

The Heart of Christianity

The Biblical Gospel and the Future of the Church

6 The Heart of the Biblical Gospel

February 10, 2019

Philippians 3:1-12

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

8 More 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,

9 and 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,

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not 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.

To the Glory of God

Now when anyone begins Chapter 3 of **Philippians**, they immediately run into two great Obstacles that stood in the way of Paul being the kind of Christian that he called us to be back in Chapter 2. And these are the *same* two Obstacles that stood in the way of Paul being the kind of person God would “accept”. And even though we are not exactly like Paul, the same Obstacles stand between us and God, and between us and the Christian life.

And the *first* Obstacle is that, on the one hand, Paul *knows* he is religiously *superior* to all of his opponents, who are boasting in their own religious accomplishments. When you read Paul’s auto-biography (verses 4-6), it is hard not to be impressed. And based on that, it was much harder for Paul to *not* “**have confidence in the flesh**” than, say, me. Very few human beings have ever accomplished the things that Paul had done, even *before* he was saved.

So just how will this amazing Apostle ever count these opponents as being “**more important than himself?**” In **Philippians 2:3**, God the Holy Spirit “moved Paul along” to write:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

... and if you are dealing with people, who are obviously *more* gifted than you are, this Command might be easy. But Paul’s opponents, the people who were boasting against him and who were actually *initiating* his Persecution, were, by every measurement, *less* godly, and *less* spiritual, and *less* used by God than Paul was. *Much* less. So, how does Paul “practice what he preaches” here?

But the *second* Obstacle is that, on the other hand, Paul also very well knows that his “religious superiority” can *never* be “good enough” to make him *acceptable to God*. So, *paradoxically*, in one sense, Paul seems to be *too* “religiously superior” to be a humble Christian, while in *another* sense, he is not nearly religiously *good enough* to be “approved by God”.

And the point of all this is that as we continue to study this Issue, we will see that the Triumph over both Obstacles is predicated on two Issues in Paul’s own life:

1. Paul considers all of his "religious superiority", the level of his own, personal, intrinsic, *righteousness*, as *less than worthless*. He calls it, in the Greek, "*skubalon*", which can be *best* understood in English as a "*rotten menstruous cloth*".
2. Therefore, Paul knew that his Acceptance with God was *not* based on his own, personal, intrinsic righteousness, but on the *imputed* Righteousness of Jesus Christ that Paul has obtained "by faith alone".

In other words, the "Triumph" that leads to both Paul's Acceptance with God *and* his ability to live the Christian life was:

The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone

... which I am suggesting to you is the very *Heart* of Biblical Christianity and, therefore, is the very "Heart", or the "Core", or the "Center" of the Biblical Gospel.

Now first of all, we need to understand just what we are talking about. The word "Justification" is *not* about being "forgiven". This has nothing to do with having all our sins washed away. And that is why the "summary statement" that so many people use today, that a sinner needs to "*accept Jesus into his heart*", is so woefully *inadequate* to describe what a sinner actually *needs* in order to go to Heaven.

The term "Justification" is about us being "accepted" in God's Sight. It has to do with a sinner being in "Right Standing" with God, about that person being "Just". So, even though "being forgiven" is *part* of being in "Right Standing" with God, the main Issue of Justification is "Righteousness".

So, the Issue that Paul deals with here in **Philippians 3** is how are sinners "made righteous" before God? You see, in order for *anyone* to be "accepted by God" so he may enter into Heaven, that person must become "*just as Righteous as God Himself is Righteous*". And even though the Bible is crystal clear about this, throughout the entire existence of the Church, there have been at least three different views that the "visible church" on the earth has *formally* and *officially* taught about how lost sinners are made Righteous before God:

1. By and through good/religious works.

2. By those works "empowered by Grace/Faith".
3. By Faith ALONE.

Now the first view said that each individual believer has to develop his *own, personal, intrinsic* righteousness by "doing good/religious works". And it is through the *accumulation* of those works, over that person's entire lifetime, that allows him to become Righteous and qualifies him for Heaven. And even though many people, *instinctively*, believe this, even today, this view offers no provision for those who didn't quite accomplish sinless perfection. So, in this case, the individual believer must "do something" to become accepted by God. So, in effect, this Teaching says that the individual has to *earn his own Righteousness*.

The *second* view was a *modification* of the first, whereby the Faith that a person had combined with the Grace that God gave *empowered* people who taught this said that obtaining Righteousness was absolutely "*by Grace*" and "*through Faith*", they *also* said that this Grace and Faith *must* be accompanied by our works. So, even though those works were "empowered" by Grace and Faith, the individual still had to "do" those good/religious works, and, therefore, he still had to *earn* his Righteousness.

Now most people don't "do good works" all the time. And so, a Doctrine had to be *fabricated* whereby those who had not fully become "Righteous" went to a place called "Purgatory" after death, where their own personal righteousness was purified over a long, extended period of time. And after that "purification process", they could then enter into Heaven. This view is the official position of the Roman Church to this day.

The *third* Teaching said that whatever works we do simply will *never* be "good enough" to cause our own, personal, intrinsic, Righteousness to reach the level of perfection. And so, sinners need an *external* Righteousness, *the Righteousness of Jesus Christ*. And this view goes on to say that we obtain that Righteousness *by Faith alone*, absent *any and all* good works. This Issue was the "Material Cause" of the Protestant Reformation, and is one of several reasons that Protestants and Catholics are divided to this day.

Now the *distinction* between #1 & #3 is the phrase "*Faith alone*". And the *distinction* between #2 and #3 is the word "*Alone*", which in the

Latin is "*Sola*". So, the Material Cause of the Protestant Reformation was the concept of "*Sola Fide*" developed by the Reformers of the 16th Century in Latin, which means that we believe and teach that:

"Sinners are made Righteous through the *imputed* Righteousness of Jesus Christ, and that Righteousness is obtained by Faith *alone* and *not* through our own works."

Now this is not "multiple choice" here. Only *one* of these views is what the Bible actually says, and the other two are *false* Teachings that will *doom* the sinner by *preventing* him from believing the Truth. So, we're not talking about some game. We're talking about what is *the* single most important Issue, "*how sinners are made acceptable in God's Sight*". So, please allow me to underline just *how* serious and *how* important and *how* vital this one single Doctrine is to the Gospel, to Christianity, and to the Future of the Church. If you *minimize* or *remove* or *hide* or *take away* or *ignore* or *marginalize* or *replace* this one single biblical Truth, you no longer *have* "Christianity", you no longer *have* "the Gospel", you no longer *have* "the Church", and, therefore, you no longer *have* "Salvation".

For example, without the leadership of the Church preaching and teaching "*Justification by Faith Alone*" (*Sola Fide*), all you have left is another Man-made religion that *removes* both the Power and the Results of the shed Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And without hearing and understanding and believing that lost people are "*made Righteous*" *by Faith alone, and not through human effort or works*", *nobody* is saved, and *nobody* goes to Heaven. So, *whatever else* we do as a Church, we must make sure that *everyone*, who lays claim to be a Christian and who is a member of *this* Church, *understands and believes* the Doctrine of "*Justification by Faith Alone*".

Let me say this another way, if a person, *anyone*, knows and understands and believes and confesses *everything* that the Bible says about "Who Jesus is" and "What Jesus did", and yet, they either don't *know* or don't *believe* in "*Justification by Faith Alone*", they will die in their sins and spend all of Eternity in a lake of fire. So, a person can quote the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds all day long, and understand what they mean. We can recite the "Lord's Prayer" twelve times every day. We can believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, and that He lived a sinless Life, and that He died a "vicarious Death", and that He rose

again the third day. But even after believing and trusting all of that, if we do not comprehend and believe and trust that the "Righteousness", that allows sinners the privilege of going to Heaven, is *not* our own, but it is the very spotless Righteousness of Jesus Christ, and that we receive that Righteousness *not* by attending the Mass, and *not* by partaking of the Sacraments, and *not* by going to Confession, and *not* by participating in the Rite of Penance, and *not* by doing good and kind and noble Works in the Community, but sinners receive the Righteousness of Jesus Christ by "*Faith Alone*". If we don't believe that, we have *not* heard or trusted in the Biblical Gospel. And if we have not heard or trusted the Biblical Gospel, we're *not* saved, and we're *not* going to Heaven. *That is what I mean when I say, "The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone is the very Heart of the Biblical Gospel"*.

And that means that any religious organization or group or "church" that either doesn't *know* or that doesn't *believe*, or even that categorically *disbelieves* in the *Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone*", is *not* a "Christian" group/organization/church. They are an "apostate religious group that preaches and teaches a false gospel", and they have "separated themselves from the Authority of Scripture".

Now what I just said is either true or it isn't. And if it is *not* true, then I am a "false Teacher". And, if I don't recant and repent, I should be *removed* from being the Pastor of this Church. But if what I just said *is* true, then by all means, we need to find out what the Bible says about this Doctrine. Basically, this Doctrine says six things:

1. Each human being has their *own, personal, intrinsic* "righteousness".
2. Jesus Christ developed *His Own Personal* Righteousness by living a sinless Life for 33-1/2 years before He was crucified.
3. The Requirement for anyone to go to Heaven is they must not only be "forgiven", but they also need to be "just as Righteous as God Himself is Righteous".
4. I either have to develop *my own personal intrinsic* righteousness to be like God's, or I must, somehow, get Jesus' Righteousness.
5. At the moment I have repented and put all my trust in Jesus and in His finished Work, God the Father takes the Righteousness of Jesus Christ and *credits* me with it.

6. The "Agency" by which the spotless Righteousness of Jesus is credited/imputed to me is: "*Faith-alone*".

Now, all this really matters on an *eternal* level. So, this is *not* about being an "academic" or an "intellectual". This is *not* an academic discussion about peripheral things that don't really matter. This has to do with worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth, and not being deceived by false and man-made doctrines.

But knowing and believing the *Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone* also has very basic and down-to-earth ramifications for our every-day lives. And it also carries with it a dire Warning. Because, since it is true that the "agency" or the "means" by which I am "counted Righteous in Christ" is "*Faith Alone*", *any* effort, on my part, to try to *earn* that Righteousness, any effort to *develop* that Righteousness by something (anything) I do (even "religious" efforts), or any act on my part to seek to *deserve* that Righteousness is not merely "wrong", but is actually "Evil". Because that effort (even an effort made with the *best* and most *sincere* of reasons) is an *affront* and an *insult* to the finished Work of Jesus Christ.

So, let's begin to grasp the importance of this by reading the verses that give us the Obstacles:

Philippians 3:1-8

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

8 More 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,

Now, *on the one hand*, Paul knows that his zeal and his “Law-keeping” excel *way beyond* all his opponents who are boasting in their achievements. He even called these people “**dogs**” and “**evil workers**”, and said they had a “**false circumcision**” in verse 2. So, look again at verse 4:

although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

... and then Paul goes about to describe all of his *religious* achievements that tempted him to take confidence in his flesh in verses 5&6. But look closely at the *last* half of verse 6:

...as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

So, the *first* Obstacle in Paul's life that had to be overcome was how he was going to count these people who had been deceived by a false gospel “*more important than himself*” and serve them? That's the *first* Obstacle. But the other is almost the complete opposite. Look again at verses 7&8:

Philippians 3:7&8

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

8 More 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,

Now look what he does. The Apostle takes all his very real effort at “Law-keeping” in verse 6, where he says, “**as to the righteousness which is in the Law, [I was] found blameless**”, and he completely *discounts* it and calls it “**rubbish**” (*Gr. skubalon*)! So, what does that mean?

Is Paul saying that *trying* to obey God's Law is a *rotten menstruous cloth*? Is Paul *condemning* “Obedience”? And, if so, is the Apostle

teaching here that it is "better" to *disobey* God than it is to try to *obey* Him? If his effort to obey God's Law is "*rubbish*", why should anyone seek to obey anything God said?

Now first of all, we need to acknowledge that keeping God's Commandments (Law) takes effort. We have to put forth effort to obey God. *Nobody* accidentally "trips and falls" into Obedience. We can *believe* what God says all day long, and we can believe it is *true*, but if we don't actually "do" what God says, we could hardly convince God that we take Him seriously. In fact, Jesus said in **John 14:15** that our Obedience to what God has said is really the only way we can prove our love for Him.

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

John 14:21, 23b, & 24

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.

... so, I would suggest that God puts a rather high premium on us *obeying* what He has said.

But the only reason any of us actually obeys God is because we consciously put our minds to obey. And *part* of us obeying God is that we also consciously put forth effort **NOT** to *disobey*. And we are told, clearly and repeatedly, throughout the Bible, that the effort we put forth to obey is "good", and "right", and "correct". And that effort pleases God. Us, putting forth an effort to obey shows that we *value* what God has said, that we put a *premium* on what God has spoken, and that we look at God's Commandments as worthy of *whatever* effort we have to put forth to obey them.

And in addition to all that, God also condemns *disobedience*. God *despises* rebellion to what He says. And He will judge those who do *not* value what He has said enough to actually put forth an effort to obey. So, the effort to obey is something that all godly people should do.

Okay, but if all that is true, then why in the world is Paul *condemning* all his effort at keeping God's Law? And as we are trying

to figure *that* out, we need to remember that Paul is *not* talking about his "Sin" here. It isn't Paul's effort at "rebellious against God" that receives this derogatory condemnation. Paul was *not* putting forth all this effort so he could *run away* from God or *hide* from God or disobey Him. No, Paul was trying as hard as any human could try to run *toward* God, to *obey* God, even when that meant he was killing and imprisoning those he saw as "polluting" the Truth (Christians).

And now that he is truly saved, Paul is calling "all those efforts at obeying God's Law" *rubbish!* Which means it is about the worst thing in the world. Because we need to remember that there is *nothing* dirtier, *nothing* more filthy, *nothing* more despised, *nothing* considered to be worthless and useless, more than "skubalon". You simply can't call *anything* a worse name than what Paul calls "all his effort to obey God's Law" here. So, what is going on here?

The answer lies in what I call, "*The Heart of the Biblical Gospel*". And not understanding this is what fuels the confusion, in our day, over the Issue of "*What relationship does our Obedience to God's Law have to our Salvation?*" And from so many people, either not *correctly* or not fully *understanding* the "Heart of the Gospel", comes all sorts of other heresies like:

- ✓ Antinomianism
- ✓ Legalism
- ✓ The relentless attacks against Grace

... and this is *why* we need to correctly and fully understand this "Heart of the Gospel", so we can *defend* Biblical Christianity against all of the many "perversions" that this ignorance causes. And I think one of the best places to defend the Truth is right here in **Philippians 3**.

So, what becomes of Paul's "Acceptance" with God? First, God gave His "Holy Laws" to Man. And then God said:

Leviticus 18:5

So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord.

Now this Statement by God may appear to us to be pretty cut and dried, but there were two different times that God the Spirit gave the

Apostle the correct and full *interpretation* of what God meant here in **Leviticus 18**. The first was in **Romans 10:5**, where Paul said:

Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.

... and the second was in **Galatians 3:12b**:

... **the [Old Covenant] Law is not of faith; on the contrary, [God spoke to Moses in Leviticus 18]"HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."**

So, what Paul is teaching is that what Moses meant in **Leviticus 18**, was that anyone, who tries to attain the perfect Standard of Righteousness by and through keeping God's Law (that He gave to Moses), must also absorb the Penalty that God gave Moses when he *fails* to keep God's Law *perfectly*! And since no human being can keep God's Law perfectly, all the Law does for us is to *condemn* us! And this is made clear when Paul said:

Philippians 3:7&8

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More 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,

In other words Paul is saying, "*All my efforts to live by God's Law, and they were my very best efforts, are completely useless as it relates to me winning Acceptance with God*" And there are two reasons Paul's efforts to obey God's Law are *useless* to win Acceptance with God:

1. If you going to earn Righteousness (Acceptance with God), you have to obey God's Law *perfectly and continually*, in thought, word, and deed, 24 hours every day and 7 days every week.
2. Nobody can do that.

So, it isn't an Issue of just "trying harder" or of "putting forth more effort", because Paul excelled at all this. But we must agree that human beings simply do not have the capacity to obey God's Law

perfectly and continuously, in thought, word, and deed, 24/7. We fail every single time. And the result of failing to obey perfectly is that the Divine Condemnation that the Law promises to those who do *not* keep the Law perfectly falls on us.

So, while it is true that there is absolutely *nothing* wrong with God's Law, (Paul said God's Law was, "**Holy**", "**Righteous**", and "**Good**", **Romans 7:12**). It is *equally* true that there *is* something *radically* wrong with fallen Man:

Romans 7:18a

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh...

... and so, the Apostle draws a conclusion to this dilemma:

Romans 7:13

Therefore, did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

In other words, it isn't God's Law, or even the fact that God gave His Law to Man, that is the problem. No, the problem is, that, in our *fallen condition*, no human being has the capacity to keep God's Law *perfectly*. So, the problem is *us*, and the failure to obey is called "Sin".

So, on the one hand, Paul has declared (correctly) that he is religiously *superior* to all the people he is supposed to humbly serve. But on the other hand, he acknowledges that this "superiority" is absolutely *worthless* with God. But, then, how will Paul be accepted with God? And how will he be able to serve his enemies with fearlessness and love? We find his answer in verses 8 and 9:

Philippians 3:8&9

More 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, and 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,

Now this Statement is utterly amazing! And it is also utterly *unique* from what every other religion and philosophy of Man teaches. And that is why this Statement is the very "Heart of the Biblical Gospel". Because without this one, single, Statement, we do not *have* Christianity. All that we have in Jesus Christ flows out from this single Statement. I cannot emphasize the importance of this Statement enough.

But before I try to give some explanation of this amazing Statement, let me put my Sermon in the context of my wider concern about the "*Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone*" in the last 150 years or so. In America, the debate about "Justification" has died down a great deal in the last two or three decades. And that *might* mean that the historic Reformation Teaching about Justification has *won the day* and has been *solidified*. And that would be a good thing. But it *also* might mean that the combatants in this Doctrinal discussion have simply grown weary, and have decided that ***it really doesn't matter what people believe about this Issue***. And that would be terrible. And sadly, I think *that* is what has happened.

But, I side with the great Puritan, John Owen, who said, that in the history of the church, there are "*innumerable subterfuges*" of the *Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone*, and in every generation there will be "*new confusions*" (false teachings) to look out for. So, please allow me to just mention five that have marked the last few decades:

1. The lines between Biblical Christianity and Roman Catholic Teachings have become blurred or non-existent.
2. The attack has been made that the "*Doctrine of the Imputation of Christ's Obedience*" is not really taught in the New Testament.
3. The so-called "*New Perspectives on Paul*", especially from scholars like N. T. Wright, have redrawn the map of New Testament Theology in such a way that confusion is widespread as to just what "Justification" actually is and how it relates to other Issues like the "Gospel", "Conversion", and "Final Judgment".
4. Others have so merged "Faith" and its "Fruits" that the term "*by Faith Alone*" has ceased to provide a foundation for Holiness, but is now virtually *identical* with it.
5. Some have so changed the ordinary meaning of the word "*Righteousness*" that the "*Act of Justification*" no longer refers to

anyone's "*right belief*" or "*right action*", but only to a courtroom "verdict of Acquittal".¹

Now there is a lot I could say. But let's start with the way Paul uses the word "***Righteousness***" in verse 6. Consider again verses 5&6:

Philippians 3:5&6

circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Here Paul uses three comparisons:

- **As to "the Law"**, [I was] a "**Pharisee**" (I was part of the group that strove harder than anyone else to keep the Law).
- **As to "zeal"**, [I was] a **persecutor of the church** (I could not have demonstrated any more zeal).
- **As to "Righteousness which is in the Law"**, [I was] **found blameless** (I kept God's Law better than almost anyone else).

... so, the most *natural* meaning is:

Paul's *Zeal* is expressed in Persecution,
and his *Righteousness* is expressed in blameless Behavior.

And that means that the word "***Righteousness***", as used here by Paul, should be understood using its very normal and usual meaning. It means: *the way one behaves when one behaves in accord with some external Standard*. And so, Paul's "*Righteousness*" is him "*behaving rightly*" according to God's Law.

Then, in verse 8, he says (amazingly) that he counts this "*Righteousness*", his own breathtaking, life-long testimony of "Law-keeping", as nothing but "***rubbish***". But verse 9 tell us why:

Paul's Goal is that he might have Righteousness from a Source
other than his own "moral doing".

¹ This view is gaining in popularity as entire denominations move further and further from Scripture.

Philippians 3:8&9

More 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, and 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,

So, Paul utterly *renounces* the “righteousness” (that he had earned through Law-keeping), and he turns to Christ as his *supreme* Treasure:

... I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...

... and in this turning *to* Christ and turning *away* from all reliance on his *own* righteous deeds, he experienced a “Union with Christ” that he never had through all his efforts at Obedience:

... so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him ...

But, amazingly, in this “Union with Christ”, Paul no longer has his former “righteousness”:

... not having a righteousness of my own derived from [obeying] *the* Law...

... and this is a clear allusion back to verse 6:

... as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless

... and over against this “righteousness” from his *own* Law-keeping, Paul now has:

... that [Righteousness] which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,

In other words, the “Righteousness” that gives us “Acceptance with God” is *not* our own, personal, intrinsic, “righteousness” brought about through our efforts at Obedience. It is the *perfect* “**Righteousness**”

which comes from God on the basis of faith.” And that means we are *given*, we are *granted*, or we are *credited* with this spotless Righteousness by virtue of our “Union with Christ”, and *not* through our effort at Law-keeping. Another way of saying this is:

We are made Righteous before God, by **BELIEVING** (Faith), not by “doing”.

... which is why Paul also wrote:

Romans 4:1-5

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture [Genesis 15:6] say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

Now think about the implications of this for a few minutes. One is that, even though many teach this today, this Righteousness in Christ from God is *not* a mere “verdict” from God, the Judge. It’s *not* the mere status of an “acquittal”. It’s the very *same* kind of “Righteousness” (Gr. *dikaiosune*) as in verse 6:

... as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

... that was Paul’s *own, intrinsic, personal* “righteousness” (*dikaiosune*) that he had developed through his efforts at keeping the Law. But now, in Christ, Paul has received the “Righteousness” (*dikaiosune*) of another! Now, remember, “Righteousness” meant: *someone’s behavior* back in verse 6. And that is the natural way to take it in verse 9.

In fact, it simply would not make good sense for him to say, “*not having a verdict of my own*”, or “*not having the status of acquittal of my own.*” A verdict of acquitted *would* absolutely “be his own”.

So, what Paul is saying is that the record of his own behavior is now utterly *worthless* as the Basis of him being “accepted” by God! Paul (and everyone else) needs the “Righteousness of someone else”. And that someone else is Jesus. And Paul goes on to teach that sinners receive that Righteousness **by FAITH ALONE!**

Now, as good as this is, we're not quite finished. Because there is one more thing, a very important *distinction*, that we need to understand about the "Righteousness" that Paul now has "by Faith in His Union with Jesus Christ". According to verse 9, the spotless Righteousness that Paul has received "by Faith alone" in his "Union" with Christ is *not* based on Paul's new, "Spirit-empowered" behavior. It is based solely on his *Faith*, his *Trust*, his *Confidence*, his *Believing* in Jesus Christ and in His finished Work. And that *distinction* makes *this* Righteousness *infinitely* better than any *partial* "righteousness" he might have had through his efforts to obey God's Law.

So, what we must understand, and what is *critical* to understanding the very *Heart of the Biblical Gospel*, is that Paul is *not replacing* the "righteousness" of his *old* "Law-keeping" with the "Righteousness" of *new* "Law-keeping". The "righteousness" that Paul developed by his own effort to keep God's Law *did not justify him before God; At all!* Rather, it *condemned* him. So, the "Righteousness that we receive by Faith in Jesus Christ" is *not* merely a *different* Righteousness or even a *better* one. No, it is the **ONLY Righteousness that allows Acceptance with God**. And there are at least three reasons for saying this.

1. Paul's language of "**being found in Him** [Jesus]" with this *new* Righteousness that is *not* his own puts the emphasis on "Union with Jesus Christ", and *not* on what Paul "did" to receive it. Paul is emphasizing that his "position in Christ", and the new Righteousness he has there, was definitely *not* obtained through the "imperfect behavior" he acknowledged in verse 12:

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect...

2. *The righteousness that Paul renounces as "my own" is not called "fleshly" or "legalistic" in verse 9.* That's not what he focuses on. He simply calls it "my own" and "from Law." And the term "*from Law*" (Gr. *ek nomou*) is used four times in Paul's writings (**Romans 4:14; Galatians 3:18, 21; Philippians 3:9**), and each time it is naturally translated as a simple reference to "*Law-keeping*" with no necessary self-reliant connotations. Paul is simply saying that one way to have "a" *righteousness* is to pursue it by Law-keeping,

that is, by having a behavior that measures up. That would be *one's own personal, intrinsic "righteousness"*, **even if it were done in reliance on God**, because it is *one's own behavior, not that of another*. Yet Paul is despairing of his own behavior as a *sufficient* righteousness to support God's irrevocable Acceptance.

3. *When Paul gets to verse 12, he shows that the way he thinks about his new Spirit-empowered behavior is that it is also imperfect, and still not the Basis of his Acceptance with God, but rather the fruit of it. He says:*

Not 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.

So, the link between verse 9 and 12 is that Christ's "making Paul his own", or "grasping" Paul or "seizing" Paul (Gr. *katelempthen hupo Christou*), is essentially the way we are "found in Christ." Christ *makes us his*. He *takes us*. *Seizes us*.

So the way Paul thinks about his pressing on in life, the living of his life of Christian obedience after his Acceptance by God, is not that this living is the Foundation of his Acceptance, but that Christ has made Paul His Own in such a way that Paul is now "found in Christ", and, as such, Paul already has a "Perfect Righteousness" that is not his own. And based on that already being true, Paul presses on to become "perfect" because "in Christ" he is already perfect.

... so, for these three reasons, I don't think Paul means in verse 9 that his *new* Righteousness in Christ is his own new "Spirit-enabled" behavior. So, now the most natural way to understand the "Righteousness that Paul has in Christ" is:

It is the *perfect Obedience of Christ* that is counted as Paul's Righteousness, because Paul is now united to Christ by Faith alone.

... and this is the *Doctrine of Imputation*. And the reason I think this is the most natural way to understand Paul here is not only because of the

contrast with his *own* obedience in verse 6, but also because of the links with Christ's perfect Obedience back in Philippians 2:8:

Philippians 2:8

Being found in appearance as a man, He [Jesus] humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is astonishing! Do you see what Paul does here in summing up the earthly life of Christ from Birth to Death? He sums it up as one great Act of unrelenting Obedience to God. Look at the first part of this verse again:

Being found in appearance as a man...

... that's referring to the *Birth* Christ, the beginning of Jesus' earthly Life...

... He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross

... this is 33-1/2 years of perfect Obedience summed up in the words:

“becoming obedient”

... and when did that perfect Obedience on earth end?

... to the point of death, even death on a cross

And this is *exactly* the way Paul was thinking when he wrote:

Romans 5:19

For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Because of Jesus' *perfect* Obedience, this “Birth to Death” Obedience, **many will be made righteous.** So, this is what Paul meant back in **Philippians 3:9**, when he said:

and 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,

So, verse 9 means: “That I may be found in Jesus *not* having a “righteousness of my own” that comes from my old effort at Law-keeping *obedience*, but a new and infinitely *superior* Righteousness, which is NOT my own, that comes through Faith in Christ, the very “Righteousness from God” that depends on Faith in the perfect Obedience of Jesus, that God counts as mine when I am in Union with Christ.”

But let’s go back now to Paul’s two Obstacles. The first Obstacle is that Paul knows he is religiously *superior* to all of his opponents who are boasting in their religious accomplishments. So how will he ever count them “more important than himself”? And the *second* Obstacle is that this religious superiority can never be good enough to make Paul acceptable to God. So paradoxically, in one sense, Paul was *too* religiously superior to be a Christian, and in another sense he is *not* nearly religiously *good enough* to be approved by God.

Paul’s answer to the *second* Obstacle, and it is the answer for all of us everywhere in the world in every culture, is that he turns away from all dependence on human deeds and away from all preference for human treasures above Christ. He turns to Christ and embraces Him alone as his supreme Treasure, *including his perfect Righteousness*. Paul said:

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord

... and that means that wicked rebels, being made *able and willing* (by what God alone did for them) to count Jesus Christ as our own supreme Treasure is what *“being made Righteous”* looks like! In other words, the Power of God, that unveils our eyes, and grants us the ability to behold the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ, and to *love* what we see, and to be *changed* into what we see, *is* what “being made Righteous” by *Faith Alone* in Christ *means*. And that is why Paul said:

and may be found in Him, [Union with Christ] 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,

Jesus, and the finished Work of Jesus, is the only Ground for our "Acceptance" with God. And that means that God is now 100% *for* Paul and 100% *for us*, *not* because of our righteous "Law-keeping", but because of Christ's perfect Obedience, including a sin-covering, Wrath-absorbing Death, that becomes ours BY FAITH ALONE!

And so, Paul's answer to the *first* Obstacle is that any pride that he might have, based on his own superiority over his adversaries, has been completely *shattered* by the Life and Death of Jesus. His so-called "righteousness" is not only utterly *worthless* in winning the Favor of God, it is also utterly *worthless* in making him more significant than others.

And this means that the beautiful *Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone* is what makes the fearless unity of Love among believers possible. Because it completely destroys all human pride. This Doctrine makes Humility both *possible* and *necessary*. And, in the process, it doesn't destroy *us*. Instead, it opens the door to Everlasting Joy:

The surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord

So, the *Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone* is the Basis for our full Acceptance with God, while also being the Basis for our progressive Sanctification, which will produce the humble and fearless unity of Love that the Bible describes. And that is why the re-discovery of this Doctrine back in the 16th Century is what ignited the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther made this Doctrine *central* in the great Awakening of the Reformation. William Wilberforce wrote only one book in his life, and said that this Doctrine was the backbone of all his reforms. Jonathan Edwards pointed to five sermons that God blessed in the First Great Awakening in America (1740s) and said this Doctrine was the one God chose to bless most powerfully. And I would add that wherever Roman Catholicism dominates, this is the Doctrine that will make the Issues clearest and cause the Biblical Gospel to shine most brightly to deliver entrapped souls to free them.

And this is the Doctrine that God sovereignly awakened me to in the early 2000's and it radically changed my life. And today, the *Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone* is *central* to all that I say or do. And it will be the Doctrine to light the way in the future, as God *continues* to

display His Grace and Mercy in saving unworthy sinners and building His Church.

So, let us study this great Truth, and let us preach it and teach it and publish it and shout it from the rooftops! And may God help us to make the *Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone*, which is the very Heart of the Biblical Gospel, the Foundation of our lives that will produce genuine Christians, who will all share this radical and fearless Unity of Love, to the Glory of God alone, so we can say with Paul:

Philippians 3:10-12

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not 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.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.