

What Really Matters (1)

Introduction

- A. **Philippians 2:19-3:1: As Paul writes about the loving concern of men like Timothy and Epaphroditus, we are reminded of what Christian fellowship is all about.** (Ex. Timothy, vs. 20; Epaphroditus, vss. 25 & 30). These men serve as examples to the Philippians of those who are truly following Christ by serving others.
- B. **The entire third chapter is Paul's presentation of *what really matters*, and we will treat it under that theme.** Written under the shadow of a low-lying and ominous cloud, from a dark, dismal cell, out of dreary and encumbering circumstances, the epistle resounds with a note of joy. If there is an interruption in that note, it serves only to make real Paul's ardent and unfaltering commitment to what really matters.
- C. **What really matters is knowing Christ, Paul says, "Watch out for those dogs":** watch out for anything or anyone that would divert you from this center.

#1: Not My Own Righteousness (Philippians 3:2-11)

- A. **It is not the external things that count, but what has happened and is happening inside.** Salvation is to (vs. 9). **Paul chose not to boast except about what Christ has done for him. Had he been prone to boast otherwise, he had enough external privileges to put out front in any comparison. He listed four special items for his external pedigree.**
 - **First, he was born of orthodox parents, circumcised, as the law required, on the eighth day.**
 - **Second, he was "of the people of Israel," more precisely "an Israelite by race,"** The word Paul uses *genos*, meaning "race, family or kind," so he was speaking of blood descent.
 - **Third, he was "of the tribe of Benjamin."** This was a matter of special pride. Priests had to prove their lineage, and the father of any girl who was to marry a priest had to prove his Israelite descent for three generations. Tribal identities had blurred, and many had become no more than ideal entities. But the tribe of Benjamin was one of the two southern tribes existing in actuality and remains true to the house of David and to Jerusalem as the center of the faith of Israel. **Possibly Paul's parents named him Saul after the first king of Israel, who was also of the tribe of Benjamin.**
 - **Fourth, Paul crowned all his enumeration of privileges of which to boast by claiming to be "a Hebrew of the Hebrews."** This had a very special

meaning. Jews were dispersed all over the world. Tens of thousands were in Rome. Alexandria had more than a million.

1. Most of these Jews stubbornly refused to be assimilated into the nations of their residence, tenaciously retaining their own religion, culture, customs, and laws. Many of them, however, forgot their language, and spoke the language of the dominant people around them.
2. **A Hebrew was not merely a Jew, he was a Jew who with great effort and arduous discipline retained the Hebrew language and taught it to his children. So Paul claimed not only to be a full-blooded Jew, he was a Hebrew who had learned and never forgotten his mother tongue, though he was born and reared in the Gentile city of Tarsus.**

B. **What reasons for which to boast! But there was more. He was ardent in his religious practice, a trained Pharisee, blameless in keeping the law, and zealous in persecuting the Christians.** What he was by birth and what he had become by conviction and achievement were enough to tally a high level of superiority compared to any who might be preaching circumcision and righteousness by the law.

C. **Privileges of birth and human achievement, however noble, count nothing.**

A good translation of **verse 7** would be **“For Christ’s sake I have learned to count my former gains a loss.”**

- In this dramatic abruptness there is a notable contrast. Each of the outward privileges in Paul’s catalog had at one time been a distinct and separate gain, individual items of profit. Now—they are all one big bundle of loss; loss because they are useless. **Everything is garbage compared to gaining Christ.**
- **Righteousness which is from the law is illusory, short-lived; now we have it, now we don’t.** It is dependent upon our efforts at meeting obligations, keeping laws, doing right. **But the righteousness of God is conferred upon us by God in response to our faith in Jesus Christ.**

D. **Too many of us Christians have yet to appropriate this freedom-bringing, wing-giving truth.** We keep one foot in the law domain where “doing” prevails, hoping that our *doing* will lead to our *being* righteous.

- **We forget that we do not strive to live by the Spirit in order to be in the Spirit. It is the reverse. Because we have been conferred the righteousness of God, we do deeds or righteousness.**
- **We do righteous works not to get in right relationship with God, but because He has already justified us.**

#2: That I May Know Him

A. **Phrase is piled upon phrase to underscore *knowing Christ* as the core of what really matters: (vss. 7-10).**

B. What does this mean, this most crucial of all matters—knowing Christ?

Verses 10-11 answer the question.

- **“The power of His resurrection.”** Paul is talking about now. **To know Christ is to have His resurrection power now. At conversion, when we repent and make a faith commitment to Christ and we are united in baptism with Christ, God does something which we accept by faith.** Once accepted, this becomes a fact of experience. We must now come to *know Him* in whom we now live. **Knowing the power of His resurrection must come first before anything else. When I come to Christ, I am a new man/woman who knows the power of Christ’s resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:1).**
- **“Participation in His suffering.”** It is a harsh, hard, difficult, demanding, but essential truth. **We do not know Christ completely unless we know Him in the fellowship of His suffering.**
 1. **The fellowship of suffering has special meaning for our life of prayer.** Accepting the fact that we are raised to newness of life with Christ, we celebrate this liberating power of the resurrection through praise and thanksgiving. **To our prayers of rejoicing gratitude, we also link intercession for all those who suffer, who have not experienced wholeness through forgiveness and healing.**
 2. **Intercession is difficult work.** Somehow—and who can tell us how?—our task is to cultivate awareness and become so sensitive to the suffering of others that in prayer, and to the degree possible in our action, we take upon ourselves their suffering.
 3. **Prayer, especially intercession, is an expression of our greatest love. Instead of keeping pain away from us, loving prayer leads us into the suffering of God and of others.** The deeper our love of God, the deeper our love of others. The deeper our love, the more we will suffer. The more we suffer, the more we will pray.
 4. **Our suffering and the suffering of others is embraced by the compassionate Christ. In a way that we may never fully understand, our intercession, through identity with suffering, becomes a channel of Christ’s liberating power.**
- **“Becoming like Him in His death.”** This was another recurring theme for Paul (**Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:3**).
 1. Paul means more than knowing Christ through the fellowship of His suffering. **The Christian is to die to the old order (Romans 6:5; Galatians 6:14), must pass through death to life, must yield his life to a process of letting the old die that the new man may be born.**

2. **There is a sense in which knowing Christ in the power of His resurrection and becoming like Him in His death are one dynamic process.** In His death and resurrection the old humanity (the old Adam) came to an end and a new humanity began (**2 Corinthians 5:14-17**). In the representative dying and rising of Christ, I pass through the death and resurrection of the old Adam (**Romans 6:4-8; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 3:1-4**).
3. **However, the implication of this must be lived out. I must consider myself dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:11). I must allow the Spirit to renew my inner nature and transform me from stage to stage into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:16; Ephesians 3:14-21).**
 - **“...and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (vs. 11). Paul doesn’t stop with what really matters *in this life*. Knowing Christ means that life goes on beyond death.**
4. Paul is not harboring or expressing doubt about his eternal destiny. He uses this hypothetical form to put his passionate longing into brilliant light. **From start to finish, Paul could never forget that salvation, which includes resurrection from the dead, is a gift of God and we dare not presume on divine mercy.**
5. **“Attain” does not mean self-achievement, but gift, gift from God.** Only those for whose earthly lives resurrection would be an appropriate crowning climax would attain. **And such ones are those who know Christ, the power of His resurrection, participate in his sufferings, and are being made like Him in his death.**