

Text: Philippians 3:4-11, Part 2

Title: Knowing Christ

Truth: The highest priority for every human being is to know Christ.

Date/Location: Sunday March 13, 2022 at FBC (rev. from April 2011)

Introduction

If you are reading this passage on your own, take note of five key terms that will help you understand the meaning of what you read: *confidence, righteousness, gain, loss, and Christ*. Each of these terms is used repetitively in the first part of Philippians 3 and tip us off to the big ideas that are being communicated from God to us.

In this autobiographical section, we learn that what Paul wants more than anything is to know Jesus Christ and everything that Christ is and offers. Paul is a good example for us; in fact, in 2 Cor. 11:1 Paul urges believers to imitate him as he imitates Christ. So let us look at what happened to Paul's "religious" thinking and ask God to help us have the same kind of desires Paul did.

I. Former Confidence in the Flesh, v. 4-6

A. If there were anyone who could have confidence in the flesh, it was Paul. He had a long resume of religious works that (he thought) could commend him to God. Ethnic background and religious self-effort are the things he was thinking about. Those things are what gave Paul "confidence in the flesh." Confidence means to have dependence or trust on something. Paul was depending, in essence, upon himself to be right with God.

B. List of Fleshly Qualifications

1. Circumcision. This was the key qualification that was at issue – v. 2 (mutilation), v. 3 (the true circumcision), and the whole Judaizer party's mantra (Acts 15:1, 5). Paul was circumcised as a child, just as the law required.
2. An Israelite. He could prove his lineage from Jewish parents.
3. A Benjamite. This tribe was one of two that stayed with the southern kingdom (Judah was the other). It produced the first

king (Saul, a somewhat dubious distinction) and Shimei was a Benjamite. It was not a special “pure” tribe.

4. Hebrew of the Hebrews. Despite living outside of Israel for some part of his life (Tarsus in Cilicia, Acts 22:3), he maintained all the Jewish customs, culture and religion. He had pure Jewish blood.
5. Pharisee. See Acts 23:6, 26:5. This was the strictest, conservative sect of Judaism. He was the fundamentalist-type, to the point of being an extreme legalist. He observed very carefully extra requirements so as not to disobey the Mosaic Law.

That’s right—he was a legalist in the real sense of the term, one who thought his fastidious observance of the law would gain him salvific favor with God, that is, would produce righteousness that God would accept over against his sin. (Most people who today level the charge of legalism do not understand the Biblical meaning of the term.)

6. Zealous (Acts 22:3). He was a zealous promoter of his belief system. Whatever touched his religion, he would destroy. Christianity was a threat, so he became a threat to it, persecuting the church even to death.
7. Righteousness. No one could levy a charge against Paul as to his law-keeping. He was not only a Pharisee, but a very observant one. Externally he seemed perfectly in line. This says nothing of the heart, however. Paul would not have persecuted the church if he had a regenerate (circumcised) heart.

Today, many people can seem outwardly righteous, but their heart is not seen by anyone but God. Oftentimes their true colors come out eventually (e.g. the apostate who has been hiding in the church for years, 1 Tim. 5:24).

II. Newfound Confidence in Christ, v. 7-11

Above are listed seven items of confidence in the flesh. There is an eighth mentioned in verse 7 and 8. In that verse, Paul makes a sweeping statement that he counts *everything* as loss on account of Christ. The list of 7 losses was not exhaustive, but it covered the

bases well. Next, there are eight corresponding investment gains that replace the investment losses.

A. Major Change in Thinking on the Value of Your Resume, v. 7-8

Knowing and Gaining Christ

1. The verb “count” is used three times in these two verses. This word means to regard, think, or consider.
2. Note that it was Paul’s *consideration* of the items in his loss column that changed. Not all of the things themselves were discarded, because they could not be eliminated. He could not change his circumcision, or his ethnic background. Of course, some of the items had to change, such as persecuting the church and pursuing a legalistic type of righteousness.
3. What changed is that he no longer considered those things as grounds of dependence or trust that he would be alright with God. This is an earthquake and tsunami in his thinking. He counted those things as worthless as he looked at them side-by-side with Christ. They formerly looked good, but when put next to Christ to get an idea of their true character, he realized how awful they really were.
4. So it is with all who come to faith in Christ. You transfer your dependence from whatever it was to Christ. You change your thinking about sin and God. You realize your rebellion against God and your need to be delivered from it. You realize you are headed for an eternal death apart from God and change your thinking to desire eternal life in heaven. You realize that Christ is the Son of God, the Lord, your Lord, that He died for your sins and, yes, was resurrected from the dead. You realize Christ loved you and gave Himself for you.
5. The idea of knowing Christ is far better than everything else. Don’t you want to gain Christ?

B. Major Change in Understanding of How God Accepts a Person, v. 9

Being found in Christ, with His Righteousness

1. When God looks at the person, where does He find him or her? In Adam or in Christ? A Christian is a person who, having

exercised repentant faith, has been placed into Christ in a very special relationship. When God looks for that person, He finds him or her “in Christ.” Otherwise, the person is unsaved and in Adam, which is effectively saying they are on the Devil’s side.

2. A key part of being placed into Christ is that your sins are forgiven and your account with God is credited with righteousness, which means you are made right with God. Your sin is no longer an issue that prevents God from establishing or maintaining a relationship with you; your sin record is not only wiped clean, but it is stamped with “made right with God by Jesus Christ.” (Ongoing sin still *is* a problem, but is addressed via genuine confession.) Why is Paul so concerned about this? Just like Job in 9:24, he knew that without righteousness, it is impossible for anyone to live with God.
3. This righteousness of God comes to one through faith in Christ. It is the opposite of trying to earn your way to heaven. Many try to earn their own way. Romans 10:2-4 tells us about the Jews who refused to submit to the righteousness of God. It’s like the independent mindset that says, “I can do it all by myself!” “I don’t need anyone’s help, much less God’s help!”
4. But it is impossible in God’s sight to achieve real righteousness by keeping the law as Paul had been trying. See Rom 3:20, 10:4.
5. Speaking very humbly, Paul wanted this condition of being found “in Christ” to persist his whole life and be evident at the final judgment (“When he shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found!”) Being found this way would demonstrate that He was a real disciple of Jesus Christ.

C. Major Change in Priorities, v. 10

Knowing Christ

1. **To Know Christ.** Not the Law! And more than intellectual knowledge, but a personal, friendship, family kind of relationship. Homer Kent wrote this: “For Paul, the knowledge of Christ Jesus as his Lord meant the intimate communion with Christ that began at his conversion and had been his experience all the years since then. It was not limited to the past...but was a growing relationship in which there was a blessed enjoyment in

the present and the challenge and excitement of increasing comprehension of Christ in personal fellowship...Although at regeneration a person receives Christ, this is only the beginning of his discovery of what riches this entails. In Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col. 2:3), but to search them out and appropriate them personally requires a lifetime.”¹

2. Knowing **the fellowship of His sufferings**. Briefly, this means to know or *experience* and share in the sufferings of Christ. The idea is that you know what it means to be a righteous sufferer like Jesus was. You realize that those that live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution, and that the path to glory always, according to God’s wisdom, goes through the path of suffering first. Persecution against Christians amounts to persecution against Christ (Acts 9:4-5), so this would be included in the sufferings of Christ. Paul does not wish for a life of luxury and ease; his priority has changed so that he will know Jesus Christ in every possible way, even gaining an acquaintance with Him in suffering.
3. **Being conformed to His death** means to be like Christ in His death, both in the character that drove Him to that sacrifice, and the purpose for which He did it. Therefore, we ought to be obedient like He was obedient unto death, and to love like He loved and died for His people (John 15:13). We also ought to live for the same purpose for which Christ died, which is not only to win people to God out of the mess of the world, but to be holy people, zealous for good works (Titus 3:14).
4. It is here that the **power of His resurrection** comes in.

Note: The resurrection is a historical event. It and the results of it—a living Jesus—were witnessed by hundreds of people (1 Cor. 15:1-8). The tomb was empty. There is no dispute about this from a historical or “proof” perspective. The only question is how you will “regard” or “consider” it. Do you believe it or do you reject it? Do you accept what it means for

¹ Kent, “Philippians” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, 1978, p. 141.

you, or do you willingly ignore it? By the way, the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ are among the best attested events of ancient history.

Note: If Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith, then resurrection is the keystone of it. Without it, there is no Christianity (1 Cor. 15:12-19).

The resurrection was an amazing demonstration of God's power. But what is far less understood is that this same power God applied and continues to apply to those who truly believe (Eph. 1:19-20). The granting and maintaining of regeneration life (Eph 2:1-10, Rom 6:4) requires such divine power. Spiritual growth, purity from sin, overcoming addiction and temptation, understanding God's word, developing Christian virtues, obeying God's commands with faith from the heart...all of these require divine life-giving and life-sustaining power.

Paul tells us that one of his highest priorities is to **know** that power in his life, to see it at work, to see it change him, to see it empower his ministry.

How can we hope to be conformed to Christ's death? The answer is this: by the power of His resurrection. The two are intertwined. The death of Christ and the life of Christ and how they work in us is somewhat of a paradox. If you want real life, you must have death first. Christ died that death for us so that we could have eternal life. But when we are saved, we die too, being released from the sinful life that we used to live. The new life we receive runs on the same energy source that raised up Christ from the dead.

No power? → No divine life.

Acts 4:33 is an example of this power at work in the apostles ministry.

D. Major Change in Future Outlook, v. 11

Attaining to the Resurrection of the Dead

1. What Paul hopes for is to make it to the resurrection so that he too possesses it. He wants it "by any means" but his ruling method is not pragmatism. The verse could be translated "If in any way I may attain the resurrection from the dead." The idea

seems to be that whatever course Paul's life takes (ease or persecution does not matter) he looks forward to the final goal which is physical resurrection out from the dead.

2. As a Christian, we already possess one type of resurrection, that is, the new spiritual life granted to us when we believed. Eph. 2:1-10, Titus 3:5. This is also known as *regeneration*, but it is hardly a coming to life *again* because there was no spiritual life present in the first place!
3. Paul is talking about another sort of resurrection, the normal sort you think of when the word *resurrection* is used: a bodily resurrection from physical death. What Paul hopes for is to get the resurrection so that he possesses it or "has it in hand." He wants to reach that goal. It is a highly anticipated future event because it marks a complete and final victory over sin and death.
4. For the righteous (saved people), that event is the so-called *first resurrection*. There is another resurrection that we do not want to be a part of, and that is the *second* resurrection which results in all its participants being cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:5-6, 15). The first one is the one that offers a blessed future existence with God and with Jesus.
5. Is there uncertainty in Paul's mind about this matter? We could read it that way. The **might** or **may** language seems to be uncertain in that he might not or may not make it. Paul is making a humble expression of his hope in the resurrection, which although a certain hope (Acts 23:6, Acts 24:15) is one in which Paul recognizes that no haughtiness is appropriate. The uncertainty is not in the final outcome, but in the way of getting there. Beyond the course of Paul's life, there is uncertainty as to whether he will have to die or whether he can be translated at the rapture (3:20–21, 2 Cor. 5:1–4). For all believers, some suffering is certain—2 Thess 1:5, Acts 14:22. We will know some measure of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, but we can endure in part because we look forward to attaining to the resurrection of the dead.

6. The same power that works in us to live for Christ—resurrection power—will work in us to bring us back to life after we die.

Conclusion

The resurrection of Christ is a stupendous display of divine power. It is the standard unit of measurement of God's omnipotence. It is like the parting of the Red Sea or feeding of the 5,000 or healing a handicapped person instantly. It is a first-rate miracle of God.

But even though it was a powerful event, there is no way the resurrection will have any meaningful influence in your life unless you accept that Jesus Christ is Lord and that He died and was resurrected for you, in your place. Then, Christ can live in your heart through faith and you can have his resurrection power operative in your own life.

Are you reading these notes and realizing that you need to come to Jesus to be saved from sin, and thus come to know this resurrection power?

Perhaps you are living a life that has a lot of sin in it and finding that resurrection power hard to see or experience. Where are your priorities? Where is your thinking? Do they match what Paul tells us here? Have you:

1. Abandoned your confidence in yourself?
2. Had a major change in thinking on the value of your resume, that your former religious confidence was actually worthless?
3. Changed how you understand God accepts a person, not by works of righteousness, but by His grace?
4. Experienced and implemented a major change in priorities, with knowing Christ at the very top of your life goals?
5. Gained a new future outlook, striving toward the resurrection from the dead?

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