

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The apostle Paul liked to use metaphors. They can be quite effective but only if we understand their underlying meaning. For example, he portrays righteousness as a breastplate of armor:

EPHESIANS 6:14 Stand therefore, ... having put on the **breastplate of righteousness**,

You have likely heard many messages about how the breastplate protects the torso of the body and, hence, the all-important heart. We see this in Scripture where the heart and righteousness are connected in a number of places such as:

PSALM 40:10 I have not hidden **Your [God's] righteousness within my heart**; ...

It all makes sense—or does it? What is righteousness?

1 JOHN 5:17 All **unrighteousness is sin**, and there is sin not *leading* to death.

1 JOHN 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for **sin is the transgression of the law**.

Unrighteousness is sin and sin is transgression of the Law; so, righteousness is *keeping* the Law; that is, not sinning. With that, Paul's metaphor of the breastplate of righteousness makes sense, especially when we read:

JEREMIAH 31:33 “But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put **My law** in their minds, and **write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Keeping the Law of God should come from a desire within the heart. And that is what Paul was alluding to with his metaphor. He even quotes from that same Scripture in Hebrews 10:16. However, Paul seems to discount his first metaphor because he uses the breastplate to describe something else:

1 THESSALONIANS 5:8 ... putting on the **breastplate of faith and love**, ...

At first glance, it might be tempting to say that ‘love’ has an obvious connection to the heart but how does ‘faith’ fit in? Did he simply forget what he wrote to the Ephesians and made something up? Or is Paul redirecting his metaphor to something completely different? It is highly doubtful that Paul would forget much; remember, he knew Scripture inside and out and quoted it quite often. In reality, Paul is absolutely consistent when he connects righteousness to love and faith. First of all, Paul tells us that agape love is the RESULT of keeping the Law:

1 TIMOTHY 1:5 Now **the purpose of the commandment [Law] is [agape] love from a pure heart**, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith,

This should be obvious. Just as in a parent-child relationship, the parent sets down rules that provide the best opportunities for an independent life. The goal is that the child will eventually have the self-discipline to follow the rules with the understanding that the rules ensure the best life possible. Likewise, the Law are rules to be simply obeyed initially but eventually become a desire of our hearts. By association, keeping the Law is *righteousness*. 1 Timothy 1:5 plainly connects keeping the Law, righteousness, and agape love to the hearts of God's children.

All of these are simple and basic truths that are at the core of many, if not most, Sabbath Thought articles. But Paul throws in *faith* with righteousness and agape love. The two metaphors could be a source of confusion if we do not understanding how faith plays a part in keeping the Law (righteousness) and growing in agape love. Interestingly, faith is something in both God's children and our Father:

PSALM 40:10 I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared **Your faithfulness** and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth From the great assembly.

There is even a hymn titled "Great is Thy [*God's*] Faithfulness," likely inspired from Lamentations 3:23. God's faithfulness is also declared in Psalm 89¹, which could be called the 'Faith Chapter' of the OT:

PSALMS 89:1-8 I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; With my mouth will I make known **Your faithfulness** to all generations. 2 For I have said, "Mercy shall be built up forever; **Your faithfulness** You shall establish in the very heavens." 3 "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 4 'Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations.' " Selah 5 And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; **Your faithfulness** also in the assembly of the saints. 6 For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? *Who* among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD? 7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, And to be held in reverence by all *those* around Him. 8 O LORD God of hosts, *Who is* mighty like You, O LORD? **Your faithfulness** also surrounds You.

One example of God's faithfulness is in giving His children a Law that leads to TRUE life. However, faith among the saints is most often equated to believing that God will fulfill our prayers and supplications. On several occasions healing is directly tied to the faith of the one who asks for it. One example is:

MATTHEW 9:27-29 When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" 28 And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "**According to your faith** let it be to you."

¹ Also Deut. 7:9; Ps. 92:2; 119:75, 90, 138; 143:1; Hos. 11:12.

But healing is only one aspect of faith; or, rather, it is one EXAMPLE of faith. Paul made this plain:

HEBREWS 11:6 But **without faith it is impossible to please Him [God]**, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

If faith were about healing, then how could someone DISPLEASE God if they simply had too little faith to be HEALED? Would God condemn someone just for that? Obviously, faith is required for much more including faith that God gave us His Law for our good, casts out demons (Matt. 17:15-20), provide the means and opportunities for good works (Parable of the Talents in Matt. 25:14-30, i.e., “good and **faithful servant**”), supply our physical needs (Luke 12:22-30), help us endure trials and sufferings (Acts 14:22), etc. In these examples, faith is believing that God provides for, and preserves, His saints:

PSALM 31:23 Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For **the LORD preserves the faithful**, And fully repays the proud person.

ROMANS 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “**The just shall live by faith.**”

Another very important aspect of our faith is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

JOHN 20:26-29 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” 27 Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**”

Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is reflected in the fact that baptism is done solely in the name of JESUS². Why? Because “there is no other name [*than Jesus*] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). However, none of these aspects of faith explain the connection with righteousness (keeping the Law) and agape love. Once again, Paul provides an answer:

ROMANS 3:20-31 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. 21 But now **the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed**, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even **the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe**. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in **Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through**

² More information is in the booklet titled [Baptize in the Name of Jesus Christ](#) available on the website.

faith, to demonstrate His [God's] righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, **that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**. 27 Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but **by the law of faith**. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. 29 Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, 30 since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 **Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.**

And there is the answer: "**the righteousness of God** ... is revealed" because it is "**through faith** in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe." Faith is belief that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ covers our sins (violations of the LAW) whereby God then forgives us. This is why it is called the Law of FAITH (v27)! Where does agape love fit in? As explained in the beginning, the purpose of keeping God's Law is to become agape love. The Law of God is encapsulated by the two Great Commandments: Love God and love your neighbor³; so, by extension, it is also the Law of AGAPE LOVE!

Simply put, righteousness is NOT transgressing the Law (sin). But all have sinned and the only remission (cancellation) of sin requires faith or belief that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ leads to God's forgiveness. Through forgiveness, God imputes or establishes us in His righteous⁴ and perfect keeping of the Law. But to want to *keep* the Law to begin with requires a desire of the heart—agape love. This cycle of repenting in faith whereby we receive God's forgiveness and righteousness is how we become more perfect in keeping the Law. All of this is motivated by agape love. This IS the work of God in us to bring us to the perfection in the "day of [our] visitation."⁵ If we stay committed, then all this is our "good fight of **faith** 'working through **love**', [to] lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession." (1 Tim. 6:12 and Gal. 5:6).

When Paul compared a breastplate—the protector of the heart—to righteousness and also agape love and faith, he was perfectly consistent because they are all part of God's work in us, which leads us in The Way unto The Life⁶!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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³³ Matt. 22:36-40; Luke 10:27; Mark 12:28-31.

⁴ Ps. 32:2; Rom. 4:5-25; Jas. 2:23.

⁵ 1 Pet. 2:12.

⁶ John 14:6.