

## **Spiritual Warfare Sermon 7: Ephesians 6:14b: Sanctification and the Breastplate of Righteousness**

### **OUTLINE**

Counterfeit holiness

True holiness

### **INTRODUCTION**

Western Christianity, of which we are a part, can best be described by Christ's words to the churches of Sardis and Laodicea, Rev. 3:1b-5, 'I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. 4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. 5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.' Rev. 3:15-20, "'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.' The devil in the first century was waging war against the churches. He was employing three main tactics, persecution through government powers waging war upon the saints bodies and possessions seeking to intimidate them motivating them by fear to abandon the faith; false religion using lies to wage war on the minds and beliefs of the saints seeking to deceive them into leaving Christ; and seduction using the materialism and the sexual immorality of the ancient world to lure and charm the Christian from Christ. The churches of Laodicea and Sardis are casualties of the devil's tactic of seduction. And so are we!

The next part of the armour we want to consider which is directly relevant to our weakness as the Western Church is the breastplate of righteousness, 'Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.' Almost all commentators when commenting on this part of the armour emphasize the double nature of the breastplate, righteousness in justification as well as righteousness in sanctification. I agree with this double emphasis but am going to reverse the order and deal with sanctification before justification.

The devil hates our holiness and is waging war on our holiness, why? Because when we are holy as He is holy, when we walk as image bearers of God and put on display the character of God, we are diametrically opposed to the nature of Satan and sin. The devil hates God and His image. When we are holy and walk in holy deeds, others see our deeds and glorify our Father who is in heaven. The devil hates God to receive praise. Walking worthy of the gospel adorns the gospel and proclaims Christ as well as highlights the state of the unbeliever. The devil wants to keep the unbeliever in the dark. When we are walking on the highway of holiness we also know the true joy of holiness finding satisfaction apart from sin. The devil wants to keep up the rouse that sin satisfies. So when it comes to putting on the breastplate of righteousness we are now faced with a problem, which breastplate? The devil hates true holiness and constantly uses counterfeits and false notions to bog the Christian down in false versions of righteousness. Before we look then at the true breastplate we must make sure we are not putting on the false.

### **Counterfeit holiness**

One of the reasons for a low level of righteousness is because we have a low view of sin. We have lost a view of God's infinite holiness and seeing our light next to His perfection and we compare ourselves with one another or our former best. Sins in the modern age are now medical conditions-alcoholism; or crimes are the only real sins; legal acts committed by consenting adults that no one can judge; human rights exalting my will over God's; residual evolutionary patterns of behaviour-unfaithfulness; cultural norms; natural inclinations from birth and learnt behaviour compounded by emotional damage. To call someone to put on the breastplate of righteousness in an age where righteousness is being redefined, we need to remind ourselves of the true definition of sin to know what righteousness is.

Sin is doing, thinking, feeling, willing, saying anything not in full conformity to God's perfect character, which is also expressed in His law, 1 Jn. 3:4. To borrow a phrase from J. C. Ryle it is anything lacking in 'mathematical parallelism' to God's character or will. It is not a sin to fail to be divine, but it is sin to fail to be a perfect human replica of God's holiness as far as the potential of our createdness allows. Christ taught us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, Matt. 5:48. Adam before the fall was fully able to do this, he had the inclination, the incentive, the means and the power all at his disposal. Man has since fallen and now all men are incapable of this perfection; that is why Paul tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Rom. 3:23. In our present state of sinfulness we are thoroughly sinful. Our human hearts are now the fountain from which all evil activity flows, and before we become Christians every thought of our hearts is evil continually, the human heart is said to be deceitful above all things. Sin is not merely an act of ignorance, but wickedness; it is not merely an outward activity but a symptom of a heart and nature condition; it is not merely failing to live up to human expectations, but high treason against the infinite God. Sin lies to us to make it appear small but God hates sin, to break one law is to be guilty of breaking all, heaven cannot allow for a sinner to enter, hell is the fair punishment for it, Christ Himself sweat blood in consideration of having to bear the punishment for it, and it was He, the God-man who alone could pay for it.

We can bravely look into the true nature of sin because God has provided for us a sufficient salvation in Christ. By His perfect death and life He provides full payment and a perfect righteousness for us, so that when we believe we receive a perfect record of righteousness reckoned to us by which we are justified and escape God's condemnation. We will say more about this further on in our study of this part of the armour. But having been saved, we are then to return to the paths of righteousness originally created for us to walk, in, the path outlined in God's law, and the path which Jesus perfectly trod. If this is what sin is, then there are certain things that putting on the breastplate of righteousness cannot be:

To put on the breastplate of righteousness and walk in God's law is not to return to the OT law in its totality. This might seem obvious to us but the Seventh Day Adventist Church which has been seen as a cult by better informed Christians is making real inroads into what is now the Evangelical Church. Under the disguise of living a healthier life, the OT foods laws are being promoted as the right way, the OT Saturday Sabbath is being promoted as an eternal law binding all Christians, and that the Lord's Day observe practiced by the church since the first century is nothing more than a Constantinian syncretism. Matters over food and days, matters which the first century Jews struggled to leave behind, matters which bound the conscience of weaker and lesser informed brothers are resurfacing and being promoted as righteousness. This is a distraction and not the righteousness that Paul is calling us to put on.

To put on righteousness is not to be confused with putting on religion. For some piety consists in getting baptised as a baby, getting confirmed, getting married in a church, going to church every Sunday, wearing Sunday best, participating in high days, crossing oneself, praying with a rosary, bowing, lighting candles and other religious activities. This is not to be confused with true holiness.

To put on righteousness is not to be confused with legalistic abstention. One can not drink alcohol, never dance, never watch TV, never listen to the radio, never wear make-up, not have Facebook, never swear, but this does not mean that one is holy.

Another wrong view of putting on the breastplate of righteousness is the view of perfectionism that has haunted Christianity. Even when born again, indwelt by the Spirit, crucified with Christ, and have the law of the New Covenant written on our hearts, indwelling sin remains. There are those who have turned the breastplate into an anvil and an anchor around our necks. That which should preserve us, acts to be our undoing. Because the true nature of sin and our sinfulness is not grasped this nonsense view is espoused. Because sin springs from the heart even as one hateful/lustful/covetous/unforgiving/unthankful thought; because sin is anything that is not to the full extent of God's holiness in hating sin and loving good; because we can commit sins of omission as well as commission; and because the bible records that we can commit sins of ignorance (Lk. 12:48; Lev. 4-5, 15:25-29), we cannot pretend to be perfect. The only way we can do so is to redefine sin as a conscious act of the will, but this is to allow our fallen and ignorant understanding; and our dull and hardened conscience and to determine the true nature of sin and not God.

To put on the breastplate is not to be confused with emotionalism and passing zeal. There is a long history of holiness preaching with its conferences, crusades, tent meetings and all the emotion and hype that go on with them. Tears and singing and shouts and testimonies and much activity and emotion can be confused with true holiness. To feel conviction of sin, and anger at sin, is not the same as putting on the breastplate of righteousness. We need to be careful that in agreeing with the truth we mistake it for having performed it.

Putting on the breastplate is not to be confused with the single action, second experience theology of many movements that tell you to yield to know freedom in holiness, or to let go and let God, or the sanctification by faith alone message. Paul's exhortations are not indicating a once off action or technique but a daily activity.

To put on the breastplate of righteousness is not to put on the lazy Christianity of the Western Church and attain or be just ahead of your peers and leaders. True holiness come from comparing ourselves with God not each other.

### **True holiness**

Having put on the true breastplate of righteousness is having agreed with God's will for human life as His image bearers. We are first and foremost not existing for the promotion of our own glory, beauty, will or deeds, but God made us to be a mirror for His glory. He gave us a greater privilege than all other earthly creatures in that we get to portray something of His glory and worth, and in this we have a dignity far above our actual worth in terms of weight, ability or beauty. True humanity is portrayed in Christ and by salvation in Him and being filled with His Spirit God fulfils His purpose of making us image bearers by conforming us to the perfect image of God in Christ. Putting on the breastplate is putting on this new identity and purpose. Paul uses this putting on language in many ways, Eph. 4:24, 'and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.' Romans 13:14, 'But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.' Col. 3:9-10, 'Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.' We can see that putting on righteousness is embracing God's purpose for us as image bearers in His Son, but let us get practical and break down what this looks like.

I am going to shamelessly borrow J. C. Ryle's 12 points on practical holiness as a good summary of what putting on the breastplate of righteousness looks like. Test yourselves by these. Let the picture of these create such a hunger and thirst in you after righteousness, for by pursuing this hunger, this is the only way we will be filled.

1. Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgment - hating what He hates - loving what He loves - and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man.

2. A holy man will endeavour to shun every known sin, and to keep every known commandment. He will have a decided bent of mind toward God, a hearty desire to do His will - a greater fear of displeasing Him than of displeasing the world, and a love to all His ways. He will feel what Paul felt when he said, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. vii. 22), and what David felt when he said, "I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." (Psalm cxix. 128.)
3. A holy man will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ. He will not only live the life of faith in Him, and draw from Him all his daily peace and strength, but he will also labour to have the mind that was in Him, and to be "conformed to His image." (Rom. viii. 29.) It will be his aim to bear with and forgive others, HOLINESS J. C. RYLE 29 even as Christ forgave us - to be unselfish, even as Christ pleased not Himself - to walk in love, even as Christ loved us - to be lowly-minded and humble, even as Christ made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself. He will remember that Christ was a faithful witness for the truth - that He came not to do His own will - that it was His meat and drink to do His Father's will - that He would continually deny Himself in order to minister to others - that He was meek and patient under undeserved insults - that He thought more of godly poor men than of kings - that He was full of love and compassion to sinners - that He was bold and uncompromising in denouncing sin - that He sought not the praise of men, when He might have had it - that He went about doing good - that He was separate from worldly people - that He continued instant in prayer - that He would not let even His nearest relations stand in His way when God's work was to be done. These things a holy man will try to remember. By them he will endeavour to shape his course in life. He will lay to heart the saying of John, "He that saith he abideth in Christ ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked" (1 John ii. 6); and the saying of Peter, that "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps." (1 Peter ii. 21.)
4. A holy man will follow after meekness, longsuffering, gentleness, patience, kind tempers, government of his tongue. He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much, and be slow to talk of standing on his rights.
5. A holy man will follow after temperance and self-denial. He will labour to mortify the desires of his body - to crucify his flesh with his affections and lusts - to curb his passions - to restrain his carnal inclinations, lest at any time they break loose.... "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Cor. ix. 27.)
6. A holy man will follow after charity and brotherly kindness. He will endeavour to observe the golden rule of doing as he would have men do to him, and speaking as he would have men speak to him. He will be full of affection towards his brethren - towards their bodies, their property, their characters, their feelings, their souls. "He that loveth another," says Paul, "hath fulfilled the law." (Rom. xiii. 8.) He will abhor all lying, slandering, backbiting, cheating, dishonesty, and unfair dealing, even in the least things.
7. A holy man will follow after a spirit of mercy and benevolence towards others. He will not stand all the day idle. He will not be content with doing no harm - he will try to do good. He will strive to be useful in his day and generation, and to lessen the

spiritual wants and misery around him, as far as he can. Such was Dorcas, "full of good works and almsdeeds, which she did,"

8. A holy man will follow after purity of heart. He will dread all filthiness and uncleanness of spirit, and seek to avoid all things that might draw him into it. He knows his own heart is like tinder, and will diligently keep clear of the sparks of temptation. Who shall dare to talk of strength when David can fall? There is many a hint to be gleaned from the ceremonial law. Under it the man who only touched a bone, or a dead body, or a grave, or a diseased person, became at once unclean in the sight of God. And these things were emblems and figures. Few Christians are ever too watchful and too particular about this point.
9. A holy man will follow after the fear of God. I do not mean the fear of a slave, who only works because he is afraid of punishment, and would be idle if he did not dread discovery. I mean rather the fear of a child, who wishes to live and move as if he was always before his father's face, because he loves him.
10. A holy man will follow after humility. He will desire, in lowliness of mind, to esteem all others better than himself. He will see more evil in his own heart than in any other in the world. He will understand something of Abraham's feeling, when he says, "I am dust and ashes;" - and Jacob's, when he says, "I am less than the least of all Thy mercies;" - and Job's, when he says, "I am vile;" - and Paul's, when he says, "I am chief of sinners." Holy Bradford, that faithful martyr of Christ, would sometimes finish his letters with these words, "A most miserable sinner, John Bradford." Good old Mr. Grimshaw's last words, when he lay on his death-bed, were these, "Here goes an unprofitable servant."
11. A holy man will follow after faithfulness in all the duties and relations in life. He will try, not merely to fill his place as well as others who take no thought for their souls, but even better, because he has higher motives, and more help than they. Those words of Paul should never be forgotten, "Whatever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord," - "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." (Col. iii. 23; Rom. xii. 11.) Holy persons should aim at doing everything well, and should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything ill if they can help it. Like Daniel, they should seek to give no "occasion" against themselves, except "concerning the law of their God." (Dan. vi. 5.) They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants, good neighbours, good friends, good subjects, good in private and good in public, good in the place of business and good by their firesides. Holiness is worth little indeed, if it does not bear this kind of fruit. The Lord Jesus puts a searching question to His people, when He says, "What do ye more than others?" (Matt. v. 47.)
12. Last, but not least, a holy man will follow after spiritual mindedness. He will endeavour to set his affections entirely on things above, and to hold things on earth with a very loose hand. He will not neglect the business of the life that now is; but the first place in his mind and thoughts will be given to the life to come. He will aim to live like one whose treasure is in heaven, and to pass through this world like a stranger and pilgrim travelling to his home. To commune with God in prayer, in the Bible, and in the assembly of His people - these things will be the holy man's chiefest enjoyments. He will value every thing and place and company, just in proportion as it

draws him nearer to God. He will enter into something of David's feeling, when he says, "My soul followeth hard after Thee." "Thou art my portion." (Psalm lxiii. 8; cxix. 57.)<sup>1</sup>

This holiness is our armour. To love sin more than God, to be satisfied in God's ways leaves no openness for sin's lies of satisfaction. This deliberate posture of holiness, this deliberate nurturing of our heavenly citizenship, this deliberate acting out of our God described identity will silence the lies of satan and sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Pg 28-30, <http://www.preachtheword.com/bookstore/holiness.pdf>