

Gospel Centered Righteousness
Philippians 3:1-21

Introduction

1. We have been studying through the book of Philippians, which is often described as a book about joy
2. Joy and rejoicing is indeed a theme found in the book, but the major focus of the book is the Gospel and how it can and should impact every part of our lives
3. In chapters 1 we saw what a Gospel centered relationship looks like, and what a life centered around the Gospel looks like
4. In chapter 2 we learned about our Gospel centered purpose as a church and as individuals
5. We also learned what Gospel centered service looks like through the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus
6. Today we are going to learn about Gospel centered righteousness
7. What does it mean to be righteous?
 - a. Most would say something like “to be good” or “to be morally upright”
 - b. However, the proper answer is to be holy and perfect just like God
8. So the ultimate question is how do we become righteous?
 - a. The Bible says this in Romans 1:17: **“For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”**
 - b. However, in Paul’s day, there were those outside the church who felt that religious rites and rituals were the key (the Jews)
 - c. Within the church, some argued that while faith was necessary, so were works (Judaizers, pre-Gnostics)
 - d. The same can be said about the church today, with some preaching the need for works or religious ritual and practices
 - e. Sometimes it’s not so overt and a bit more subtle, revealing itself as various forms of legalism (i.e. don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t dance, go to movies, etc.)
 - f. Today we are going to see what Paul says about all of this as we look at Gospel Centered Righteousness

A. Gospel centered righteousness is not found in anything we do (3:1-7)

1. Paul issues a warning about false teachers and their teachings (1-2)
 - a. He begins by encouraging them to **“Rejoice in the Lord”** (1a)
 - 1) To rejoice simply means to be happy or joyous, but here Paul adds a clarifier—they are to rejoice **“in the Lord”** which means that they are to find their happiness or well-being in Jesus Christ
 - 2) While this opening phrase seems at first to be unrelated to what follows it has EVERYTHING to do with it
 - 3) Paul is about to confront false teaching which could lead some to search for spiritual their well-being in something other than Christ—in this case, the rites and practices of the OT

- 4) That is the way false teaching is—it often causes us to find our sense of righteousness or spiritual wellbeing in something other than the finished work of Christ
- b. This false teaching is something Paul had addressed before (1b): **“To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.”**
 - 1) You know, it’s interesting to consider the negative reaction so many Christians receive when calling out false teaching within the Church
 - 2) But, Paul, and others, made it a habit out of pointing out false teaching and teachers:
 - a) Paul did this in his letters to the Colossians where he warned them to avoid those who were teaching an early form of Gnosticism (i.e. seeking for spiritual knowledge through esoteric practices, mysticism and physical mistreatment of the body)
 - b) He warned the Corinthians, Galatians and now the Philippians about the Judaizers who were claiming that Christ wasn’t enough, and that other Old Testament rites and practices were required for salvation
 - c) He dedicated two entire letters to Timothy warning him about the false teachers at Ephesus, and even named them (Hymenaeus, Philetus, Alexander)
 - d) Peter warned his readers about the teachers that were introducing “destructive heresies” in their churches (2 Peter 2:1; 3:17)
 - e) Jude indicates that the primary purpose for writing his letter was to warn them of the false teachers within their own church(es)
 - 3) Pointing out false teaching is not only Biblical, but a REQUIREMENT of those that shepherd the flock of God:
 - a) See Acts 20:28-29-31
 - b) Paul took this serious which is why he considered it **“no trouble”** to warn the Philippians once again
 - c) He understood that warning them was **“as safeguard for you.”**
 - c. Paul does not mince words when addressing the false teachers (2): **“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;”**
 - 1) Notice he repeats the word **“beware”** three times—lit. **“watch out for”**
 - 2) He refers to the false teachers as **“dogs”**:
 - a) Mentioned over 40 times in the Bible, and not generally in a positive light
 - b) They were scavengers and considered unclean
 - 3) He calls them **“evil workers”**
 - 4) Finally, he refers to them as **“the false circumcision”**
 - a) More literally he writes **“the mutilation”**—your translation might say something like “those who mutilate the flesh”
 - b) Contextually, and derogatorily, this is a reference to those who taught that circumcision was necessary to please God (i.e. Galatians 5)
 - c) In other words, Paul is addressing religious rites, practice or works of the OT Law
2. Paul reminds them that we—those who are in Christ—are the **“true circumcision”** (3-7; i.e. the real people of God)
 - a. We **“worship in (by) the Spirit of God”**
 - 1) The word Paul uses here is more akin to service than worship, i.e. we “serve in/by the Spirit of God”
 - 2) This is in contrast to those who serve or worship God/god in the flesh through religious rites and practices

- b. We **“glory in Christ”**—to put one’s full trust and assurance in Christ, rather than our own works
 - c. We **“put no confidence in the flesh”**
 - 1) Paul offers himself up as an example
 - 2) If anyone could have put confidence in the flesh it was Paul (4-6)
 - 3) Yet, he forsook all that and exchanged it for Christ (7): **“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ”**
3. So what is Paul’s point in all this? Real righteousness—Gospel centered righteousness—is not found in anything we do, no matter how religious or spiritual it may be

B. Gospel centered righteousness forsakes religious practice in exchange for Jesus Christ and knowing him (3:8-11)

- 1. Paul considered **ALL** of his prior religious attempts to please God and attain righteousness as garbage compared to the value of knowing Christ (8): **“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish...”**
 - a. Notice that Paul considered “all things” loss...not just some
 - b. All things here refers to any attempt at gaining righteousness or right standing with God through works, including religious practices
 - c. He calls such things “rubbish” which not only referred to garbage, but was used as a vulgar term to refer to excrement
- 2. Paul was willing to forsake—or put aside--all those things for two reasons:
 - a. To gain true righteousness (9): **“in order to gain Christ and be found in Him”** (9-11):
 - 1) Those prior things were an attempt at gaining **“a righteousness of my own derived from the Law”**
 - 2) But what he received **“through faith in Christ”** was a **“righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith”** (9)
 - b. To gain eternal life (10-11): **“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”**

C. Gospel centered righteousness doesn’t return to works-based righteousness (3:12-16)

It’s interesting how many in the Church today want to return to such things: “soul care” or spiritual formation—Celebration of Discipline by Foster, contemplative prayer, fasting, labyrinth walking, lecto divino, etc.

- 1. I grew up in a church that favored religious ritual over knowing Christ:
 - a. They were not a help, but a hindrance to gaining Christ
 - b. Paul called the Galatians foolish for returning to such things after they came to faith in Christ (Galatians 3:3)
 - c. Why would we want to return to such things?

2. Paul recognized that when it came to righteousness, he had not fully obtained it yet in a practical sense (12):
 - a. **“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect,”** (12a; 13a)
 - b. **“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet”**
 - c. Positional righteousness vs. practical righteousness:
 - 1) Positional righteousness refers to the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed to us at salvation—in other words, in our standing or position before God, we are as righteous as Christ is because God has taken Christ’s righteousness and placed it within us
 - 2) Practical righteousness refers to the day-to-day living out of our faith as we conform our behavior to the standards and practices laid out in God’s word
 - d. So, Paul is recognizing that while he was righteous in Christ positional, he had not reached perfect righteousness practically

3. While this dilemma caused some to return to works or flesh-based religious ritual and practices, Paul refused to return to those things (12b; 13b-14):
 - a. **“but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus”**
 - b. **“but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind (i.e. the old religious practices) and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”**

4. He encouraged the Philippians to continue living out their righteousness in the very same way they attained it (15-21):
 - a. They were to continue living by the **“same standard”** (15-16)—in other words, they gained their righteousness through faith in Christ and should retain it through faith in Christ rather than works
 - b. They should continue following the example of Paul and others who did the same and avoid those who do otherwise (17-21):
 - 1) Paul identifies five traits of those who practice works-based righteousness (19):
 - a) They are **“enemies of the cross of Christ”**
 - b) Their **“end is destruction”**
 - c) Their **“appetite (lit. ‘belly’) is their god”**—they simply feed their flesh
 - d) Their **“glory is their shame”**
 - e) They **“set their minds on earthy things”** (i.e. works of the flesh)
 - 2) But those who continue to rely on Christ for their righteousness...(
 - a) Recognize that they are **“citizens of heaven”** (which means they are not interested in earthly practices or rituals like those above)
 - b) And, **“eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”**

Conclusion
