

This morning, I am continuing in a sermon series through the New Testament book known as Philippians, which is a letter written by the Apostle Paul from a Roman prison to a church in Philippi that he had started. This morning we will be in verses 1-16 of chapter 3. We are going to spend a couple of weeks on this incredible section.

Philippians 3:1-16 - *Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-- ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, **I have more:** ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have **lost all things**. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the **resurrection from the dead**. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me **heavenward in Christ Jesus**. ¹⁵ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

There is a lot worth talking about in this passage. Next week I want to focus more on everything Paul has to say about his goals and motivation, how he is pressing on to know Jesus. Today I want to focus on verses 2-9, where Paul focuses on the concept of righteousness and the difference between trying to gain a righteousness based on our spiritual resume and one that is based on faith in Jesus. The simplest way to understand righteousness is “right-relatedness, especially to God.” The righteous are those who are right with God, accepted by God, and who live in right

relationship with others, loving their neighbor as themselves. There are three movements to his argument:

1) Reject anyone who adds to justification by faith in Jesus

Justification means declared not guilty, or right with God. Paul begins this section with some strong words:

Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.

He tells them to watch out for people he calls dogs, evildoers, mutilators of the flesh. He is referring here to the Judaizers, who were teaching that in order to be saved from your sin and right with God, you did not just have to believe in Jesus but that you also needed to become Jewish. We read about them in Acts 15:

Acts 15:1 - Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

The Judaizers were teaching that the new Christian converts needed to be circumcised, since that was a sign of the covenant with God, as we read in Genesis 17. They would need to keep dietary laws, and observe the festivals, follow the laws, and so on. In other words, it was not enough to believe in Jesus; they needed to become Jewish as well.

But Paul will have none of that. He calls the Judaizers out for the dogs that they are. Dogs is a reference to Gentiles, the unclean, those who are outside the covenant community. He calls them **evildoers**. And he calls them **mutilators of the flesh**, another reference to pagan religion. Paul is ironically saying that although these people claim to be right with God, they are actually NOT in a right relationship with God because of their false teaching about what makes people right with God.

Listen to how strongly he argued against them in Galatians 5:

*Galatians 5:2-3 - Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be **circumcised**, Christ will be of **no value** to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.*

He tells them that if you believe that circumcision makes you right, then you are putting yourself back under the entire Old Testament law, which no one can fully obey. But that is not the gospel. What makes you right with God is not circumcision or fidelity to the law, but faith in Jesus. As he writes in v. 3:

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh--

Circumcision is not about the physical act, Paul says, and the outward reality does not mean that inwardly you are right with God. All who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh are those who are right with God. The Judaizers have elevated a ritual into something that makes one right with God and in the process have missed the point of the gospel. Paul declares that the ritual is empty and meaningless without the internal reality.

Romans 2:25-29 - *Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.* ²⁶ *If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?* ²⁷ *The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.* ²⁸ *A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.* ²⁹ *No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.*

Reject anyone who adds to salvation by grace or justification by faith. Paul is consistent in this message, and he has similarly strong words to those who fall for the teachings of the Judaizers:

Galatians 1:6-9 - *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--* ⁷ *which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.* ⁸ *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!* ⁹ *As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

There are still people who call themselves Christians who teach that what makes you right with God is not only faith in Jesus, but that other things are needed as

well. Jesus plus speaking in tongues. Jesus plus baptism. Jesus plus sacraments. Jesus plus praying the prayer of salvation. Jesus plus good works. Jesus plus reading the King James Version. Jesus plus joining our denomination. All examples of Jesus plus something else for salvation. No!!! That is taking away from the gospel of salvation by grace, of justification by faith!

2) Throw away your spiritual resume

Paul declares that he does not put confidence in the flesh. What does he mean by that? He goes on to explain:

⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

What is Paul doing here? He is arguing against the teachings of the Judaizers by giving the Philippians his spiritual resume. He wants them to know that he has more reason than the Judaizers or anyone else to consider himself right with God on the basis of his pedigree and his religious devotion. He was a Jew by birth, not a convert, belonging to a pure tribe, highly educated, devoted to the law, above blame, and zealous for God. **He is culturally and racially and religiously pure.** But he no longer sees these qualifications the same way:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

He declares that his spiritual resume is trash. It is loss, it is rubbish. The word translated “rubbish,” skubalon, is also the word used for animal excrement. What a descriptive way to communicate the value he places in his spiritual resume. Everything that I once boasted in and looked to for my righteousness, everything that I thought made me right with God, I know realize is loss, worthless, a steaming pile of excrement. Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. **This is the language of accounting – assets and liabilities.** These are the things that give me confidence before God. And after meeting Christ, I realize

that I'm wrong. **These things are actually keeping me from salvation and knowing Christ, because they are causing me to be self-sufficient and deceived with regards to righteousness.** Those who are religious think they are fine, acceptable to God. But those who are sinners know they need a Savior. Paul declares that everything is a loss compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. The only thing in the asset column is Christ and His righteousness. All else is loss.

Paul places no confidence in the flesh. He knows that he is not accepted by God because of his pedigree, works, or attitude. There is nothing in him that makes him righteous, right with God.

In Matthew 5-7, we have Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, in which he shows us how high God's standard of righteousness really is.

***Matthew 5:20-22, 27-28, 48** - For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. ²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, 'is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell... "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart... **Be perfect**, therefore, as your heavenly Father is **perfect**.*

So how do you measure up to God's standard?

Throw out your spiritual resume. It does not make you right with God. Maybe you grew up in church. You are a moral person. You read the Bible. You tithe. You were baptized. You went through the sacraments. You are a pastor. Whatever your resume, **God is not impressed**. You still fall short of God's holy standard. Many people around the world are depending upon their spiritual resume to get them in. God, look at all I've done – don't you accept me? But your spiritual resume will not make you right with God. There is only one way to be right with God.

3) Receive the righteousness that is by faith

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of

knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

He wants to have the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith in Christ.

Once again, righteousness means right-relatedness to God. It is being right in the eyes of God, accepted by God. Paul declares that he does not seek a righteousness that comes from his own goodness, but the righteousness that is given by God and is received by faith in Jesus. Listen to some passages that teach this clearly:

Romans 3:20-24 - *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.*

What does this mean? How is it that God gives us this right relationship? When Jesus died, he abolished the old covenant and established a new covenant.

Hebrews 9:15 - *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new **covenant**, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first **covenant**.*

A covenant is like a contract but with more intimacy. The old covenant had curses for those who could not live up to the laws. Jesus died to pay the penalty for those sins, and now the old covenant is obsolete, replaced by a new and better covenant:

Hebrews 8:6-13 - *But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the **covenant** of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. ⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first **covenant**, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new **covenant** with the house of Israel and with **the house of Judah**. ⁹ It will not be like the **covenant** I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my **covenant**, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the **covenant** I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and **they will be my people**. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." ¹³ By calling this **covenant** "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.*

In Jesus, there is a new covenant. God puts his laws in our minds and writes them on our hearts. He is our God. We will know Him. He will forgive our wickedness and sin. And so, circumcision is no longer necessary to mark a person as one of God's covenant people. The new covenant is entered into by repentance from sins and faith in Christ. And the sign of this new covenant is baptism – we die with Christ and are raised with Him.

Notice that salvation and conversion for Paul was not primarily about sin but about **where he found his righteousness**, or what he was trusting in to make him right with God. Salvation came to Paul when he shifted that which he trusted in to be right with God. He always knew sin was wrong, but he was converted when he changed his attitude towards his goodness and his credentials. He was saved when he realized that his resume could not save him, when he realized that in Christ, he had the perfect resume. According to Moises Silva, **faith is "the act of counting as loss all those things that may be conceived as grounds for self-confidence before God."**

Reject anyone who adds to justification by faith in Jesus. Throw away your spiritual resume and receive the righteousness that is by faith in Jesus.

Now, we've been speaking mainly of religion and what makes someone right with God. But righteousness is not just a religious predicament. Even if you don't believe in God, your heart still is trying to find righteousness, whether or not you know it. Righteousness is right living, according to a standard. It is self-worth. It is "enoughness." It is the knowledge that you measure up. What is it that convinces your heart that you have worth or value, that you measure up? Do you feel like you are enough, acceptable? Paul used to trust in his spiritual resume, and **the resume is a great metaphor for how we try to become righteous**. Your resume is a listing of your merits and qualifications that is presented in the hopes of getting you into something. It is an argument, a case that you are making. We do this all the time, trying to get IN – to jobs, friendships, romantic relationships. And some let us in, while others shut the door if we don't measure up.

You can reject God and Jesus and the gospel, but that doesn't do away with the desperate need of your heart to feel worth, to feel accepted, to know that you are enough, that you measure up. And this world offers you many places to look: work, relationships, romance, education, children, pleasure. But trying to find your righteousness, your enoughness, your worth, in anything else will leave you empty, anxious or depressed.

As David Zahl put it in *Seculosity*: *"We want to feel good about ourselves, and so we edit our personalities to maximize the approval of others. Or we exaggerate hardships to make ourselves seem more heroic or others more villainous. The theological and psychological term for the energy we expend for the sake of feeling righteous is self-justification, and it cannot be overstated as a motivation in human affairs."*

Receiving the righteousness that is found in God gives you a self-worth that is not based upon your performance. Finding your righteousness in Jesus allows you to take criticism and endure failure without it changing your self-worth. You can interact with others with humility and grace because you don't need to prove that you're better than anyone else. When you trust in Christ, the verdict is in. You are enough. You are loved. You have measured up, not because of anything you have or haven't done, but because Jesus has taken your sin and failure and guilt and given you His righteousness. Throw away your resume, and receive the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith today.