

# "The Breastplate of Righteousness"

Ephesians 6:13–17

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by Senior Pastor Hong Poonghwa

## Ephesians 6:13–17 (PowerPoint)

### Preface

It has been a while, but I would like to return again to the Epistle to the Ephesians and continue learning from it.

Over the previous two messages, we have learned about “having girded your waist with truth.”

That is to say, “girding your waist with truth” means that the One called Jesus Christ is truth—that is, fact and reality—and that to earnestly wait for the grace that will be given when He appears again is what it means to “gird your waist with truth.” And we learned that unless one aligns one’s faith and one’s life with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and makes that the foundation, it cannot be said that one has “girded the waist with truth.”

This morning, we would like to consider the next item: “having put on the breastplate of righteousness.”

What we learned previously, “girding the waist with truth,” is, strictly speaking, not armor for fighting, but preparation for fighting—a foundation, something like a base without which nothing can begin.

In order to move easily and fight effectively, one lifts up the long garment made of a single large piece of cloth that hangs down to the feet and firmly ties it around the waist. The belt serves as a foundation, a kind of preparation that is absolutely necessary in order to put on the armor.

And once the belt is firmly fastened, then at last, one puts on the armor.

And what one puts on first is the breastplate to protect the chest.

### Part One

If the primary role of armor is to protect life, then the breastplate may be said to be the most important piece of armor.

This is because the greatest role of the breastplate is to protect the heart—the organ of life.

Even if one’s arms or legs are injured, or even torn off, of course there would be an indescribable pain that one would not even want to imagine, but as long as the heart is beating, there is still a great possibility of living.

But if the heart is pierced, there is no life.

Therefore, in protecting life, the breastplate can be said to be the most important piece of armor.

And it is this most important organ—the chest, the heart—that the devil aims at. Naturally, because if the heart is pierced, it becomes a fatal wound. The devil knows that if he pierces our heart, we will not be able to stand at all.

Then what corresponds to the heart for us Christians? What is it that, for a Christian under the devil's attack, can become a fatal wound?

It is righteousness.

Righteousness is precisely what corresponds to our heart.

In other words, by accusing us regarding whether we have righteousness, whether we are righteous, whether we stand in righteousness—if he pierces that point, the devil knows that he can kill us.

He knows that he can drag us into eternal destruction.

However, the great problem for us—and an exceedingly easy matter for the devil—is that among us human beings, there is not even one who has righteousness.

The devil knows that if he strikes at the “heart” of righteousness in us humans, we have nothing to say in return—an instant kill, a single blow.

That is why what becomes necessary is the breastplate of righteousness that protects life from the devil's attacks.

Not a miserable, full-of-holes breastplate of righteousness made by our own hands, but the perfect breastplate of righteousness prepared by God—other than putting this on our chest, there is no way for us humans to protect our heart.

## **Part Two**

As we have learned in Ephesians up to this point, we human beings have no righteousness.

The righteousness that we humans think of is always unfair, arbitrary, and self-centered.

We try to govern things based on private understandings and relationships, gather people we like, create our own circle, build power, produce vested interests, and seek to do as we please—that, after all, is the righteousness that we humans think of.

No matter how much we may say, assert, and be convinced that “I am right,” “my view is not wrong,” “I am the righteous one,” as we have learned in Ephesians, all of us human beings are by nature children who deserve God's wrath, those who were dead in sins and trespasses, walking as children of the devil filled with curses and bitterness, whether knowingly or unknowingly—and if left as we are, without any effort, we would naturally fall together with the devil into the punishment called hell.

Let us look at one passage of Scripture that speaks this truth plainly and directly.

### **Romans 3:9–20 (PowerPoint)**

We may look at a person and think or say, “That person is a good person,” but in the end, it means that in this world there is no such thing as a perfectly good person. If someone appears to be a good person, it is only because they are acting like one. Or perhaps, because of various rules, laws, customs, common sense, what is considered normal, human-made morals, and concern about how others see them—because these things exist, they are forced, as it were, to play the role of a good person.

In Ecclesiastes it says, “God tests them so that they may see that they are but beasts” (Ecclesiastes 3:18).

And in the Psalms it says, “I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You... they are like the beasts that perish” (Psalm 73:22; 49:12). Humans can become even worse than beasts, and we have the potential to do things that would make it seem even disrespectful to beasts to compare them with us. And in fact, we do such things. If we do not, it is only because we are concerned about some kind of social gaze and some kind of restraint is applied.

That is why, in places like the internet where faces cannot be seen, people can become as cruel, merciless, and cowardly as they wish.

Among us human beings, there is not even one righteous person.

Not even one.

There may be “good people” according to human-made or human-conceived standards, but as it says in Romans 3:20, there is not even one person who is recognized as righteous before God.

Yet the problem here is, as mentioned earlier, that this world is filled with all kinds of righteousness.

More precisely, it is filled with things that appear to be righteousness but are not. And at the very center of this appearance of righteousness—the very stronghold—is each one of us human beings.

It is said that the current world population is 8.28 billion. If we put it simply according to the words of Scripture, it means that in this world there exist 8.28 billion varieties of pseudo-righteousness that only appear to be righteousness.

Let us look at several passages from Proverbs that point this out plainly.

### **Proverbs 21:2 (PowerPoint)**

### **Proverbs 16:2 (PowerPoint)**

### **Proverbs 12:15 (Third Edition) (PowerPoint)**

**"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice."**

**Proverbs 14:12 (Kougo Translation) (PowerPoint)**

**"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."**

**Proverbs 20:9 (PowerPoint)**

It is as if it is saying, "Every person thinks that they themselves are righteous, yet they are all pseudo-righteous."

These may be words we do not even want to hear, words that make us want to close our ears. We may feel, "Even if that is said, what are we supposed to do?" But it is an undeniable fact.

There is no righteousness in people.

There is no righteousness in us.

That is why we must put on the "breastplate of righteousness" on our chest.

However, we must not misunderstand here.

It is not "our" breastplate of righteousness.

It is "God's" breastplate of righteousness.

For righteousness belongs to God alone, and God alone is holy.

**Isaiah 5:16 (PowerPoint)**

Only the holy God is the One who can judge fairly, justly, and ultimately. Only this One is righteous, and only this One is holy.

Earlier, in Proverbs 12:15, it said, "A fool thinks his own way is right, but a wise man listens to advice." Indeed, to listen to this word of counsel—that only the holy God is righteous and holy—is the way of wisdom prepared for us human beings.

And this holy and righteous God—what He has prepared for us to wear on our chest as the breastplate of righteousness—is Jesus Christ.

That is, the righteousness of God given to all who believe, through believing in Jesus Christ.

Let us return once more to Romans chapter 3. "

### **Part Three**

**Romans 3:20 (PowerPoint)**

In other words, no matter how much we do things that are thought to be good, even if we act according to rules or according to ethics and moral standards and do what is considered good, even if by doing so we put on an appearance of righteousness, honestly speaking, what arises within me is only an awareness of sin; the more I try

to do something good, the more a sense of guilt clings to me, and I cannot wipe away the feeling of hypocrisy.

However, verse 21.

### **Romans 3:21–22 (PowerPoint)**

As we confirmed earlier in one of the books of the prophets we looked at, Isaiah 5:16, that God alone is righteous and God alone is holy, this God has prepared for those who are not righteous at all—for us humanity—the only way to be acknowledged as righteous, the breastplate, which is the righteousness of God given through believing in Jesus Christ.

Let me explain a little more in detail.

Among all created things, human beings, who alone were created in the image of God, were originally created as those who possess the attribute and nature of "holiness" and the attribute and nature of "righteousness."

In Leviticus 11:44, there is the word spoken directly by the holy God: "I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy." In this word is the reason why we humans must seek to be "holy."

That is, human beings were originally holy.

They were beings specially distinguished and set apart by God from other created things.

However, human beings, by their own free will, were completely defeated by the devil's attack and temptation aimed at piercing the heart, and they lost the attributes of "holiness" and "righteousness."

Just as it is written in Genesis.

And what is truly like a curse is that there is no way for us humanity to recover the attributes of "holiness" and "righteousness" once they have been lost.

This is because God is eternally and perfectly fair and just, and therefore He cannot show favoritism to humanity—who have lost holiness and have become sinners worthy of being cast into evil, darkness, burning Gehenna, the lake of fire—and, while disregarding other created things, unjustly and unfairly overturn and destroy the order of all creation as if flipping over a table, simply because He likes us, and keep humanity specially close to Himself.

That God is holy is an attribute and nature beyond what we can imagine or even conceive.

The word "holy" in Hebrew is *kadosh*, and normally when using this word, it can be used only once in a sentence, and it is not used repeatedly in succession.

However, because God's "holiness" is incomparable and beyond imagination, in Isaiah chapter 6 it says, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts," and in the book of

Revelation also, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty" (Revelation 4:8). It is repeated three times, and uniquely for God alone, the word "holy" is repeated three times—ignoring the usual convention—in order to somehow express in words this incomparable and special holiness of God.

Such a holy God would never ignore righteousness and treat only humanity with special favor among all that He created.

If there is only one thing He could do, only one thing that would be possible, it would be to deny Himself.

That God would deny Himself.

The One who is the Creator of all, who exists before all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—the only God through whom all things were created—this God cast aside being God, became like a human being, and moreover, in order to become a substitute for us sinners, was not born as a sinful human, but was born as the one and only human without any sin.

A sinner cannot become a substitute for sinners.

Only one without sin can become a substitute, and as we saw earlier, such a human does not exist in this world; therefore, God Himself took the form of a sinless human and was born, denying that He is God.

Though He had no sin and therefore had no need to become empty, He emptied Himself, humbled Himself, and became obedient even to death on the cross as a substitute.

In order to restore once again to humanity the attribute of "holiness," to once again sanctify human beings as those who possess the nature of "holiness," which is the original form of humanity uniquely created in the image of God, He obeyed even to death on the cross as the substitute for our sins. That God Himself would do what should never happen—even if heaven and earth were overturned—that God would die; that God would deny Himself—this is the one and only way, possible only for God because He is God, by which human beings can once again be recognized as "holy," that is, as "righteous," as "just."

This is precisely the saving work of Jesus Christ, the Savior, who took on human form, obeyed to the point of death on the cross, and was raised from that death. And this is the one and only absolute way by which sinners—who can produce nothing but an awareness of sin, who possess no righteousness—can be justified. To put on this righteousness of God, to put on the breastplate of righteousness on the chest, is the only way to be protected from the devil's attack that seeks to pierce our heart.

This righteousness of God, this saving work of God, is presented by the Apostle Paul in a very simple, precise, and clear way so that anyone can understand and be convinced—these are the words of Romans 3:21–22.

### **Romans 3:21–22 (PowerPoint)**

This is the grace spoken of in the Bible, the mercy given to us, and the breastplate of righteousness that protects our heart.

#### **Part Four**

Our righteousness is no longer a righteousness based on ourselves.

It is the righteousness of God that is born through accepting and believing that the cross of Jesus Christ is for me.

It is the unshakable righteousness of God.

Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord—this is the righteousness of God.

Therefore, we cannot give up on ourselves, and at the same time, we cannot judge our neighbors, other people, those other than ourselves.

Because it is not my righteousness, but the righteousness of God given by grace.

At the same time that no one can deny my existence, we also can no longer judge, deny, or criticize others and indulge in a sense of superiority, nor can we be tormented by feelings of inferiority.

That is why the Apostle Paul gives to Christians the eternal word of encouragement, "There is no need to despair," and "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus," and at the same time exhorts, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with humility regard one another as more important than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3–4).

Even so, the devil does not give up and continues to attack us.

He tries to pierce our heart.

He continually tempts us, without rest, to make not the righteousness of Jesus Christ but our own righteousness, our own justice, our own correctness, into our breastplate, and the moment we put on our own righteousness, he watches for the opportunity to pierce our heart.

Not only Christians who believe in Jesus Christ, but all human beings most often receive fatal attacks when they build their faith on their own righteousness and build their lives on their own correctness.

When we establish our faith and our life based on my correctness, my righteousness, my experience, my knowledge, my skills, if the devil pierces our heart, two concrete symptoms appear, and by these two symptoms, it becomes as if we are spiritually dead.

Pride and despair.

When we rely on ourselves and try to establish our faith on our own righteousness, we begin to judge those whom we think are inferior to us—those whom we think have less ability, experience, knowledge, or age—and on the other hand, when we see those whom we think are superior to us, we become discouraged.

In these two problems, what must always come first is the cross.

Jesus Christ on the cross.

The righteousness of God through Jesus Christ on the cross.

When we put first the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ on the cross, we cannot judge, nor can we fall into discouragement or despair.

Both judging others and giving up on ourselves, becoming disappointed in ourselves, or ignoring ourselves—both of these mean ignoring God.

The devil aims at this point and seeks to destroy us instantly.

Although we must not live our life of faith based on ourselves, we face daily the devil who attacks us so that we would base it on ourselves.

The devil persistently stimulates and manipulates pride and despair.

That is why we put on the breastplate of God's righteousness.

### **Conclusion**

Our daily battle is not with a mindset or way of thinking such as, "I am not like that person," "I am different from that person," "I do not think the way you do," or "I do not think this is Christianity." Rather, we are called to continually ask ourselves each day whether we are fighting the battle of offering our bodies as a holy and living sacrifice, discerning what the will of God is, what is good and pleasing to Him, and striving to do it.

This, I believe, is the very act of continuing to put on the breastplate of the righteousness of Jesus Christ upon our chest.

Let us pray.

Benediction: Romans 3:22