

Introduction: We turn in today's notes on Philippians 3 to God's righteousness accounted as ours by faith. This is the glory for Christ's church on earth and in heaven: Christ's taking our sin and imputing to us His righteousness. Coupled with His promise never to leave us or forsake us, we have certain proof that we will be carried through to the final day of Christ's victorious resurrection! With God's righteousness as our armor, and the Father's determination that His Son would be *with us* in our sufferings, we can with Paul have a single-minded faith that apprehends Christ as our highest good and greatest joy.

Monday: Read Philippians 3:1-3 & Deuteronomy 30:1-6 Beware of Dogs

We begin by noting Paul's use of the term "circumcision" in describing those who have true faith and who, by the Holy Spirit, worship and glory in Christ with "circumcised" and cleansed hearts of faith (Philippians 3:3). This language of the "circumcision of the heart" has a rich Old Testament history.

In Deuteronomy 30, Moses prophetically speaks God's promise of salvation to His people after forty years of wandering in sin in the desert and reminds them that, wherever their wanderings in sin have taken them, God's arm of grace is not short. He can reclaim them and do the redeeming work to make them "circumcised in their hearts," that they might love the Lord their God with all their hearts and minds (Deuteronomy 30:6).

What a forgiving God we have. Time and again throughout His people's Old Testament wanderings, He urges them to return and promises He will forgive all. Let these words from Deuteronomy 30 sink into your weary heart and soul:

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Meditate and Pray: Let us celebrate God's grace as the surgical element that circumcises hard hearts and melts our enmity against the Lord. Use this hymn by Samuel Gandy:

1 What though th' accuser roar
Of ills that I have done!
I know them well, and thousands more:
Jehovah findeth none.

2 Sin, Satan, death appear
To harass and to appall;
Yet since the gracious Lord is near,
Backward they go and fall.

3 Before, behind, around,
They set their fierce array,
To fight and force me from the ground,
Along life's narrow way.

4 I meet them face to face,
Through Jesus' conquest blest;
March in the triumph of His grace
Right onward to my rest.

5 There, in His book, I bear
More than a conqueror's name,

Of soldier, son and fellow-heir,
Who fought and overcame.

Tues/Weds: Read Philippians 3:1-9 & Acts 15:1-5**In Christ Alone**

From the early days of the church, there were always false teachers. In Acts 15:1-5 they came into the church with a legalism that eventually developed into a full-blown heresy. These “Judaizers” may have been Jews who professed Christ initially but then sought to bring in Jewish works of the Law as contributing good works for salvation. Either way, they insisted that new Gentile converts had to be circumcised in order to be fully welcomed into the church of Jesus Christ.

But Paul is adamant. We will never be saved by any work of our flesh. Not even Paul’s status as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” – or his accomplished obedience to the strictest outward observance of the law as a Pharisee, could help one whit in Paul’s search for a righteousness with which to stand before God.

Along with Paul, we must reject all such attempts of *adding elements of outward ceremonial laws from the Old Testament to the pure free grace of God’s salvation*. It is Christ alone and His righteousness alone, received by faith as a gift of grace, that saves. Look at how it is described in Philippians 3 as *not originating* in this world or *created by* our fallen race’s attempts at morality. Rather, it is sourced in God and only received as a free gift:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith ...

Philippians 3:7-9

Thurs/Fri/Sat: Read Philippians 3:1-9**“Righteous” Envy**

To shut the mouths of these purveyors of a false gospel, Paul shares the failure of his own religious good works and heritage to provide him with assurance of salvation. When it came to human religious accomplishment, Paul was born an elite Jew and belonged to the strictest branch of Judaism, the Pharisees. Go over Paul’s list more closely in Philippians 3:4-7:

- He was literally an “eight-dayer” who was circumcised in precise observance of the exact day God commanded for circumcision to take place.
- “Of the stock of Israel,” meaning that the Apostle could trace his lineage back to its royal beginnings when Jacob, “the Prince of Israel” wrestled with the Angel of the Lord in the book of Genesis.
- He by inheritance was born to the most patriotic Jewish tribe of Benjamin, in whose boundaries the holy city Jerusalem was located.
- As “a Hebrew of Hebrews”, we are to understand that he was a *not* a Greek or mixed race Jew, but a Hebrew Jew – who spoke the original language, learned the customs and beliefs of the ancient fathers, studied under the rabbis in the best synagogues and refused to be corrupted by the pagan ways of the Roman empire.
- By choice, Paul lived according the traditions of the Pharisees, fencing the Law of God by many man-made rules to ensure that he could claim to be blameless when it came to outward adherence to the Law, much like the rich, young ruler in Mark 10:17-25.
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- His outward rigor towards the Law was only matched by his persecuting zeal toward all whom he thought to be an enemy to the Jewish temple and Law. This zeal drove him to bloodshed as he hunted Christians down, armed with arrest warrants from Jerusalem.

Meditate and Pray: It is a terrible reality that some who consider themselves to be the *most self-righteous* in terms of religious effort can show hateful envy towards those who have *more religious joy, integrity and peace* than they do. Such was the hatred of men like Saul (later called Paul) towards godly followers of Christ, like Stephen.

As Dr. Sinclair Ferguson speculates, it may well have been Saul-later-called Paul's encounter with the martyr Stephen (a defender of the Gospel whom the Jews assailed but could not refute – see Acts 6:9-10) that sparked Saul's hatred of all who were not of the "circumcision party." Saul even held the coats of Stephen's murderers and approved of his death in Acts 7:58. After all, Saul was from the very region of the Jews who attacked Stephen (Cilicia – Acts 6:9) and may have known Stephen as a fellow Jew in his upbringing and Jewish training.

Later in his life, Paul would painfully experience what it was like to be envied for his faithful gospel preaching (Philippians 1:15)– even as he had envied Stephen's possessing a joy and delight in Christ which he had never known!

Envy is a terrible cancer that can grow in just that way. Those Gospel preachers who resented Paul's courageous witness for Christ in Rome preached Christ out of envy (Philippians 1:15-18), thereby exposing themselves to the very danger of religious hypocrisy that can lead to a violent coveting of other Christian servants' gifts and callings. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees envied Jesus when the crowds went after him, and the same group continued against Paul in his day of fruitful gospel ministry. Thus Paul learned fellowship in the sufferings of Christ (Philippians 3:10) as he suffered the same hateful envy which initially drove him to hate and hurt Christians.

Sunday: Read Philippians 2:9-11

Confidence in the Savior Alone

Let us praise God today that our boast is in Christ, and not in our own accomplishments (Philippians 3:3)! Sing about what He has accomplished in the following hymns which speak of boasting in Christ – as our Lord, Provider and Defender! Take note that all the Old Testament titles of God the Father have now been given to Christ, fully God and also conquering sin, death and Satan in our nature. He truly provides in each situation, as hymn # 95 shows: (with extra verses from John Newton not in our hymnal, but very worthwhile.)

1 Though troubles assail us
And dangers affright,
Though close friends should fail us
And foes all unite,
Yet one thing secures us,
Whatever betide,
The promise assures us,
The Lord will provide.

2 The birds, without garner
Or storehouse, are fed;
From them let us learn to
Trust God for our bread.
His saints what is fitting
Shall ne'er be denied
So long as 'tis written,
The Lord will provide.

3 We all may, like ships, by
The tempest be tossed
On perilous deeps, but
We cannot be lost;
Though Satan enrages
The wind and the tide,
Yet Scripture engages,
The Lord will provide.

5 When Satan assails us
To stop up our path,
And pale courage fails us,
We triumph by faith.
He cannot take from us,
Though oft he has tried,
This heart cheering promise,
The Lord will provide.

7 No strength of our own and
No goodness we claim;
Yet, since we have known of
The Savior's great name,
In this our strong tower
For safety we hide:
The Lord is our power,
The Lord will provide.

4 His call we obey, and
Like Abram of old,
We know not the way,
But our faith makes us bold;
For though we are strangers,
We have a sure guide,
And trust in all dangers,
The Lord will provide.

6 He tells us we're weak, and
Our hope is in vain;
The good that we seek we
Will never obtain,
But when such suggestions
Our graces have tried,
This answers all questions:
The Lord will provide.

8 When life sinks apace, and
Our death is in view,
The word of His grace shall
Then comfort us through,
Not fearing or doubting,
With Christ on our side,
We hope to die shouting,
The Lord will provide.