



Rev Dave Brown
Rector of St Nicholas Stevenage & St Mary Graveley
2a North Road, Stevenage. Herts. SG1 4AT
Tel: 01438 213587
Email: revdmbrown@gmail.com



Briefing 68: Wednesday 16th June, 2021.

Dear Friends,

The weapons and armour of the Christian – RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Last week I wrote about the need for us to put on the **belt of truth**, that is to know the truth of the gospel, and to bring it to mind. Today our focus is on the **breastplate of righteousness** (Galatians 6:14b).

Apart from the head, which as we will see in a few weeks' time, has its own protective armour, the most vulnerable part of the human body is the chest. Behind our rib cage sits our heart, lungs, and various other vital organs. One carefully aimed thrust in that region, and we are a goner. Hence the reason modern-day soldiers wear Kevlar or something similar across their chests. Paul says that the breastplate the Christian needs to put on is **righteousness**. What does he mean by that?

In the Bible, the word righteousness has generally 2 meanings. In the New Testament particularly, it often refers to the righteousness we are given when we put our trust in Jesus. As we know, we cannot live a perfect life or keep God's commandments, however hard we try. This leaves us with 2 problems. Firstly, we need a saviour who can stand in our place and take the punishment our sin deserves. Jesus did that for us on the cross. But that only gets rid of our negatives, if you like. Being perfect as God is perfect, (which is the requirement for eternal life) isn't simply about avoiding wrongdoing, it is also about always doing what is right. We can't do that, but Jesus did. He lived the perfect life we could never live, and so as well as dealing with our sin and washing us clean, when we put our trust in Jesus, his perfect record is given to us. That is sometimes called imputed righteousness. Righteousness that we haven't earned, but that is credited to us. We need to remember these glorious truths that through faith in Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven and that Jesus' perfect righteousness is credited to us. Holding onto these 2 facts will help us to stand firm in our faith when we give into temptation, or when Satan points out our many failings, past, present and future!

But in Galatians 6:14, I think Paul is pointing us to the other meaning of the word righteousness, which is more to do with the way we live. So rather than a given righteousness, Paul is telling us that to stand firm against the devil schemes we need to continually turn from sin and strive, with God's help, to live a holy, or righteous, life. That's nothing new, is it? So why does Paul call it the **breastplate** of righteousness? Why is living a holy life so key to standing firm in our faith?

In ancient times, the heart was seen as the centre of the person, the real you, the place where desires were forged and actions planned. Sadly though, however sweet our hearts look on Valentine's Day cards, Jesus says that the desires of our hearts are not always good (see Mark 7:21 – 22!) Wonderfully though, when we come to Christ, we are given a new heart, a heart that wants to please God rather than self. But like all heart transplants, it takes a while for the body to accept it. Just like the apostle Paul, we all have times when we do the wrong things we don't really want to do, and times when we don't want to do the good things we know we should do. The question is: how do we strengthen our chances of winning and standing firm? How do we protect our hearts and grow in our desire to do what is right and resist evil?

According to Paul, we need the breastplate of righteousness. That is, as we live a holy life, obeying God's commandments, turning away from sin, seeking to do what is right, so the chances of us continuing to live a holy life, obeying God's commands and turning away from sin, increase. Simply put: The more we live the right way, the more we will want to live the right way. Of course the opposite is also true. If we let down our defences and give in to temptation on a regular basis, so sin becomes a habit. It ceases to bother us, and temptation becomes far less easy to resist. That's not rocket science. It's the same with seeking to give up smoking or alcohol or high-calorie foods. The more we give in, the easier it is to give in the next time. But resist, and the next temptation is easier to resist as well.

Despite our new hearts, this battle will rage in us until we see Jesus face to face. Until then we need to defend our hearts with the breastplate of righteousness, living out our baptism promises daily by resisting the devil, turning from sin and continually turning to Christ for his help, strength and encouragement. Knowing God's commands is vital too, but this is something that needs to be done, not just thought about. Seeking to live a righteous life helps us stand firm in our faith, because we start to see that God's commands are good, as he is good. May God help us in this battle.

Grace and peace...

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

Come + pray!

Benefice prayer gathering Wednesday 16th June: 7:45pm-9pm via zoom. Join us and a rep from the **Barnabas fund** who support persecuted Christians around the world to pray for the church, the world, our mission partners and one another. **Contact Dave for a link.**

Friday night at St Nicks from 8pm-10pm.

Come + join us and pray for God's Holy Spirit to move in us and across this town that we might know more of God's love and power in our lives and see many brought to Jesus.

Private Prayer in St Nicholas church THIS WEEK and NEXT WEEK.

Tuesday from 2pm-4pm, Wednesday 12noon-2pm and Thursday 10am – 12 noon.

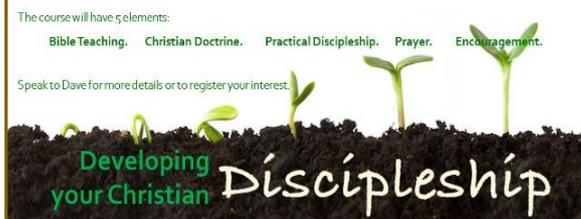
For more information about the Barnabas Fund- see [Barnabas Fund: Hope and Aid for the Persecuted Church](#)

LITTLE LAMBS ó The St Nicholas mums and toddlers group, got off to a great start last week. It will now be meeting Friday mornings from 9am-10:30am, during term time under the leadership of Jeannette Parker. Jeannette is still **desperately** in need of helpers, including some to set up (from 8:40-9am), some to provide refreshments (9:15-10:15), and others to sit and chat with the mums and dads who come along. Can you help? Are you willing to be part of a rota? If so please do not wait to be asked but get in touch with Jeannette asap on enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk Thank you!

An Invitation to Grow a Good and Beautiful Christian Life
A 30-session course designed to help you grow in knowledge, understanding and practice as a follower of Jesus.
Starting end of June 2021 and running on alternate Wednesday nights (7:30pm-9:30pm), each week will include direct teaching, discussion, prayer, with follow-up exercises and further reading to do before each session.

The course will have 5 elements:
Bible Teaching. Christian Doctrine. Practical Discipleship. Prayer. Encouragement.

Speak to Dave for more details or to register your interest.



Discipleship
Developing your Christian

There's still time to sign up for the **Discipleship course** which starts on Wednesday 23rd June at 7:30pm. 15 people have now signed up, but there is space for plenty more. It runs on Home Group weeks- so if you are in a home group I'd *suggest* you do this instead, so life doesn't get too busy with the extra reading and homework!

If you'd like to join in, whether in person on via Zoom, please let me know by Wednesday 16th. Growing in our faith always takes time and effort. So **please** don't let the length of the course put you off. Learning more about God and his ways is always worth it!



MORNING COFFEE OR AFTERNOON TEA IN THE VICARAGE: The Vicarage Garden Café will be open for bookings on **Tuesday 22nd June (10:30am-noon)**, **Friday 2nd July (3pm-4:30pm)** and **Wednesday 14th July (10:30am-noon)**. We can take up to 30 people each time, sat at tables of 6 around the garden. If you like to join us, please contact Judy on 01438 213587 or email enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk (If you'd like to bring a cake- talk to Judy)

Readings for the next few weeks: Over the next few weeks will be finishing our series on Matthew's gospel before starting a summer series in the book of Genesis. For those who'd like to read the passages before coming to church on Sundays, the readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

20th June: Matthew 20: 29-end.

27th June: Genesis 4: 1-16

4th July: Genesis 4: 17-24

Dates for Church Family BBQs: Booking forms will be in church soon, but please save the dates. We hope everyone will be able to come to ONE of the TWO dates! **Sunday 11th July from 12:30pm, Saturday 24th July from 4pm.**