

Overcome Satan's Accusations with ...

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Andreas - July 16, 2017

Watch the video clip from the movie about Martin Luther, the man who started the Protestant Reformation. October 31, 2017 is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. I think we need to throw a party and dress up like Protestants.

The reason I showed the clip is because I wanted you to hear this line: "So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this, 'I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? For I know one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God. Where he is there I shall be also.'"

Today we continue our look at the spiritual armour in Ephesians 6:10-18. These verses list six pieces of armour, plus prayer. The pieces of armour listed in these verses are based on the outfit of a Roman soldier. Like the soldier, you and I are in a battle. Unlike the soldier, we don't battle with physical forces. Instead, we battle with spiritual forces. Our battle is with Satan, whose mission is to deprive us of the abundant life God wants to share with us.

God created us for unhindered fellowship with himself. Satan wants to disrupt that fellowship. God created you for an eternal life with him. Satan wants to deprive you of that future. God created you to partner with him as he redeems creation. Satan wants to stop you from finding your place in God's plan; and he has a well-worn strategy to make it all happen.

Last week, we saw that the first step in Satan's strategy is to deceive us with lies. The first time Satan stepped onto the biblical stage was right at the beginning when he deceived our first parents into believing that God's Word cannot be trusted and that they would become like God if they seized the right to judge between good and evil for themselves. That's the lie that underlies every single one of Satan's lies. How do we overcome those lies? By putting on the belt of truth.

Just last week, someone lied to me. The lie came in the form of an email. Maybe you've received similar emails. The email told me that the Bank of Montreal had suspended online access to my MasterCard account due to suspicious activity. In order to restore access, I was told to click on the provided link.

Except for one spelling mistake that I didn't notice until Kirsten pointed it out, the email looked legitimate. It had the BMO logo and the link was

www1.bmo.com. Instead of clicking on the link, though, I went to my account to see if it was actually suspended. It wasn't. Everything was fine.

So, why didn't I click on the link? Because I was suspicious. Why was I suspicious? Because I was protected by the truth. I knew that banks don't give instructions like that by email.

When it comes to overcoming Satan's lies, we put on the belt of truth as we walk with the Spirit of Christ and let him apply the truth of the Bible to our hearts and minds; of course, in order for the Spirit to do that, we have to hide Scripture in our minds and hearts.

What does Satan do when he can't deceive us with his lies? Does he go away and leave us alone? Absolutely not.

To find out what he does next, read the story of Job in Job 1:1-12. This is from The Message version.

Job was a man who lived in Uz. He was honest inside and out, a man of his word, who was totally devoted to God and hated evil with a passion. He had seven sons and three daughters. He was also very wealthy—seven thousand head of sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred teams of oxen, five

hundred donkeys, and a huge staff of servants—the most influential man in all the East!

⁴⁻⁵ His sons used to take turns hosting parties in their homes, always inviting their three sisters to join them in their merrymaking. When the parties were over, Job would get up early in the morning and sacrifice a burnt offering for each of his children, thinking, “Maybe one of them sinned by defying God inwardly.” Job made a habit of this sacrificial atonement, just in case they’d sinned.

⁶⁻⁷ One day, when the angels came to report to God, Satan, who was the Designated Accuser, came along with them. God singled out Satan and said, “What have you been up to?”

Satan answered God, “Going here and there, checking things out on earth.”

⁸ God said to Satan, “Have you noticed my friend Job? There’s no one quite like him—honest and true to his word, totally devoted to God and hating evil.”

⁹⁻¹⁰ Satan retorted, “So do you think Job does all that out of the sheer goodness of his heart? Why, no one ever had it so good! You pamper him like a pet, make sure nothing bad ever happens to him or

his family or his possessions, bless everything he does—he can't lose!

¹¹ *“But what do you think would happen if you reached down and took away everything that is his? He'd curse you right to your face, that's what.”*

¹² *God replied, “We'll see. Go ahead—do what you want with all that is his. Just don't hurt him.” Then Satan left the presence of God.*

The first thing this passage tells us about Job is that he was totally devoted to God and hated evil with a passion. Your Bible might say, “He was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.”

That's code for Job had overcome the first step in Satan's strategy. He was not one to be deceived by lies. He was protected by the belt of truth because he lived in an ongoing relationship with God.

Now, because he couldn't deceive Job with lies, what did Satan do? Did he give up and leave Job alone? Absolutely not. Instead he kicked into second gear.

In the story of Job, Satan appears before God after roaming to and fro throughout all the earth. Knowing exactly what he was up to, God asked Satan, “Have you noticed my friend Job? There's no one quite like

him—honest and true to his word, totally devoted to God and hating evil.” In other words, “Have you noticed there’s a man out there who’s beaten you? He hasn’t been deceived by your lies.”

“Yes,” says Satan, “but it’s only because you protect and pamper him.”

By saying that, Satan was accusing God of favoritism and Job of what I call vending machine faith: “I keep putting loonies into the machine as long as it keeps giving me the candy I want. As soon as the machine stops producing what I want, I kick it and walk away.”

“Stop pampering Job,” Satan challenges God, “and you will see that his devotion is conditional and shallow. He will kick you and walk away. Deep down, he’s a just a hypocrite, like all those other people of God.”

The same is true for you and me. If Satan can’t deceive us, he might leave us alone just long enough to think we’re safe. Then, bang, he comes back to accuse us of violating the very truth we cling to for protection.

I don’t know if the scene described in Job’s story still unfolds today. Since Jesus defeated and bound him through his death and resurrection, I somehow doubt

that Satan still has the right to enter God's presence and bring accusations against God's people.

But I do know that Satan is still able to use my circumstances and my weaknesses to remind me of my own faults and failures and to fill me with guilt and shame so that I lose my authority and confidence as a child of God.

Now, before we talk about overcoming Satan's accusations, we need to be clear about something. Guilt, by itself, is not bad. Guilt is to our consciences what pain and puss are to our bodies.

We don't like pain and puss; but imagine life without them. We wouldn't know when there's an infection in our bodies. Guilt tells us that there's some kind of corruption in our lives.

In fact, a sense of guilt may be the result of the Holy Spirit's work. One of the jobs of the Spirit is to convict us of sin. That conviction can bring guilt.

The difference between Satan's accusations and the Holy Spirit's conviction is that Satan's accusations are designed to mire us down in shame, while the Spirit's conviction is designed to free us from the actions that caused the guilt and to restore our authority as believers.

If you let him, the enemy will keep haunting you with things you did long ago, even after you've come clean and made things right: "You had an abortion when you were a teenager. You're marred for life." "You gave away your innocence before you were married. You'll never make a good husband." "You failed as a parent. You don't deserve a family." "You messed up. You might as well just give up and let yourself go. You have no authority. You have no reason to be confident."

That's how Satan uses our failures against us. In contrast to that, the Holy Spirit uses those same failures to compel us to put on the breastplate of righteousness.

So, what is this breastplate of righteousness?

Your breastplate of righteousness is simply your defense against accusations. Your defense demonstrates that you are in the right and your accuser is wrong. Your defense usually consists of a record of good behaviour and right conduct. That record deflects the charges brought against you.

Personally, I've never been charged with a crime, other than an unspecified number of traffic violations. In the vast majority of cases, I was guilty as charged. I

had no “breastplate of righteousness” to protect me, so I took my demerits and paid my fines.

In a few cases, though, I felt that I was being falsely charged. I felt that I was in the right, so I held up my breastplate of righteousness.

One of those times was during my tree planting career. I was travelling from the Lower Mainland to Prince George. I was somewhere south of Quesnel when I noticed that my fuel was getting low. At one point, I passed a gas station that had a really good price, so I decided to turn around.

I found a driveway and started backing in. The problem was that I was pulling a tent trailer and I really didn't know how to back up with a trailer. I had to straighten the truck and trailer out so that it was straddling the entire highway.

Just then a brand new Kenworth travelling from Inland Kenworth in Terrace, BC to Inland Kenworth in Langley, BC came around the corner. I needed to get out of the way in a hurry. So I put the truck in reverse and stepped on the gas.

Everything would have been fine, if the truck driver had just stayed on course, but he saw me and decided

he needed to head for the same ditch I was heading for. You could say we had an encounter.

When the police showed up, one of the officers pulled out his pad and started writing a ticket. For some reason, I had the composure to say, “Sir, since when is it illegal to turn around on the highway? People do it all the time.”

He looked at me, ripped up the ticket and put his book away. I’m sure he could have nailed me; but my defense, or my breastplate of righteousness, as flimsy as it was, was enough to get me off the hook.

When you and I face the enemy’s accusations, we need a breastplate of righteousness; and it had better be more solid than the defense that got me off the hook with that police officer.

In his efforts to rob our confidence and authority, our enemy the devil brings two kinds of accusations against us. The first kind consists of false charges, like the charge he brought against Job. Satan couldn’t find anything wrong with Job, so he dug up something that Job hadn’t done yet.

As Job lost his blessings one by one, there were moments when it looked like the Accuser was right. Job questioned God and complained about the

treatment he was getting; but to the end he never gave up his faith in God. In Job 13:15, after he had been stripped of everything but his life and his wife, Job declared, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.” In your face Satan.

In our battle against Satan’s accusations, there will be times when we are right to defend ourselves. The fact that someone misunderstood your words or took offense at something you said does not make you liable or guilty, even though you might feel that way. You might want to clarify what you said; you might want to change the way you say it; but, unless you meant to offend and mislead, you are not guilty.

The fact that a friend or family member gets into trouble for making foolish choices does not make me responsible for their pain and suffering, even though they might try to make me feel that way. There may be things that I can do to help them; but I am not responsible for the consequences of their choices; and I may not be doing them any favours by rescuing them from those consequences.

So, Satan’s false accusations need to be met with an account of our right conduct; but if our own conduct is the only defense we have then we’re in deep trouble, especially when it comes to God’s standards.

When it comes to God's standards, the enemy doesn't have to rely on hypothetical sins that I have not yet committed. He's got plenty of real dirt on me for a life time of guilt and an eternity in hell. Romans 3:23 says, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

If we're going to survive the enemy's accusations, if we're going to stand in God's presence with confidence, we need a breastplate of righteousness that's made up of something other than our own conduct. We need the righteousness that comes from Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ lived a morally impeccable life. He got through life, from birth until his gruesome crucifixion, without believing a single lie of the devil. Because of his blameless conduct, even in the face of death, the accusations of the enemy could not touch him.

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that *he was tempted in every way just as we are and yet without sin*. Throughout his life, Jesus built for himself an impenetrable breastplate of righteousness.

The Bible also tells us that, because of his impeccable life, God accepted Jesus' death as a payment for each and every time you and I believed a lie of the enemy and disobeyed God's Word. 1 Peter 2:24 puts it this

way: *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.”*

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

As Jesus Christ hung on the cross, a two-way transfer took place. God took your sin and mine and transferred it on to Jesus. Then he took the righteousness of Jesus and made it available to you and to me. Now, when you and I acknowledge our sin and accept God’s offer, the transfer is complete. We are forgiven and become righteous in God’s sight.

From that moment on, when your heavenly Father looks at you, he no longer sees what you used to be. Instead, he sees Jesus. It’s like you are covered over with a robe of righteousness that’s not your own.

This whole deal works like an e-transfer. If I were to send money to you by e-transfer, you would get an email stating that I’ve made so much money available to you. In order to see that money in your bank account, you have to click on the accept button.

The moment Jesus died on the cross and God accepted his death as a payment for sin, forgiveness

and righteousness became available to every human being. God's email to us is the Gospel message, the Good News of Jesus Christ. In order to cash in on that righteousness, each one of us has to click on the accept button.

The fact that our grandparents or parents accepted the transfer does not mean it's ours. Just because we hang out with Christians and go to church does not mean it's ours. In order to make the forgiveness and righteousness of Jesus Christ our own, each one of us has to accept it for ourselves.

How do we do that? With a simple and sincere prayer, something like this: "Father in heaven, I have believed the enemy's lies; I have sinned against you. Thank-you for sending Jesus to pay the penalty for my sin. I now accept your forgiveness. I receive your gift of righteousness and the protection it provides."

Once you've accepted that gift, you have a breastplate of righteousness that protects you from any and every accusation that Satan hurls at you: "So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this, 'I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? For I know one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God. Where he is there I shall be also.'"

Does all of this mean that we stop sinning and become perfectly righteous the moment we accept God's offer? Unfortunately, no. That's why we need to keep on confessing our sins and accepting God's gift. Our journey into righteousness might start with a simple and sincere prayer; but from there it has to continue each and every day.

Does all this mean that we can go on sinning all we want? No, absolutely not. God doesn't forgive us and declare us righteous so that we can go back to the things that were destroying us. No, God forgives us and declares us righteous so that we can leave those things behind and start walking aright with his Spirit. That's what the next piece of the armour – the shoes of readiness – are all about. We'll talk about them next week.

Today, let's deal with the accusations and the guilt that rob us of our authority and confidence as children of God.

As we go through life, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, there are a lot of different voices that speak into our minds and hearts. One of those voices may be a voice of the Accuser telling you that you have failed and that you are beyond hope. If you listen to that voice long enough, then it will create your reality. You will fail. You will be without hope.

Another voice may be the voice of self-righteousness, telling you that you can do no wrong and that you don't have to fess up to anything. If you listen to that voice long enough, it will plant you in a false reality. You may end up looking confident and strong on the outside; but on the inside you will be fragile and insecure.

The voice you want to listen to is the voice of God's Spirit. He knows your faults and failures better than you know them yourself. Yet, he says, "Come, give them to me; and I will give you the righteousness of Jesus Christ. I will restore your authority and confidence as a son or daughter of God."

I saw a strange sight. I stumbled upon a story most strange, like nothing my life had ever prepared me for.

Even before the dawn one Friday morning I noticed a young man, handsome and strong, walking the alleys of our City. He was pulling an old cart filled with clothes both bright and new, and he was calling in a clear, tenor voice: "Rags! Rags! New rags for old! I take your tired rags! Rags!"

“Now, this is a wonder,” I thought to myself, for the man stood six-feet-four, and his arms were like tree limbs, hard and muscular, and his eyes flashed intelligence. Could he find no better job than this, to be a ragman in the inner city? I followed him. My curiosity drove me. And I wasn’t disappointed.

Soon the Ragman saw a woman sitting on her back porch. She was sobbing into a handkerchief, sighing, and shedding a thousand tears.

The Ragman stopped his cart. Quietly, he walked to the woman, stepping round tin cans, dead toys, and Pampers. “Give me your rag,” he said so gently, “and I’ll give you another.”

He slipped the handkerchief from her eyes. She looked up, and he laid across her palm a linen cloth so clean and new that it shined. She blinked from the gift to the giver.

Then, as he began to pull his cart again, the Ragman did a strange thing: he put her stained handkerchief to his own face; and then HE began to weep, to sob as grievously as she had done, his shoulders shaking. Yet she was left without a tear.

“This IS a wonder,” I breathed to myself, and I followed the sobbing Ragman like a child who cannot turn away from mystery.

“Rags! Rags! New rags for old!”

In a little while, when the sky showed grey behind the rooftops and I could see the shredded curtains hanging out black windows, the Ragman came upon a girl whose head was wrapped in a bandage, whose eyes were empty. Blood soaked her bandage. A single line of blood ran down her cheek.

Now the tall Ragman looked upon this child with pity, and he drew a lovely yellow bonnet from his cart. “Give me your rag,” he said, tracing his own line on her cheek, “and I’ll give you mine.”

The child could only gaze at him while he loosened the bandage, removed it, and tied it to his own head. The bonnet he set on hers. And I gasped at what I saw: for with the bandage went the wound! Against his brow it ran a darker, more substantial blood – his own!

“Rags! Rags! I take old rags!” cried the sobbing, bleeding, strong, intelligent Ragman. The sun hurt both the sky, now, and my eyes; the Ragman seemed more and more to hurry.

“Are you going to work?” he asked a man who leaned against a telephone pole. The man shook his head.

The Ragman pressed him: “Do you have a job?”

“Are you crazy?” sneered the other. He pulled away from the pole, revealing the right sleeve of his jacket – flat, the cuff stuffed into the pocket. He had no arm.

“So,” said the Ragman. “Give me your jacket, and I’ll give you mine.”

Such quiet authority in his voice!

The one-armed man took off his jacket. So did the Ragman – and I trembled at what I saw: for the Ragman’s arm stayed in its sleeve, and when the other put it on he had two good arms, thick as tree limbs; but the Ragman had only one. “Go to work,” he said.

After that he found a drunk, lying unconscious beneath an army blanket, an old man, hunched, wizened, and sick. He took that blanket and wrapped it round himself, but for the drunk he left new clothes.

And now I had to run to keep up with the Ragman. Though he was weeping uncontrollably, and bleeding freely at the forehead, pulling his cart with one arm, stumbling for drunkenness, falling again and again,

exhausted, old, old, and sick, yet he went with terrible speed. On spider's legs he skittered through the alleys of the City, this mile and the next, until he came to its limits, and then he rushed beyond.

I wept to see the change in this man. I hurt to see his sorrow. And yet I needed to see where he was going in such haste, perhaps to know what drove him so.

The little old Ragman – he came to a landfill. He came to the garbage pits. And then I wanted to help him in what he did, but I hung back, hiding. He climbed a hill. With tormented labor he cleared a little space on that hill. Then he sighed. He lay down. He pillowed his head on a handkerchief and a jacket. He covered his bones with an army blanket. And he died.

Oh, how I cried to witness that death! I slumped in a junked car and wailed and mourned as one who has no hope – because I had come to love the Ragman. Every other face had faded in the wonder of this man, and I cherished him; but he died. I sobbed myself to sleep.

I did not know – how could I know? – that I slept through Friday night and Saturday and its night, too. But then, on Sunday morning, I was wakened by a violence.

Light – pure, hard, demanding light – slammed against my sour face, and I blinked, and I looked, and I saw the last and the first wonder of all. There was the Ragman, folding the blanket most carefully, a scar on his forehead, but alive! And, besides that, healthy! There was no sign of sorrow nor of age, and all the rags that he had gathered shined for cleanliness.

*Well, then I lowered my head and trembling for all that I had seen, I myself walked up to the Ragman. I told him my name with shame, for I was a sorry figure next to him. Then I took off all my clothes in that place, and I said to him with dear yearning in my voice: “Dress me.” He dressed me. My Lord, he put new rags on me, and I am a wonder beside him. The Ragman, the Ragman, the Christ! By Walter Wangerin Jr.
<http://www.inspirationalarchive.com/573/ragman/>*