

## Leader Corner

The Value of Christ

Philippians 3:1-11

A regular theme of Paul's letters was encouragement that his churches hold fast to the doctrines he had taught them, and not to let the truth of Christ's Gospel be corrupted. Of the many heretical views trying to confuse early Christians, one of the most prevalent was the temptation to slip back into Jewish legalism. A group of men known as Judaizers would follow Paul on his missionary journeys, and after he left, they would infiltrate the new churches and corrupt them with false teaching, namely that faith in Christ was not sufficient if a person did not also keep the Law, especially circumcision according to the law of Moses. Here in Philippians 3, Paul warns against this slide back into legalism by highlighting that he was the best legalist of them all, until he realized that real value is only found in Christ. This study examines how Paul shifts the center of the righteous, God-following life from the Law of Moses to the person and work of Jesus Christ, and asks you to consider what has true worth in your life.

**Main Idea:** A relationship with Christ and a desire to share his sufferings and know his resurrection power is worth far more than a ritualistic false righteousness rooted in law-keeping.

**Main Practice:** Christians must learn from Paul's testimony and believe him when he says there is no value in pursuing "righteousness" by over-zealous Jewish legalism. Rather than spending time checking legal boxes, spend time considering what it really means to "know" Jesus in relationship.

**Main Teaching:** Philippians 3:1-11, particularly v.7

## Refocus with Praise

Together, look up and read the lyrics from the song "Because of Christ." A portion of the music is listed below.

On a hill in Israel  
Mercy spoke for me  
Mercy spoke for me  
Mercy spoke for me

What a blessed mystery  
His punishment my peace  
His punishment my peace  
His punishment my peace

Hallelujah Hallelujah  
Jesus rose in victory  
He's alive, alive in me

It was on Golgotha's tree  
His death brought liberty  
His death brought liberty  
His death brought liberty

May I never boast in anything  
Except the cross of Jesus Christ  
May I not forget the blood He shed  
It is by His death I am alive

Hallelujah Hallelujah  
Praise the one who set me free  
Death has lost its grip on me

May I never boast in anything  
Except the cross of Jesus Christ  
May I not forget the blood He shed  
It is by His death I am alive  
Because of Christ, I am alive

May I not boast in anything  
Except the cross of Jesus Christ  
May I not forget the blood He shed  
It is by His death I am alive  
Because of Christ, I am alive

Hallelujah Hallelujah  
Jesus rose in victory  
He's alive, alive in me

Hallelujah Hallelujah  
Praise the one who set me free  
Death has lost its grip on me

What a humble sacrifice  
Love that washed me clean  
Love that washed me clean  
Love that washed me clean

Hallelujah Hallelujah  
Praise the one who set me free  
Death has lost its grip on me

Hallelujah Hallelujah  
Jesus rose in victory  
He's alive, alive in me

## with Prayer

Have someone in your group pray the following Scripture, and then read Isaiah 64:5-6 aloud:

*You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.* Isaiah 64:5-6, NIV

The issue of how new Christian believers were supposed to relate to the Law of Moses were dealt with in Acts 15, however it continued to be a source of great tension and confusion in the life of the early church. (And sometimes even still today!) Here in chapter 3 of Philippians, Paul addresses this conflict head-on, using the first 3 verses to contrast counterfeit Christianity vs. true Christianity. Then from v.4-11, he shares his own Pharisaic, law-keeping resume and contrasts its value with the value of knowing Jesus and the true righteousness that comes only through faith in Christ.

1. What do you think Paul is saying about the role of repetition and reiteration in verse 1? What is the proper posture toward repetition from each perspective (the repeater and the receiver)?
2. For rhetorical emphasis, Paul uses the Greek word *blepo* three times in v.3. Since it means “to see,” it is most commonly translated as “look out” or “watch out” in Paul’s context here, though a few Bible versions translate it as “beware,” possibly to create a more understandable contrast with the word “safe” at the end of v1. How would you describe the 3 things Paul wants them to beware of, and how do these connect to the issue of rejoicing that Paul brought up in v1?
3. Then in v3, Paul says Christians are the true circumcision, and offers 3 ideas that contrast with his 3 ‘beware’s’ from v2. How would you describe these 3 ideas, and how do they connect to rejoicing?
4. In v4-6, Paul lays out his resume. What point do you think he’s trying to make by reciting all this?
5. Verse 7 is the pivot point in Paul’s testimony. The key contrast is between the idea of gain vs. loss, or said another way (as the NET Bible translates it), “But these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ.” What do you think Paul means by this?
6. Paul then uses v8-11 to emphasize the tremendous value of Christ, which he does in v8 by comparing his Pharisaic resume to...dung! Some translations soften it by using the word “rubbish,” but the Greek word *skubalon* was often used as a vulgar term for fecal matter. Paul would’ve known that, and given the context established in v.2-4 is about what the flesh produces, he is likely going for shock value here by literally comparing his former legalistic accolades to excrement and feces. Paul isn’t holding back. In the span of a few verses, he’s called these Judaizers dogs and their accomplishments dung. Why do you think Paul goes to such graphic lengths to draw this contrast for his readers?
7. Admittedly, there’s some heavy (and sometimes controversial) theology baked into verse 9, but the key idea continues to be the contrast between righteousness by the Law vs. righteousness by Faith. In your own words, how would you describe the difference?
8. Paul references several “means” in v10 (to know him and the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to become like him in his death) that all point toward the “end” in v11 (attaining the resurrection of the dead). In summary, what does Paul find most valuable now, and how is that different from what he used to find valuable? How should your story be similar, as a Christian?
9. Discuss any other key, biblically-based teaching points you recall from the weekend's sermon.

Philippians 3:8-11 is also commonly used as an example when Christians use the phrase “having a personal relationship with Jesus.” Paul says “...the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,” and “that I may gain Christ, and be found in him...and that I may know him...” This intimate language of knowing Christ (as opposed to simply having head-knowledge “about” him) sounds like the way you’d describe a relationship, hence the common Christian phrase. Using Paul’s descriptions and distinctions as a guide, talk about what it means to know Jesus, and how that’s different from simply knowing “about” him.

### For Further Focus

There are a few other places in the New Testament where personal information about Paul’s pre-Christian life is shared, and these can be helpful for a fuller view of Paul’s perspective. Dig deeper by reading Acts 8:1-3, Acts 22:3-4, Acts 26:9-11, 1 Corinthians 15:8-11, Galatians 1:11-24, and 1 Timothy 1:12-16. (In fact, the famous confrontation Paul had with Peter (Gal 2:11-16) was about the very issue discussed in this study!)