

## Chapter 3 – The Breastplate of Righteousness

I received a message from a friend a few years back. She was about to step into women's ministry, and definitely felt God nudging her in this direction. She was everything you want someone in ministry to be—excited, prepared, and ready to be used by the Lord. But here's the thing: someone told her she wasn't good enough, and she believed it. Hearing those words coming from the mouth of one of her peers was a swift kick to the gut.

She allowed Satan to steal her joy, deflate her sense of self-worth and question her calling. He's the master manipulator of half-truths, who comes to kill, steal, and destroy. You see, on one hand it was true. She wasn't good enough. But the thing is, none of us are. Not one. She's not good enough, I'm not good enough, even Billy Graham wasn't good enough. But here's the thing our righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ, and He is more than good enough. Throughout history He's used people that were weak and small and flawed to further the gospel. He's using cracked vessels for His glory and honor, so that through our weakness His grace abounds all the more.

In Isaiah 64:6, the Bible describes the righteous acts of the unbelievers as filthy rags. What the writer was referring to here when he wrote "filthy rags" were actually menstruation cloths that were used, washed, and hung out on the fence to dry. They'd shrivel up, fade, and sometimes even blow away in the wind.

*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)*

It's gross, but that's exactly the point the author of Isaiah was trying to make. We're deceiving ourselves if we think we are something without the righteousness of Christ.

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)*

*And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. (Philippians 3:9, KJV)*

The righteousness we're talking about here, is a gift that's imputed to us. It's a right standing with God through faith in Jesus Christ. It's given to us by grace, and there's nothing we can do to earn it. But there's another righteousness I want to talk about in this chapter, and that's the

righteousness we're commanded to live by. The difference here is that one is a gift and the other is our responsibility.

To put on The Breastplate of Righteousness is to live a righteous life. It's something we put on every day. Don't get me wrong— The Breastplate of Righteousness is not self-righteousness—it's our response to the righteousness imputed by Christ. As Paul writes, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

We won't be perfect, but we can and should be progressive. Progress is development and improvement. It's movement toward a goal. Just as a baby grows within the womb so we must develop and progress as we're growing in Christ.

If you look at images of Roman breastplates, you'll see they take on a vest-like shape, and were generally made of leather, bronze, or iron. The breastplate was worn over the tunic, and served to protect the vital organs within the upper torso.

The Breastplate of Righteousness serves to protect the heart. In fact, Proverbs 4:23 tells us, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Every choice we make, and every action we take stems from the heart. Our priorities, our convictions, our ideas, and our belief systems are all formed in the heart.

If everything we do flows from the heart, then we must do our best to protect our hearts by guarding our thoughts and filling our minds with the truth of God's word.

*In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul writes, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*

The words he uses here are likened to warfare. We see the crumbling walls of a fortress as enemy soldiers are brought to their knees.

In one of his sermons, Charles Spurgeon shared a parable of a Dervish man from the East who came upon a mountain. Looking down from the mountain, he saw the sun shining brightly on a river stream. It looked beautiful from afar, but as the old man made his way down the mountain, he soon discovered that this river was muddy and unfit for drinking.

Nearby, he saw a young shepherd boy busy filtering water. With much effort and time, he sifted and filtered the muddy water each day for his flock. Little by little he purified the water, collecting it in a cistern so the animals might have clean water to drink.

Knowing that there was a better way, the Dervish man instructed the young shepherd to follow him. For miles they journeyed through rough terrain until they came to the source of the stream. Just as they arrived a flock of birds flew away while wild beasts rushed into the forest. They found an open well that was continually flowing, but the beasts that came to drink had perpetually disturbed the soil around it. Because of these animals the well was turbid and muddy.

“My son,” said the wise man. “Set to work now to protect the fountain and guard the well, which is the source of this stream. If you can keep these wild beasts and fowls away, the stream will flow pure and clear.”

And so, while the young man went to work guarding the stream, the old man said, “My son if thou art wrong, seek not to correct thine outward life, but first seek to get thy heart correct. For out of it are the issues of life, and thy life shall be pure once thy heart is so.”

## Pause and Reflect

Q. What are Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 10:5 likened to?

Q. What were Roman breastplates made of?

Q. What does it mean to put on The Breastplate of Righteousness?

Q. What does Proverbs 4:23 tell us to guard? Write the verse out here.

Q. What are some practical ways you can protect your heart?

### Fill in the Blanks:

If you know that he is \_\_\_\_\_, you know that everyone who does \_\_\_\_\_ has been born of him. (1 John 2:29, NIV)

For with the heart man believeth unto \_\_\_\_\_; and with the mouth confession is made \_\_\_\_\_. (Romans 10:10, KJV)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and \_\_\_\_\_, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly \_\_\_\_\_ for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV)

Q. With what are we to fill our minds?

Q. What does Paul say we should take captive? How do we do that?

Q. What are some reoccurring thoughts that you struggle to take captive? What are some enticing lies that Satan has told you about these thoughts? What are some truths that can tear these lies down?