

<b>Series:</b> The Fellowship of the Gospel	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Philippians 3:1-14</i>	<b>Title:</b> Nothing to Prove	<b>Date:</b> 11.01.2020
<b>Website Writeup:</b> Paul gets intense, but what is so important? As we study this vital passage, we'll see, there's no compromise in the gospel message & it must be guarded in its purity.			

We find ourselves in **Philippians 3:1-14** today if you want to follow along. It says...  
*Further, my brothers & sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup>Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. <sup>3</sup>For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh - <sup>4</sup>though I myself have reasons for such confidence.*

*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

*<sup>7</sup>But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ - yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

*<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brothers & sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind & straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Kim & I once took a cruise where I conquered one of my greatest fears - I sang in front of 300 people. We did a duet of 'You're The One That I Want' by Olivia Newton John & John Travolta in *Grease*. I tried to sing the chorus, but the words came up so fast I couldn't follow & ended up singing one of her lines - "I need a man that can satisfy me!" Some sixty year old balding man yelled, "I'll satisfy you baby!" I flashed my wedding ring. That gave me a newfound appreciation for singers who put together all the elements of song into a package to sound good! It's beyond having a good voice, there've been great singers like Tom Waits who have raspy harsh voices. There are more components than you'd realize, which for a good singer, that all becomes muscle memory.

What makes a good artist is more than talent. In painting, there are many components to a great work, form, structure, line, composition, color theory, application, materials, mediums, chiaroscuro & drawing. Breaking patterns, doing something unique, a great artist has the ability to make their work stand out, which often involves shock value, because it works.

Vincent Van Gogh was a great artist. Here's one of his paintings [The Postman]. Just a postal worker, but Van Gogh makes him look like royalty - he made the ordinary look extraordinary. He was able to put the intellectual kibbles & bits into a work, making it beautiful. Taking all the non-negotiable mechanics of art, making them bleed heart & soul. Mediocre painters can't marry the mind & heart - they get stuck in the mind & mechanics of painting & the work, although well crafted, looks lifeless.

We can draw a comparison between art & the spiritual life. We have the nuts & bolts of spiritual life - theology, doctrine, salvation, grace, faith, leadership, baptism, body life, a quiet time, prayer, service, a kingdom theology, missiology, etc. The nitty gritty's of faith to be practiced in relationship with Jesus in a vibrant & life-changing interaction. But when focus comes off Jesus, we get bogged down with details & elevate the mechanics of spiritual life to levels unhealthy. That's when we begin to live in self-righteousness, legalistic & serve a false gospel.

Paul was the Leonardo DaVinci of vibrant faith, continually applying the basics, never losing sight of freedom in Christ. He could plug in all the details while keeping focus on Jesus. The details aren't bad, they're important practices & one of those is our understanding of *Christ-righteousness*, meaning *we have nothing to prove to God*. But to grasp it, we have to understand what it is & how we get it. Let's break this down...

Paul says, "*Further, my brothers & sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.*" Notice the word *again*. He's writing things he's said before, because they're vitally important. We have only 13 letters from Paul. He must have written more, but in all, he's repetitive. He's saying, "*I want to remind you again of what's central to your spiritual life in Christ, going over this again & again will guard you from wrong teaching & thoughts which aren't actually of Christ.*"

He then proceeds with a scathing attack on a dangerous group, "*Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.*" Imagine being the recipient of this letter, how crass it may sound in its attack against this group. Let's understand the level of intensity Paul uses in this short communiqué. He's attacking Judaizers - Jewish background believers who'd follow Paul around, swooping in after he had set up a church, stepping in, maybe with good intention, to bring the Philippians' into a clear understanding of what what they thought it meant to follow Jesus *correctly*. They added extra requirements to salvation, undermining what Paul's already preached & by doing so, they dismantled the gospel making it a falsehood. Tozer (in *'Pursuit of God'*) called it the *'God-and'* syndrome.

They may've said, *"You wanna follow Jesus, there's more to do. You gotta become Jewish & be circumcised."* Speaking from a Jewish background, they didn't buy into the simple gospel of grace. They believed Christians had to adhere, at least in part, to the ceremonial law in order to be saved. **And Paul calls them dogs, men who do evil, mutilators of the flesh, even though they may've been well intentioned religious faithful people.** To call a Jew a dog was extremely offensive, revealing that to Paul this is a big deal since they're undermining truth & faith. Referring to them as *'those men who do evil'*, even though they may've thought they were in the right, he attacks that which they put their identity in - circumcision, an ancient physical sign they belong to God. Paul claims it's only self-mutilation, at one point it may've had value, but in Christ it wasn't a requirement for salvation. Salvation's by grace through faith alone - simply profess with your mouth & believe in your heart Jesus is Lord, that's it. Profane & harsh words since, good intention or not, they *were* leading people astray. Leaders like Paul aren't concerned about personal feelings & offending sensibilities when it comes to the integrity of the Gospel - God's truth overrides our personal affinities. If you're leading people astray by false teaching, you need to be confronted.

So, for Paul this is serious. But, couldn't he have just written that group directly saying, *"Look guys, you are just not getting it,"* explain the situation, had a discussion, while listening to their concerns? No, he couldn't because remember, he's addressed this before & has seen the damage it's caused. At certain times making a stand on Gospel truth becomes paramount. Typically, those advocating falsehood can't be reasoned with, the must simply be refuted. It's not a discussion, this is foundational to the gospel & is a matter of life, death & the Glory of Christ. Paul, like Jesus, seems to only attack the pious religious legalist. Those putting extra requirements on the shoulders of sincere repentant people, perverting the gospel, making it a false gospel of self-effort.

Paul reacts harshly because you can't create a beautiful painting using a Volkswagen as a brush, it's non-negotiable. Likewise, you can't pollute the Gospel by saying God's grace isn't enough for salvation. It's central, basic & unmovable in its importance to faith, since our grasp of righteousness dictates how we relate to Christ & others. We face this today in a new progressive gospel being preached now, putting extra requirements on others to be considered 'saved'. Jesus is moved off center, with certain issues & actions taking his place of priority. If you don't agree, ascribe, or become an activist for their cause in the way they deem correct, you're suspect or worse, that's not the gospel.

Paul says it's we who are the circumcised, worship by the Spirit, glory in Christ & put no confidence in the flesh, not them - he's drawing lines, as he should. The Flesh can be translated as *'human effort'* seen in two extremes, the flesh side (licentiousness) & the self-righteous side (law/legalism). Both revealed in Galatians 5:6, *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision (law/legalism) nor un-circumcision (licentiousness) has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."* Remember, the Law's good & our standard of life, but when it becomes your measuring rod of getting right with God, you've lost the gospel.

It's easy to see the need for Christ for those lost in sin. It's harder to see the religious person doing their duty as needing Christ. There are those who pride themselves on what they do *for* Christ, who accepted Jesus early, grew up in church, attended Christian school, never smoked, gotten drunk, and were even virgins when they got married! Imagine! They look so religious, so good. Others of us lived openly in sin, but after coming to Christ our lives changed & we've walked in Jesus ever since, also looking very religious.

It'd be easy if Paul were shouting at all those blatant sinners. He's not. He's talking to Judaizers. Well-intentioned religious people, trying to let others know how to *really* please God through self-effort/righteousness. But no one at Six:Eight's saying, "*Hey, gotta follow the ceremonial law, get circumcised.*" However, sometimes we do set up a whole new set of ceremonial laws to follow. A behavioral culture with rules to get in... don't smoke, be a drunkard, or look at porn, stay chaste, go to church, study your Bible, pray, join a Community Group, memorize Scripture, witness to people...etc.

Like bad artists, we take the good mechanics & make them so important *they* replace Jesus & become our self-righteousness. *But Paul says, "4though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more..."* As if to say, "You think you're a good guy? I'm more religious than all of you!" 'Circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day' - even his parents were devout & followed the rules for him. 'Of the people of Israel' - not a convert, or son of a convert, but 100% Jewish. 'Of the Tribe of Benjamin' - one of two which stayed faithful while 10 other apostate tribes fell away. 'A Hebrew of Hebrews' - he spoke the language & didn't pollute himself in syncretism with Greek thought & life. 'A Pharisee' - there were only about 6000 Pharisees at any one time, Paul's one of them knowing the law inside & out. Devoted & set apart to guard God's Law. 'Persecuting the Church' - his zeal for Judaism led him to persecute the church, watching & approving Christians put to death before his conversion. If any one thinks they have reason to find confidence in the flesh, they've got nothing on Paul! He's pure bred, a Jew of Jews, even things outside of his control were done correctly for him!

But in Jesus, what's all that worth? You thought he was intense when he spoke about dogs & mutilators of the flesh, listen to what he says next, "*7But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ*" The word for 'garbage' means human excrement! Now I'm excited! Paul not only takes all the important details of faith & puts them into a coherent life of devotion, but has shock value! A true artist! All his self-righteousness is good enough only to be flushed. Now I'm listening Paul! All the adolescent boys of Philippi perked up & snickered, waiting to hear what he said next when this was read. Why is this issue so important that he'd be so shocking in this letter? You can hear the elders of the Philippian church, "*I'm not sure we can read this to the congregation, it's too vulgar.*"

Then he reveals the elemental issue he thinks is so important to life in Christ. *“I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ - yes, to know the power of his resurrection & participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”*

Righteousness, the elemental issue, what is it & how do you get it? It's defined as a right relationship with God. We know there's nothing we can do to gain righteousness before God. Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”* That's been pounded into our Christian brains, but how well do we know & live it? Latching on to the word *saved* we relegate the Gospel to only being important at the point of conversion. But grace has daily relevance, it's not only what *justifies*, but *sanctifies*, or transforms us & it's also accepted by faith every day.

We think we have it all together, even believing we're better than blatantly licentious people, but we need Jesus as much as anyone every day. Nothing we can do can ever make us right with Christ. Righteousness is credited/imputed to us. We often think about salvation as 'Jesus forgave me of my sin', but it's more. He didn't just zero out our account by paying our debt & now we have to maintain a good record in order to not to go into debt again. Rather, He filled our account with all the riches of the kingdom to be drawn upon daily without end! Righteousness & grace extend past just initial forgiveness of sin, and onto our being heirs to all of God's riches!

John Wesley, author of many old hymns, was a pastor & missionary who came from England to America, where he started a ministry to native Americans in Georgia. But, for certain reasons, John had to return to England. He considered himself a good Christian doing all the right things, a pastor educated in the Scriptures. But, something strange happened to him returning on the ship. As they traveled a storm brewed, the ship tossed violently, John was terrified. He noticed some Moravian Christians in peaceful prayer on the ship. How'd they find peace in the face of imminent death?

When he returned to England he wrote, *“I went to America to convert the Indians; But O! Who shall convert me? Who, what is he that shall deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say to die is gain...I show my faith by my works by staking my all upon it...O who will deliver me from this fear of death?”* He was beginning to understand *imputed righteousness*, the gospel was becoming clear! He realized, his religion's based on works, intellect, what *he* could do to reach God. A personal religion serving to build him up, but it's of no use in a time of need. A worthless, legalistic religion, with no power.

Upon reaching England, he met a Moravian named Peter Bohler who instructed him on Salvation by faith alone. John began to read Luther's commentary on Galatians. He was

then invited to a Moravian gathering & wrote of his experience, *“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that he’d taken away my sins, even mine & saved me from the law of sin & death.”* This was John’s conversion, a man who’d already given his life to the work of God as missionary & pastor, had now actually found Jesus!

Francis Schaeffer referred to living under Christ’s righteousness as *Active Passivity*. Faith in nothing but Christ alone, resting in the assurance of God’s grace, not only to save, but also transform. As Paul said elsewhere, this brings freedom, *“It’s for freedom you’ve been set free,”* he said. Then asked, *“Why put yourself under bondage again?”* Exactly what Judaizers were suggesting, but the simple gospel’s enough for them & us!

Francis Schaeffer, during a difficult time in life, discovered what he called *the present [daily] value of the Blood of Christ*. Rose Marie Miller, in here book, *From Fear to Freedom*, said, *“We need to be constantly surprised by grace. There are those that marvel at the liberation which comes when you no longer think of the Gospel as a message relevant only to non-Christians.”* When Kim & I did our duet, I knew the lyrics, but I couldn’t feel the music. Have you ever felt you know the Gospel lyrics, but can’t feel, or put it to music? You mouth the words, but can’t put it together into a beautiful work of art?

Christ paints a beautiful picture with everyone who comes to him, like Van Gogh, He elevates us to royal status. He puts us in right relationship with the Father through his work on the Cross. Faith starts with the point of recognition & acceptance of total human weakness & our need of repentance. But, sadly, many of us live a life of what Rose Marie Miller calls *Presumptive Confidence* in our works before God. A.W. Tozer calls it *The Self-Life*. The Self-Life or Presumptive Confidence, relies on moral abilities, religious accomplishments & visible securities - it needs positive circumstances to survive. It can’t embrace the suffering promised in following Jesus. Wesley’s presumptive confidence failed him on that ship! But true faith in Christ can weather any storm, any criticism, false teaching, depressive incident, or danger & leave you looking into the face of Jesus at peace.

Augustine said, *“Too late I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient & ever new! Too late I loved you! And, behold, you were within me, and I out[side] of myself...there I searched for you.* We fight a battle against our flesh until Jesus comes back. So, cheer up, you’re worse than you think! We’re no better than the licentious un-circumcised person in our self-righteous law abiding flesh. **But...we have nothing to prove! His righteousness has been credited to us. Through Him we’re rightly related to God once more. So, walk by the Spirit, with Jesus as our righteousness. Pursue Christ well, use all the tools of the faith maturely, not trusting them for righteousness, but paint a portrait of a life given over to Jesus in all ways! Don’t be taken away by a false progressive gospel, hold firmly to the message of Christ. Don’t just memorize the words, allow the**

music of grace to flow through you! Then you'll be in step with the Spirit & a great witness for God's glory & mission! As Paul said, forget what's behind, strain toward what's ahead, press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called you heavenward in Christ Jesus! Allow Jesus to use the mechanics of the faith to paint a masterpiece out of your life!