

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

THAT I MAY KNOW HIM!

Read Philippians 3:7-11

Introduction

It is “because of Christ,” we can live in the grace of God. Are you centred in Christ? Do you make much of Him? It would be thrilling to be invited to Buckingham Palace to be introduced to the queen. That would be exciting. Yet we know the Lord of Glory, King of Kings. Does He diminish all the other pursuits of our lives? Is everything else a pale in comparison to Him? The studied estimate of the apostle Paul, after more than two decades as a Christian, was the inestimable wonder of the Lord Jesus Christ and the pursuit of Him.

Paul's Heart Cry

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (vv7-9)

Paul did not only count his religious pedigree as a loss; he counted all things loss – but he counted them as a loss in view of the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

Gain vs. Loss

By dissecting this confession, we risk reducing it to the sum of parts that by no means equals the impact of the whole passage. But let's see what Paul is saying. "Loss," found in verses 7 and 8 is the Greek noun *zēmia*, "damage, disadvantage, loss, forfeit," with the implication of sustaining hardship or suffering. Why "loss"? Why isn't he merely neutral towards his religious credentials?

- First, because they are empty in themselves. They don't satisfy the heart.
- Second, the pride they represent stands in the way of grasping something much more valuable -- knowing Christ intimately.

When you weigh the value of one vs. the other, his religious credentials tip the scale as "rubbish" (NIV, NRSV) or "dung" (KJV). The Greek noun “*skybalon*” means "dung, muck," both as excrement and food gone bad.

Does Paul have to reject his rich Jewish heritage to be a Christian? No. His letters are filled with appreciation for God's blessings to the Jews. What he rejects is the false assumption that one can earn righteous standing before God by one's credentials and a well-lived life. That he categorically rejects.

But Paul has "lost all things" (3:8b). He has forfeited his promising career as a respected Jewish Rabbi to follow Jesus the Messiah. Paul, like each of us, had to choose his own path. Paul chose Christ because he saw Christ's overwhelming worth when compared to his former path.

After twenty years or more of experience Paul had an opportunity of revising his balance-sheet, and looking again at his estimates, and seeing whether or not his counting was correct. What was the issue of his latest search? How do matters stand at his last stocktaking? He exclaims with very special emphasis, ‘Yea doubtless; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord’.

Excellence of the Knowledge of Christ Jesus My Lord

What does it mean to "know Christ"? The word "excellence" is here strictly used to indicate (as in 2 Corinthians 3:9-11) that the knowledge of Christ so surpasses all other knowledge, and, indeed, all other blessings whatever, as to make them less nothing.

Paul's use of the term "knowledge" doesn't derive from the Greek mystery religions and philosophical schools that abounded in his day, but from the Hebrew scriptures. In the Old Testament, knowledge (Hebrew *yāda`*) denotes "living in a close relationship with something or somebody, such a relationship as to cause what may be called communion."

To be found in Him

What does it mean, "to be found in Christ"? Paul is clear that at any moment of scrutiny or test; whether in life, in death, and/or before the judgment-seat, he must be found in Christ. The truth of the believer's deep incorporation in his Lord and Head, and identification with Him for acceptance and life, is here full in view as exemplified by Paul's statement here.

Paul's own righteousness vs righteousness through faith

Paul exposes the great difference between the legal relationship stressed by his opponents and his personal connection with Jesus Christ. He said in verse 9, "*not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith*".

What is this righteousness? The Greek noun "dikaiosynē" has three basic meanings: (1) justice or fairness, (2) right standing, and (3) upright behaviour, uprightness.

Paul contrasts two types of righteousness in verse 9:

<p>Source of righteousness: Law Means of righteousness: Personal obedience</p>	<p>Source of righteousness: God Means of righteousness: Faith</p>
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Righteousness under law considers a person righteous because of his or her own upright behaviour. Righteousness by faith, considers a person righteous because God has declared it so and as judge considers a person so.

In brief, here's how it works. God agrees with our confession of sins that we are guilty and that there must be a penalty for sin. Once the penalty has been paid (crudely called in criminal law, "our debt to society"), then we are free. Yes, ex-cons, but free. Our penalty for rebellion and treason against the Most High God is death. That penalty has been paid by Jesus Christ on the cross. Thus, God declares the penalty paid and that we are righteous, that is, in a right standing with God once more.

Righteousness Received by Faith

This concept is difficult to grasp for some. It is hard to believe, since it is such amazing news. How can someone else take my sin? Who would do that? Don't I have to bear it and the consequences of it? How can this be?

The core of the Christian faith is that we believe Jesus died for our sins on the cross and was raised from the dead for our salvation. Either it is true, or it isn't. Either the crucifixion and resurrection are Christian myths, or they actually happened in history and are spiritual facts of life.

If the crucifixion and resurrection actually happened, and I believe they did, then Jesus, the Holy One, took all of the degradation of our unholiness upon himself, "*the righteous for the unrighteous*" (1 Peter 3:18), in order to remove our sin and guilt from us. (Also ponder Isaiah 53 to understand this better.) This is what Paul means when he refers in our passage to "*the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*"

But what does faith have to do with it? Though Christ has died for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29; 3:15-17; 1 Timothy 2:4, 6; 4:10; 1 John 2:22; 4:14), that salvation takes effect only for those who put their trust in him. Faith confirms what God has done and activates this salvation for oneself.

The Greek word "faith," which occurs twice in our verse, is the Greek noun "pistis", "state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted.

Notice in the following verses the clear linkage between faith (believing) and salvation or righteousness:

*"Even the **righteousness** of God, **through faith** in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who **believe**. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23)*

*"For with the heart one **believes** unto **righteousness**, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:10)*

Jesus died for your sins. You believe it to be true. You speak it with your mouth (that is, confess it). And you receive salvation and righteousness in return. Yes, your faith is weak when you are a new Christian. Sometimes you are like the man whose son was healed, who said, "*I believe, help my unbelief*" (Mark 9:24). But you grow in understanding and faith and experience.

Knowing Christ Intimately

"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." (vv10-11)

This was the simple plea of Paul's heart. It was a plea unknown to the legalist, who must necessarily focus on his own performance and status to find some kind of peace with God. But Paul wanted Jesus, not self. To know Jesus is not the same as knowing His historical life; it is not the same as knowing correct doctrines regarding Jesus; it is not the same as knowing His moral example, and it is not the same as knowing His great work on our behalf.

"That I may know Him": the Greek seems to imply a decisive act of knowledge rather than a process. A lifelong process is sure to result from the act; for the Object of the act "passeth knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). But the act, the decisive getting acquainted with what Christ is, is in immediate view. A far-reaching insight into Him in His glory of grace has a natural connexion with the spiritual act of submissive faith in Him as our Sacrifice and Righteousness.

A writer writes: "they tell me he is a refiner, that he cleanses from spots; he has washed me in his precious blood, and to that extent I know him. They tell me that he clothes the naked; he has covered me with a garment of righteousness, and to that extent I know him. They tell me that he is a breaker, and that he breaks fetters, he has set my soul at liberty, and therefore I know him. They tell me that he is a king and that he reigns over sin; he hath subdued my enemies beneath his feet, and I know him in that character. They tell me he is a shepherd: I know him for I am his sheep. They say he is a door: I have entered in through him, and I know him as a door. They say he is food: my spirit feeds on him as on the bread of heaven, and, therefore, I know him as such." How much do you know Him? How much have you experienced Him?

The Power of His Resurrection

The phrase “power of His resurrection” is difficult to exhaust in exposition. The Lord’s Resurrection is spiritually powerful as (a) evidencing the justification of believers (Romans 4:24-25, 1 Corinthians 15:14; 1 Corinthians 15:17-18); as (b) assuring them of their own bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20, 1 Thessalonians 4:14); and yet more as (c) being that which constituted Him actually the life-giving Second Adam, the Giver of the Spirit who unites the members to Him the Vital Head (John 7:39; John 20:22; Acts 2:33; Ephesians 4:4-16). This latter aspect of truth is prominent in the Epistles to Ephesus and Colossae, written at nearly the same period of St Paul’s apostolic work; and we have here, very probably, a passing hint of what is unfolded there.

Knowing Jesus means knowing this power, the new life that is imparted to us now, not when we die. Paul wants to know in an experiential way the power of Christ’s resurrection. That is, he wants to experience the same power that raised Christ from the dead surging through his own being, overcoming sin in his life and producing the Christian graces to the life of others.

This passage indicates the great truth that while our acceptance in Christ is always based upon His propitiatory work for us, our power for service and endurance in His name is vitally connected with His life as the Risen One, made ours by the Holy Spirit.

Fellowship of His Sufferings

Knowing Jesus also means knowing this **fellowship of His sufferings**. Paul deals with the fact that the Lord who has redeemed him has done it at the severest cost of pain; and that a moral and spiritual necessity calls His redeemed ones, who are united vitally to Him, to “carry the cross,” in their measure, for His sake, in His track, and by His Spirit’s power. And he implies that this cross bearing, whatever is its special form, this acceptance of affliction of any sort as for and from Him, is a deep secret of entrance into spiritual intimacy with Christ; into “knowledge of Him.”

Being conformed to His death: This reminds us that being in Christ also means being “in” His death. These words had particular relevance to Paul who faced possible martyrdom. Paul was not morbidly focused on suffering and death in the Christian life. He saw that they were a necessary way to the goal of resurrection life right now and the ultimate resurrection from the dead.

- This was a goal that was worth any means to Paul. The suffering was worth it, considering the greatness of the goal of resurrection from the dead.

When Paul mentioned: “that I might attain”, he didn’t doubt that he was saved, but he did long mightily for the completion of his salvation through the resurrection of his body. It was something that he had not yet attained and longed for.

Remember that Paul wrote this having experienced more suffering than we will ever experience, and he wrote it from the custody of Roman soldiers. This wasn’t merely theological theory and ideas, but a lived-out connection with God.

Do you long to know Jesus better -- really know him? That is my longing, too. Grant it, Lord Jesus.