

Title: The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Christ Jesus

Text: Philippians 3:1-9

Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.

² Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. ³ For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, ⁴ though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

⁵ I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. ⁶ I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

⁷ I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸ Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

Central Theme: True righteousness is not found in human religious achievement or rule-keeping, but is a gift received through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

I. The Warning Against False Righteousness (Philippians 3:1-3)

Paul begins with a strong warning against those who would lead the Philippians astray with a message of salvation through works of the Law (Judaizers).

- **Rejoice in the Lord (v. 1):** The foundation of the Christian life is joy in Christ, which serves as a safeguard against false teaching. This joy is a continuous command, even in difficult circumstances (Philippians 4:4; 1 Peter 1:6-9).
- **Beware of "Dogs" and "Evil Workers" (v. 2):** Paul uses harsh terms for those who insist on circumcision and other legalistic requirements for salvation, calling them "mutilators of the flesh". This highlights that legalism is a dangerous perversion of the gospel, leading people away from the sufficiency of Christ (Galatians 5:12). Jesus also reserved His sharpest words for the outwardly religious whose hearts were far from God (Matthew 23:27-28).
- **True Circumcision is of the Heart (v. 3):** Genuine believers are described as those who:
 - Worship by the Spirit of God (John 4:24).
 - Glory in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:31; Jeremiah 9:23-24).

- Put no confidence in the flesh. This concept echoes the Old Testament understanding of spiritual circumcision (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:25-29).

II. Paul's Impressive Resume and Its Demolition (Philippians 3:4-6)

To demonstrate that no human achievement is sufficient, Paul lists his own impeccable Jewish credentials. If anyone could be justified by the law, it was him.

- **Pedigree and Performance (v. 4-6):** Paul's list of accomplishments includes:
 - **Circumcised on the eighth day:** A sign of being a faithful Jew from birth (Genesis 17:12).
 - **People of Israel, tribe of Benjamin:** Pure Jewish lineage (Romans 11:1).
 - **A Hebrew of Hebrews:** Culturally and linguistically pure.
 - **As to the Law, a Pharisee:** Belonging to the strictest sect, committed to perfect observance (Acts 22:3; Acts 26:5).
 - **As to zeal, a persecutor of the church:** Demonstrating extreme devotion and sincerity from his previous viewpoint (Acts 8:3; Galatians 1:13-14).
 - **As to righteousness under the law, blameless:** From a human perspective, his performance was faultless, yet insufficient to meet God's standard (Luke 18:9-14).

III. The Supreme Treasure of Knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7-9)

Paul explains his radical re-evaluation of all his "gains" after coming to know Christ.

- **Counting Gain as Loss (v. 7):** Everything that Paul previously considered an asset for his standing with God he now counts as "loss for the sake of Christ" (Matthew 16:26)...
- **The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Jesus (v. 8):** Paul views all earthly and religious achievements as "rubbish" (or "dung") in comparison to the infinite value of an intimate relationship with Christ (Colossians 2:8; Hebrews 12:2).
- **Gaining Christ and God's Righteousness (v. 8-9):** The goal is to "gain Christ" and "be found in him," possessing not his own righteousness that comes from the law, but the **righteousness from God that depends on faith** (2 Corinthians 5:21). This highlights the doctrine of justification by faith alone (Romans 3:21-28; Ephesians 2:8-9). This is a gift received by faith, not earned by works.

Reflection and Application Questions

- **Evaluate your confidence:** What are you relying on for your standing with God? Is it your good works, morality, or religious background? (Jeremiah 17:5-6)
- **Identify your "gains":** What are the "assets" in your life (e.g., career success, social standing, religious activity, good reputation) that you might secretly be putting confidence in for your self-worth or salvation?

- **Embrace God's gift:** How does Paul's use of the word "rubbish" affect your view of your own achievements? How can you practically "turn from self-righteousness" this week and rely solely on Christ's perfect righteousness? (Titus 3:5)
- **Treasure Christ above all:** How does your pursuit of knowing Christ compare to your pursuit of other life goals? What practical steps can you take to prioritize growing in intimacy with Jesus this week? (Matthew 13:44-46)
- **Examine your worship:** Verse 3 describes true believers as those who "worship by the Spirit of God" and "glory in Christ Jesus." What does Spirit-led worship look like in your personal life and in the corporate gathering of believers?