said, "Peter, I have prayed for you." I want you to see the prayer that Jesus prayed. Jesus did not pray that Peter would not betray Him because in the circumstances, under the pressures that would develop, with the known weaknesses in Peter's character, it was inevitable that Peter would betray Jesus. But Jesus prayed a different kind of prayer, the only prayer that could really help Peter. This is what Jesus said (Luke 22:31-32):

> "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail." (NIV)

Notice that, that "your faith may not fail." Even though he was going to deny the Lord, even though he was going to show himself very weak and, in a sense, cowardly, everything could still be retrieved provided his faith did not fail. You see, it is the breastplate of faith and love. Faith is essential for this breastplate.

The kind of faith that we are talking about works through love and only through love. In Galatians 5:6, Paul says this:

> "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working

> through love." (NAS)

Bear that in mind, "faith working through love," the breastplate of faith and love. As I understand it, there in Galatians, what Paul is really saying is, "No kind of outward ceremony or ritual in itself is sufficient. The one, essential thing without which we cannot succeed in the Christian life, is faith and the kind of faith that works through love. It's not a passive faith, it's not a theoretical faith, it's an active faith. It's a faith that works but through love."

I am impressed by the irresistible power of love the more I meditate upon it. I love a passage in the Song of Solomon which speaks about love. It says this (Song of Solomon 8:6-7):

> "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal over your arm; for love is as strong as death, Many waters cannot quench love; Rivers cannot wash it away." (NIV)

Think of that statement, "Love is as strong as death." Death is the one irresistible thing that we all encounter. There is not one of us that can resist death. When death comes, it is irresistible, there is no way to avoid it. And Scripture says, "Love is as strong as death."

Did you ever think about that? Love is irresistible. It always conquers. There is no way it can be defeated. Love protects our hearts from all negative forces, from resentment, unforgiveness, bitterness, discouragement, despair, all those evil things which will corrupt our heart and spoil our lives. Because remember all that there is in life comes out of the heart.

Listen to how Paul describes this kind of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8:

> "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." (NIV)

That is the breastplate that we need, one that never fails, a breastplate in which there are no weak points that Satan can penetrate. And see how appropriate what Paul says there is to the picture of the breastplate. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. When you have on that breastplate of faith that works by love, it will always protect you. It will keep your heart from every attack and attempt of Satan to penetrate that vital area of your life.

Well, our time is up for today. I will back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I will be dealing with the next two items of defensive armor, the shoes and the shield.

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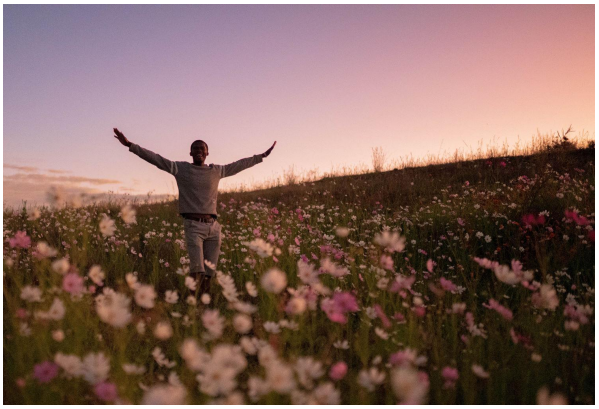

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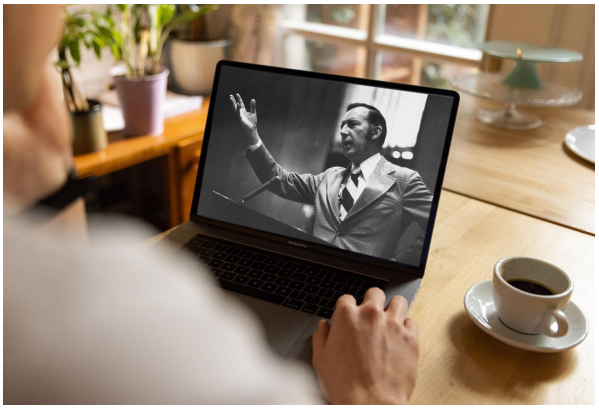

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