

Philippians (3:7-14)

Paul's Life Since Christ

After demonstrating the wickedness of self-righteous pride, Paul now shows that all human accomplishments pale in comparison to the "the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

I. Paul's Past Renunciation (3:7-8)

A. Paul's Past Gain is Really His Loss (v. 7)

1. Whatever was in Paul's credit column has now been moved to the debit column. All those years of preparation and commendation in gaining meritorious favor before God had become a hindrance rather than help in knowing God (see Jn. 5:39).
2. The only thing that remains in Paul's credit column is Christ.
3. Note it is "for the sake of Christ" that Paul consciously rejects any notion of confidence in his prior achievements.
4. Something so profound occurred in Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3-9) that his entire value system was changed forever! The very things he valued the most became the least valuable compared to Christ. The expression "to live is Christ" rings true in every sense of the expression.

B. Paul Expands His Losses (v. 8)

1. The verb tense changes from a decisive break from his past that has present implications (*ἤγημαι*, perfect tense, "[as a result of my past conversion] I now consider loss") to the continual, on-going regard for everything henceforth (*ἡγοῦμαι*, present tense, "I [continue to] consider"). What Paul counted as loss at conversion, he repeatedly counts as loss again and again.
2. Not only past achievements and blessings, but all the world offers cannot begin to compare with the "surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus." Anything in which Paul could be tempted to trust, apart from Christ, was absolutely dangerous.
3. A relationship with Jesus is not without its price, however. Jesus makes it clear that one cannot have both the world and Him (Mt. 6:24; 10:39; 13:44-45; 19:21; Lk. 9:62). To be clothed in the righteousness of Christ is to be stripped naked of all human pride and ambition that seeks to displace the work of the cross.
4. The attitude Paul maintained toward all things is garbage or refuse, i.e., good for nothing (*σκύβαλα*, "rubbish," used for excrement or spoiled food). Not only are "all things" worthless, they are abhorrent compared to an intimate relationship with Jesus, which more than compensated for the loss of everything.

II. Paul Present Aim (3:9-11)

A. The Supreme Ambition Stated (v. 9)

1. To "gain Christ" (v. 8) means to be "found in him . . . having a righteousness . . . that comes from God and is by faith." This, and nothing else, is Paul's supreme ambition in life.
2. One's standing before God is either "from the law" or "from God." These two sources are antithetical to one another. The first expression represents any and every effort, regardless of sincerity, that seeks to win God's favor apart from faith in Christ alone.

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3. Lest we think that "faith" is the human side of salvation, Scripture is clear that it is a gift from God (Acts 16:14; Eph. 2:8-9; Philip. 1:29; 1 Tim. 1:14; Heb. 12:2; 2 Pt. 1:1). Faith is the only essential that warrants acquittal before God's judgment; all else is as "filthy rags" (Is. 64:6).

B. The Supreme Ambition Explained (vv. 10-11)

1. To "gain Christ" (v. 8) and to be "found in him" (v. 9) is what it means to "know Christ" (v. 10).
2. The "power of his resurrection" is the power to live the Christian life (cf., Eph. 1:19-20), especially in the face of suffering to which all believers are called (1:29; Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 3:3).
3. To suffer for Christ is, for Paul, to suffer with Him (2 Cor. 1:5 "the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives").
4. To share in Christ's sufferings means to share in His glory (Rom. 8:17), be buried with Him (Rom. 6:2-11), crucified with Him (Gal. 2:20), and to die daily for Him (1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 4:10). In short, it means to find our entire identity in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17)!
5. To some extent, our relationship with Christ is nurtured when we suffer for Him, thus changing from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18). Put differently, our measure of Christlikeness is seen by the measure of our suffering. Ergo, suffering for Jesus has extreme significance in this life.
6. The hope of participating in the resurrection suggests that Paul's belief in a physical resurrection was in the future and not necessarily upon his physical death (comp. 1:23).
7. Paul lacks no certainty for his ultimate salvation (Rom. 8:28-30) nor his future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:35-49). The realm of possibility here is stated merely to indicate the uncertainty about his immediate future and outcome of his trial (cf., 1:22-23).

III. Paul's Future Hope (3:12-14)

A. Negative Disclaimers

1. "All this," v. 12 and "hold of it," v. 13 refers to all that Paul has stated thus far as his supreme goal, viz., to "gain Christ" (v. 8), to be "found in him" (v. 9), and to "know Christ" (v. 10).
2. In essence, Paul flatly denies any sense of absolute, sinless perfection in this life.

B. Positive Assertions

1. Paul was painfully aware that he fell far short of his supreme ambition (1 Tim. 1:15-16). Yet, that did not stop him from running the race for the prize (1 Cor. 9:24-27).
2. The work of sanctification—the process of becoming holy—is progressive in nature; there are no shortcuts.
3. The dramatic and intense manner in which Christ redeemed Paul is the same manner in which Paul will "take hold of" Christ (v. 12). When God grips us by grace, we lay hold of Him with all our might.
4. The focus is ahead and not behind (v. 13). A forward focus is essential in successfully running a race (Acts 20:24; Heb. 12:1-3).
5. Paul is determined to win the prize, not by being first, but by finishing the race (2 Tim. 4:7). This prize is not exclusive, but for all who finish (2 Tim. 4:8).

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On the progress of sanctification, consider . . .

“Since becoming a Christian, you have become more and more aware of the sin in your life, and you are discouraged by it. But what discourages you, I see as a sign of life—not the sin itself, but the fact that you are discouraged by it. If you professed faith in Christ and it did not make any difference to your values, personal ethics, and goals, I would begin to wonder if your profession of faith in Christ was spurious (there are certainly instances of spurious faith in the Bible—for instance, John 2:23-25; 8:31ff.).

But if you have come to trust Christ, then growth in Him is always attended by deepening realization that you are not as good as you once thought you were, that the human heart is frighteningly deceptive and capable of astonishing depths of selfishness and evil. As you discover these things about yourself, the objective ground of your assurance must always remain unfalteringly the same: ‘if anybody does sin we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One’ (1 John 2:1). Let your confidence rest fully in that simple and profound truth.

What you will discover with time is that although you are not as holy as you would like to be or as blameless as you should be, by God's grace you are not what you were. You look back and regret things you have said and thought and done as a Christian; you are embarrassed perhaps by the things you failed to think and say and do. But you also look back and testify with gratitude that because of the grace of God in your life, you are not what you were. And thus, unobtrusively, the subjective grounds of assurance also lend their quiet support.”

From *Letters Along the Way*, D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, Crossway, p. 23.