

Philippians 3 Sermon for Gulf Gate Church [09.28.08]

[script for PPT; PPT CD; jug of water; 2 clear glasses; spoon; soy sauce; waste bowl; handout]

Introduction

A. Learning to Read: [Slide 1: Title only]

1. Intro: Last week, I invested about forty minutes to teach you two verses. Today we will discuss twenty-one verses. If you do the math... either I have to do something differently or we all have to cancel our lunch plans. The truth is, I would love to stay here all day talking with you about Philippians 3. I know all scripture is inspired and useful, but Philippians 3 is one of my favorite passages! However, to extend a word of encouragement to the tear down crew, I will tell you I am aiming at about thirty-five minutes today.

2. Learning to interpret: One of the best things about going to seminary was that they taught me how to really study and analyze scripture, and I was delighted to find there is a lot more revelation from God, a lot more meaning, than I ever imagined. So as I teach you what scripture says and means, I also try to show you how this meaning is revealed – so you can learn to study scripture better yourselves – and so you can get more excited about what you are learning today.

† Last week, we looked carefully at the meaning of the key words in two sentences, and when we had done that and put the sentences back together, we found that those two sentences – which we might have glossed over in a casual reading of Hebrews chapter 10 – were actually two powerful commands from God about how he expects us to live and thrive. This week, we will broadly analyze the theological themes of the letter of Philippians, and I will show you how we discover that theological meaning from what Paul wrote.

B. The Letter: At the time of this letter, more than a decade had passed since Paul founded the church in Philippi. It is useful to ask ourselves, why did Paul write this letter? Why did God include it in the Bible?

1. The local problem: [Slide 2: Persecution] In the Roman empire, only the cult of the emperor and recognized ethnic religions had legal status and protection. Christianity was not recognized at this time, and the Christians in Philippi had faced persecution since the church started.

2. Paul's problem: [Slide 3: Imprisonment] Paul was now under arrest in Rome for preaching the gospel. We see in chapter two that the Philippians had sent a man named Epaphroditus to Rome with an offering to help Paul, which shows they continued to support and identify with him.

3. The letter's problem: [Slide 4: Deliverance?] However, the Philippians were confused by these problems. Why would God allow them to suffer? Why would God let Paul languish in prison when he had God's work to do? Where was God's deliverance? Some people suggested God was angry with them for not obeying the Mosaic Law of Israel.

† In the first two chapters, Paul explained the following: 1. even in prison he was doing God's work of spreading the gospel; 2. he knew God was pleased rather than angry; 3. humble, sacrificial suffering for the gospel is part of the Christian experience; 4. Christ was the greatest model of humble, sacrificial suffering for the gospel; 5. Paul, Timothy, and their own Epaphroditus were examples of those who followed Christ into this lifestyle.

Point 1: The Source of Our Righteousness

[Slide 5: vv.1-3] ¹Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. ²Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; ³for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...

A. Who were the opponents?

1. **Christians:** [Slide 6: True circumcision] Paul called Christians – those of us who have faith in Christ – the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh... We will come back to that.
2. **Circumcision:** [Slide 7: Circumcision] The Jews required physical circumcision for men.
 - † People referred to as “the circumcision” in Paul’s letters were either Jews or Jewish Christians who thought you had to follow the Mosaic Law of Israel to earn righteousness before God and thus procure his blessing.
 - † These people would argue that God allowed the Philippians to be persecuted because they did not follow the Law.
3. **Ironic Names:** In contrast to those of us who are the true circumcision, Paul called these people the false circumcision, evil workers, and dogs. These terms were all ironic insults.
 - † [Slide 8: Dogs] Dogs were creatures who were not careful about avoiding what was unclean, so the Jews who kept the Law would refer to Gentiles who did not keep the Law as dogs. Now Paul said those who want to keep the Law in order to be righteous were really the dogs.
 - † [Slide 9: Evil workers] Similarly, his opponents probably used the phrase “works of the Law” to refer to their philosophy, so Paul called them workers of evil.
 - † [Slide 10: False circumcision] Paul also called his opponents who believed in circumcision the *false* circumcision, which in Greek referred to pagan mutilation rituals.
 - † We can see what kind of mood Paul is in: nasty! He is adamantly opposed to these people who are saying the Philippians need to follow the Law of Israel to be righteous enough to get God’s blessing.

B. The source of Righteousness! [Slide 11: Two views] Here is one of the most important points in the whole Bible, and it is a repeated theme throughout the Bible, especially in the New Testament:

1. **Their View:** These other people say you earn your righteousness by what you do;
2. **Paul’s View:**
 - † Paul says you have no righteousness without Christ no matter what you do...
 - † And when you are saved in Christ, God considers you as righteous as Christ: this is called imputed [or accounted] righteousness, because Christ’s righteousness is accounted to us.
 - † These are the battle lines that have been drawn here. Let’s read on...

Point 2: The Value of the Source of Our Righteousness

[Slide 12: vv.4-6] [We Christians put no confidence in the flesh] ⁴although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: ⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

[Slide 13: vv.7-11] ⁷But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸More 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 so that I may gain Christ, ⁹and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰that

I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

A. Paul's human merit

[Slide 14: vv.4-6] 1. Paul as most meritorious: Paul said if they wanted to consider human merits, he would be among the most meritorious.

- † Before meeting Christ, Paul was from one of the most loyal tribes of God's chosen people; he was obedient to the Law, and a respected zealous leader in the religious group with the highest standards.
- † He had more claims to being the right sort of person than his opponents could ever have.
- † He also had prestige, power, influence, accomplishment, and probably enough wealth, all things to which people aspire today.

2. No Value in these things: **[Slide 15: vv.7-8 highlight]** But note what he said about these things:

- † First, he said these things were worthless to him compared to knowing and serving Christ.
 - He received salvation and righteousness as a gift of grace through faith, not by what he had accomplished.
 - In fact, the things that made him *feel* righteous before were not only relatively worthless, they were harmful if they deceived him into *feeling* self-righteous.
 - **[Slide 16: Refuse]** Paul called these things rubbish in v.8, a Greek word that can mean refuse, the things thrown to the dogs. This is ironic: the people Paul called "dogs" are the ones who value the things he calls "refuse" as a way to earn righteousness before God.
 - **[Slide 17: v.9 highlighted]** Paul knows that righteousness comes by God's grace through faith, it is a gift, not the result of our works. Looking again at v.9, we see Paul say, "...not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith..."
- † **[Slide 18: Title only]** Let me give you a personal example: I have given up my banking career and good salary, gone to seminary for four years, and now work in ministry for free... does this make me more righteous in God's eyes than you? does this make me more righteous in God's eyes than I was before?
 - Not one bit. don't confuse the cause and effect: my sacrifice does not make me righteous; instead, my God-given righteousness leads me to sacrifice.
- † Let me illustrate this for you, because this is really important, whether you are already a believer or still checking Christianity out.
 - **[Slide 19: In his image]** We start out with a glass of pure, crystal clear, water. This is the way God designed us to be: pure, a reflection of his character.
 - **[Slide 20: Two kinds of sin]** However, we are conceived with two kinds of sin. When Adam and Eve sinned the first time, they corrupted their nature and this corruption has been passed down through the generations, and we inherited this corrupted nature from our parents, which is called inherited sin; also, we are held guilty by God for Adam's sin, because God accounts or imputes the guilt to all of Adam's offspring, which is called imputed sin. So even as we are conceived we are not pure like God desired. [put drops in the water].

- **[Slide 21: sinning on our own]** Of course, as our lives progress, we sin a bit on our own [add more drops to water], so that we become quite polluted.
- Now suppose we decide to do more of the good things Scripture commands and less of the sinful things. We can pour out some of our sinfulness and add some of the goodness of God. [represent with pouring out some water and adding some fresh water]. I can make the water lighter and lighter, but can I ever get it pure again?
- **[Slide 22: no way to become pure again]** No, I cannot. And the same way, I can never make myself perfectly pure and holy again. I was corrupted from the start and I sinned along the way. I can try to make myself a better person than I was, but I can never in my own power make myself the righteous and pure person God designed me to be;
- **[Slide 23: no way to earn salvation]** Catch this: I can never in my own power make myself the righteous and pure person that I *need* to be to have salvation from sin and death so I can spend eternity with our holy God.
- That's why God does it for us. He offers us the righteousness and purity of Christ – he accounts it to us – even though we have not earned it, so we can be saved.

3. Giving up these things: So Paul said his accomplishments did not have value because they could not save him or give him righteousness. **[Slide 24: vv.7-8 highlighted]** Paul also said that, because these worldly things were essentially useless compared to the gifts of Christ, he was willing to give them up for Christ!

- † By the time he wrote this letter, he was ostracized from his people, had given up his formerly successful life to be an impoverished missionary, and had repeatedly suffered being beaten, stoned, and jailed for preaching the gospel.
- † Instead of being driven by worldly success, Paul was driven by wanting to serve Christ and wanting to allow God to work through him to carry out the ministry.

B. Glory and Humiliation

1. Christ's glory and humiliation: **[Slide 25: vv.10-11 highlighted]** We also see here that Paul associated knowing Christ in his resurrection with knowing Christ in his sufferings. In chapter two, Paul explained that Christ's glory was tied to his humility, to his humiliation on the cross. It is only in sharing Christ's humiliation that we get to share in his glory.

2. Dying to the world: Here is another way of looking at it: If we died to our sins with Christ, then we died to this life with Christ too.

- † **[Slide 26: True deliverance]** Our hope is not for success in this life. It is in being resurrected to eternal life! That is what Paul has been saying in this letter. He was not worried about being delivered out of prison, because he was already delivered from sin, death, and Satan, to become a citizen of Heaven.
- † Likewise, we should not be setting store by worldly blessings, nor worried when we lack them, but rather should be looking for any way we can serve Christ better with what God has given us in this moment.

Point 3: Living Up to Our Righteousness

[Slide 27: vv.12-16] ¹²Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward

to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; ¹⁶however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

A. Sanctification

1. Definition: Those of us who believe in Christ are enjoying two kinds of *sanctification*.
 - † That might be a new word to you, so I'll define it: to sanctify something is to separate it out to be holy; when God sanctifies us, he makes us holy, righteous, prepared for his purposes.
2. Positional Sanctification: As we just discussed, we have attained righteousness as a gift from God.
 - † **[Slide 28: Positional Sanctification]** This is called *positional* sanctification: we have the position of righteousness before God because God accounts to us the righteousness of Christ. This allows us to be in communion with God and is a necessary part of our salvation.
3. Progressive Sanctification: In our behavior, we are not quite holy yet, are we? Let's go around the room, each of us giving evidence that we still sin... just joking. But it is true, even though we are saved, we still sin.
 - † **[Slide 29: Progressive sanctification]** However, by God's grace we can become more sanctified – more righteous – in our behavior, to live up to this position God has given us. This is called *progressive* sanctification, because it progresses throughout our lives.

B. We need to live up to our gift of righteousness

1. The Goal: God first calls us righteous; then he calls us to live up to that righteousness. If we value the gift of righteousness, if we value Christ, then we will seek to live up to that righteousness.
 - † If you just had a thought that you are already living righteously, let me remind you that Paul said he was not yet fully living up to it, and this from a man who had lived up to the Law and then given up everything for Christ! Each of us needs to improve how we live.
2. Reminder: **[Slide 30: biblical thinking]** Remember, we do not do good things to earn righteousness; we do good things because God has already accounted us as righteous and is transforming us to live more righteously.

C. God's Image

1. Christ the only one: As I mentioned earlier, it says in Genesis that God made us to be his image, his reflection. But Christ was the only one who truly was the image of God, for we are tainted by sin.
 - † **[Slide 31: Progressive Sanctification]** God is working to transform us into being more like Christ, to being more like who he created us to be. He is transforming us to become as righteous in thought and deed as we already are in his sight.
2. Our Part: **[Slide 32: Our participation]** We can cooperate with that process. We can desire it, pray for it, submit to it, do the spiritual disciplines mentioned in scripture, and practice obedience... We can experience changing values, as we forget our worldly accomplishments and desires, and press on for doing God's work. Like Paul, we can pursue this goal in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

Point 4: Citizens of Heaven, not the World

[Slide 33: vv.17-21] ¹⁷Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. ¹⁸For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping,

that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we 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.

A. Examples to Follow

1. **Examples:** In the last chapter, Paul gave Christ as the ultimate example of humble service, sacrifice, and suffering, and also himself, Timothy and their own Epaphroditus as examples of normal people following Christ in this way.
2. **Exhortation:** Now Paul exhorts the Philippians to follow these examples and contrasts himself with his opponents.

B. Contrasting the example of the Opponents with that of Paul

1. **Contrast:** **[Slide 34: Contrast]** It is strange, but those like Paul's opponents who advocate self-righteousness, in earning righteousness for themselves, almost always live sinfully; but those who believe in imputed righteousness, righteousness as a gift from God, learn to live righteously.
2. **Self Righteousness and sin:** A self righteous attitude is a sin in itself, but it also leads to sin.
 - † **[Slide 35: self righteousness]** If you think you have to earn God's favor, to earn your righteousness, then you become either prideful or defeated, depending on how well you think you are doing. If you get prideful, your sin-corrupted mind begins to think you are better than you really are, and you begin to justify your behavior even when it is bad. If you get defeated, you give up trying, and stay stuck in a sin cycle.
 - † The problem is that you are relying on your own flesh to act righteous, and your flesh is not up to the challenge. If you are empowered only by sin-corrupted flesh then you will live a sin-corrupted life, just like a non-believer.
3. **Grace Righteousness and sanctification:** **[Slide 36: grace righteousness]** In contrast, a grace righteousness attitude leads to righteous behavior.
 - † If you know your righteousness before God is a gift, not something you earned, if you know you deserve to go to Hell for your sins, but will not because of God's grace, then you are grateful and so you desire to identify with and follow Christ.
 - † You develop a right perspective as a citizen of Heaven. This life is only seventy-five or eighty years on average, whereas life in Heaven will be forever! millions of years!
 - So, like Paul, you begin to be willing to sacrifice and even suffer in this short life if you can make an eternal difference by representing Christ.
 - Also, like Paul, you are eagerly awaiting Christ's return, when he will resurrect the dead and perfect us to fully be like him.
 - And, you know God's goal is to sanctify you now, so you cooperate in that process.
 - † Best of all, you are empowered not by the flesh, but by the Holy Spirit: God is going to continue the process of sanctifying you – of growing you to be more like Christ, more like the person he created you to be in his image – as your life progresses, so you can live up to the righteousness he has given you.

Summary: These are some of the most important things the Bible has to say. Let's summarize.

[Slide 37: I] Point 1: Without Christ we have no righteousness, we are worthless to God. We are considered righteous by God only because he attributes to us Christ's righteousness. Nothing we do can make us more righteous in God's sight; our mistakes do not make us less so. This is true after salvation as well as before.

[Slide 38: II] Point 2: Understanding that our value to God comes from Christ alone, we should adjust our attitudes to value the things of the world less and the things of Christ more. We should see our worldly blessings as tools to serve Christ, not as inducements to wallow in worldly pleasure. We should aspire to give all of ourselves to Christ and his work, even if it means sacrifice and suffering.

[Slide 39: III] Point 3: If we value Christ and his gift of righteousness correctly, we will be transformed by grace progressively over our lifetimes to better live up to this righteousness. This should be our goal.

[Slide 40: IV] Point 4: We should accept these truths because we have a right vision of what it is all about: not eighty years on earth! but eternity with God and Christ's return to judge, bless, and resurrect/glorify.

Application

1. **[Slide 41: Application 1-3]** Allow the theology of this chapter to change the way you think, to renew your mind so you will be transformed by grace. Pray about, think about, and meditate on the true source of your righteousness, of your value to God. Allow your attitude about what gives you value to change.
2. Assess your goals and what you live for. None of us are at the Paul level yet, but we can check our sense of purpose and seek to make Christ and his work greater priorities in our lives.
3. Assess your willingness to sacrifice and suffer for the gospel of Christ. 2 Timothy 3:12!
4. **[Slide 42: Application 4]** Cooperate in your progressive sanctification, your spiritual growth: press on by praying, studying the Bible, worshipping, participating in biblical community, serving on the ministry team, sharing your faith with others, adopting biblical attitudes, and trying to be obedient.
5. **[Slide 43: Application 5-6]** Keep your eyes on Christ and heaven as the right perspective for this life.
6. Beware of teachers today who are like Paul's opponents in Philippians.
 - † Legalists who insist on following the Mosaic Law or their own man-made rules in order to be righteous or accepted by God;
 - † Prosperity doctrine churches that teach God's will for Christians is worldly blessing;
 - † Churches that teach "name it and claim it" and if you don't get it, it is because of your lack of faith or lack of righteousness.
7. **[Slide 44: Application 7]** Understand where the deliverance is! Paul had been delivered from sin, death, Satan... he knew he was going to be resurrected and spend eternity with Christ. He had been delivered, no matter how much he was suffering in this life. Even when you are suffering or struggling, rejoice even amidst the adversity, for God remains sovereign and the gospel continues... In 1:13 Paul said that his arrest had led to the whole guard hearing the gospel, and in 4:22 he said *All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household...!* Despite his confinement, Paul still reached into the palace and led people to Christ! God will use your times of struggle for good purposes also. Praise the Lord! **[Slide 45: Title only] Let's Pray...**