

Philippians 3:4b-14

If anyone else thinks that he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised 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; ⁶in regard to zeal, persecuting the church; in regard to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

⁷But, whatever things were a profit for me, these things I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. ⁸But even more than that, I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith. ¹⁰I do this so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, ¹¹in the hope that in some way I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

What Is it Worth?

I.

Pop quiz. What is a Christian? Think about it for a bit, because I'm not going to give you a definition—at least, not at first.

Philippi was a city where Paul had established a Christian church. Paul had gone there because of a vision he had received of a Macedonian man urging him to come and help. Philippi was a city in Macedonia. You can read about Paul's call to Macedonia in Acts 16:6ff. The Christians there appreciated Paul's ministry and always wanted to help him.

The congregation in Philippi faced a serious threat. Just before our text, Paul says: "Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evildoers. Beware of the mutilation" (Philippians 3:2, EHV). Now, I'm not a dog person, but Paul wasn't talking about the typical house pet with its tail wagging as it greets you at the door. All three of Paul's "beware" are pointing to preachers of false doctrine. He uses strong language to do it. The "dog" comparison is the type of vicious dog that wants to rip out a person's throat. By evildoers, Paul again refers to those promoting false teaching in the church. His strongest warning of all is about the "mutilation." With this, Paul wants them to recognize exactly who he is talking about—the Judaizers. That group insisted that Christians, no matter whether they were of Jewish descent, or Gentile, must be circumcised. Paul called their insistence on circumcision "mutilation."

The Judaizers insisted that there had to be a certain level of adherence to the Ceremonial Law. The Ceremonial Law was part of what God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai. These were the rules for worship Israel was mandated by God to use. It included the particular days on which the people were to worship, both on a weekly schedule as well as their festival days. Also included were all the sacrifices that were required, and dietary restrictions that were binding on the people, as well as rules that dictated whether a person was clean or unclean. Those who were unclean were not eligible to go to the temple for worship until they were declared clean once again.

What all of this boiled down to was that what the Judaizers were doing was insisting that Old Testament worship rules also applied to New Testament Christians.

Following those rules was complicated. Fail, and you needed to make some additional sacrifices in restitution.

If people were going to try to apply Old Testament worship rules, Paul said, *he* was the champion. *He* was better at it than *any* of those Judaizers. “If anyone else thinks that he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised 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; ⁶in regard to zeal, persecuting the church; in regard to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:4-6, EHV). These were all impressive things.

II.

Back to our pop quiz. What is a Christian? Let’s throw out a few true/false statements to help you out. True or false? Jesus Christ went to the cross to destroy death and give you the gift of eternal life. Your answer: true. Because of what Jesus did for you on the cross, your sins are forgiven and you are covered in the righteousness of Christ. Your answer: true. You are declared holy and just before the throne of God. Your answer: true. On the day of the resurrection you will experience never-ending joy and peace as you are gathered in to glory with your Lord Jesus Christ. Your answer: true.

Are you coming up with a bit more of a definition for a Christian? Perhaps you will answer: Christians are those who believe the message of the gospel—that Jesus died for their sins and gave them his perfection so they can stand before God’s throne and be welcomed into heaven. Good.

So...why do many who call themselves Christian add things to the gospel? Some who call themselves Christian say that people are saved by obedience to the “precepts” of the gospel. What *that* means is that there are a set of rules to be obeyed to earn salvation. That’s not the gospel. There are some who say that the gospel is to be a feeling that tolerates other people’s beliefs and ignores what is contrary to what the Bible says. That’s not the gospel. There are some who speak of the “full gospel.” The simple message of what Jesus did is not enough; there must be something added to it, like holiness of living, or speaking in tongues, before a person has the full gospel. That robs sinners of the comfort of the gospel.

III.

“But, whatever things were a profit for me, these things I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. ⁸But even more than that, I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:7-8, EHV).

Most English translations sanitize things a little bit. “Rubbish,” or “garbage” aren’t wrong translations, but Paul’s word is stronger. Have you ever cleaned out a chicken coop? It stinks. It’s awful. It might make you choke and gag if you aren’t wearing something to cover your nose. Paul’s word translated rubbish here means dung; manure.

All the “additions” to the gospel, all the attempts to create “rules” for Christians to keep, or higher ideals to meet, anything a person thinks he or she must do to “help” with salvation are nothing less than a smelly pile of manure.

Remember what Isaiah said about our efforts to please God? “All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth” (Isaiah 64:6, EHV). I won’t trouble you with the more literal meaning of a filthy cloth; suffice it to say that Isaiah was pretty graphic, just like Paul.

Let’s look at the manure pile of additions to the gospel in the context of Paul’s following verse, as well. “I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them

rubbish, so that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith” (Philippians 3:8-9, EHV).

What is a Christian? Someone who trusts in Christ alone. One who understands that it is faith alone in Jesus alone that brings a person salvation, not anything added to it.

All our good works, all our good intentions are rubbish. All our attempts to add something to what Jesus did for us are fruitless. He has already done it. What he has done needs nothing more.

As for considering his own efforts as rubbish and loss, and counting only on his righteousness in Christ, Paul says: “I do this so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, ¹¹in the hope that in some way I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11, EHV).

Jesus told his disciples that they could expect to suffer because of their Christian faith. Paul talks about the same thing. He has a certain “fellowship of [Jesus’] sufferings.” In another one of his letters (2 Corinthians 11:23-27) Paul lists many of the things he had to suffer. Paul *never* implied that these things added to his status as a Christian, or to his salvation; he merely said these things were part of him being a Christian and having faith in Jesus.

IV.

We have answered the pop quiz question: “What is a Christian?” If you didn’t catch it, you’ll have to go back and listen again on the podcast. Now what?

“Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me” (Philippians 3:12, EHV). There is a certain reality. Those Judaizers thought they could live as more righteous Christians if they followed the Old Testament worship rules. Some who call themselves Christians today think people are “more saved” or better Christians, if they follow certain rules and regulations. Remember that Paul pointed to his past and said that if obeying rules was the standard, he was the champion.

But he wasn’t. He was not perfect. His own righteousness was a filthy rag, or a pile of dung. The same is true for every Christian: we still have a sinful nature that lives inside us. We are never going to be perfect, this side of heaven.

“I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14, EHV). While Paul didn’t think he was perfect, or that his actions as a Christian would have anything to do with him going to heaven, he wanted to demonstrate his faith by the way he lived.

Jesus said about believers: “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:20, EHV). That doesn’t mean the believer won’t make mistakes. Paul said: “Indeed, I know that good does not live in me, that is, in my sinful flesh. The desire to do good is present with me, but I am not able to carry it out” (Romans 7:18, EHV). The sinful nature will be there until the day you die. Each of us fights against it. Each of us joins Paul in “Straining toward the things that are ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14, EHV).

So, What is it worth? That’s what we have been asking today. Say, as Paul did, that your own righteousness is worthless, but having faith in Jesus, and the righteousness that comes by faith, is worth everything. Amen.