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## The Challenge of Keeping God First: Putting on the Breastplate of Righteousness *A Commentary by Jason Curry*



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There are multiple definitions of the term righteousness as it is understood throughout the bible. According to Smith's Bible Dictionary, righteousness is defined as "holiness, justice, rectitude; an attribute of God only..." The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology maintains righteousness was "often synonymous with virtue itself." After reading biblical commentaries for years, I have come to believe that Jesus' description of the term righteous as explained in his story or Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is more insightful than the abstract definitions of the term. In this parable, which is found in Luke 18:9-14, Jesus says that the two men went to the temple to pray. In essence, the Pharisee said: "God, I thank you that I am not like these evildoers because I fast and pray." However, the tax collector went to the temple and "would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said,

'God, have mercy on me, a sinner. (Luke 18:13)'" Jesus then said: "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God (Luke 18:14)." Even though Pharisee fasted and prayed, he was attempting to do something that is impossible (i.e., establish his own righteousness). The tax collector recognized that the act of being made holy, righteous, sanctified, pious and consecrated begins and ends with God. The parable confirms that righteous is a spiritual state of being that begins with the submission of our will to the perfect will of God. It also suggests that righteousness is not found in actions or rituals, but rather in human hearts devoted to loving God and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Paul lists the "breastplate of righteousness" among the armor that we are expected to wear when are preparing to combat spiritual wickedness. In Ephesians 6:14, Paul says that

we are to stand firm "...with the breastplate of righteousness in place." His metaphor regarding the armor suggests that the breastplate is designed to cover some of our most vital organs: our lungs, our stomach and most importantly, our heart. Our hearts are important for they are symbolic of our zeal and passion for serving God. Therefore, Paul's metaphor is central to our Christian walk because it maintains that we need God's holiness or righteous to protect us from anything or anyone who would discourage our passion for serving Christ. Yes, with hearts full of humility, and with minds convinced that only God can restore us to a state of righteousness, we will be able to "stand firm." Working to ensure that God remains first and foremost in our lives, (yes, a beacon light instead of a taillight), will help us to keep on the breastplate of righteousness.