

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST

by Brent Gehman

KEY VERSE:

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Philippians 3:7-8a

FAITH STORY:

Philippians 3:1-11

FAITH FOCUS:

Paul encouraged the Philippians to be happy and content with what they have in the Lord Jesus Christ and his grace. The more we rejoice and are happy in Jesus, the more we will have a desire to serve and obey him. Paul reminds us to be aware of those who are evil and who seek to gain only their own desires of the flesh. He says that if anyone has reason to be confident in the flesh, he does. Being born into a high-class Jewish family, being Hebrew and a member of the tribe of Benjamin, being circumcised just like the Hebrew law said, and being a Pharisee who kept the law blamelessly, Paul thought that if anyone could earn God's favor, he could. But now Paul has regarded all these things as loss, because the value of knowing Jesus as Lord surpasses them all. He realized that he no longer has self-righteousness that comes from the law, but righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. Paul states that if we want to know the true power of Christ's resurrection and the sharing of his suffering, we have to become like Christ in death.

SESSION GOAL:

To challenge students to realize that whatever we have gained we need to count as loss if we gained it through our own self-righteous means. True righteousness can be gained only through knowing Christ Jesus.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Identify how our value in society compares to our value because of what Jesus did for us.
- List what they are tempted to put their trust in.
- Consider what it means to "count everything as loss and rejoice in what God has given us."

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 A variety of magazines—business, sports, teen
- 2 Scissors
- 3 Glue and construction paper
- 4 Worksheets and pens—one for every two people

- 5 You should study the worksheet and answer the questions prior to class
- 6 Bibles for all students
- 7 Newsprint and markers

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (10 minutes)

Welcome students and ask them to form small groups of 3-4. Instruct them to use the magazines and construction paper to create a collage of photos and words that answer this question: *What do people need to do or be in order to be a valuable part of society?*

CONNECT: (5–10 minutes)

Invite groups to present their collages to the class, and to explain what the collage says about being a valuable part of society.

Discuss:

- Do you agree with what the collages are saying?
- Do these things make you happy? (be honest!)
- Are these things good in a faith sense?
- Will these things create a relationship with Jesus?
- Will these things hinder a relationship with Jesus?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–20 minutes)

Ask students to open their Bibles to Philippians 3:1-11. Read it together, then ask for students to summarize what they think the passage is saying.

Pair off the students and hand out the worksheets and pens. Ask them to answer questions 1-6. Bring students back together and discuss their answers.

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Display all collages so everyone can see them (on the wall, floor, or table.) Ask students to study each collage and choose three items that they are the most tempted to put their trust in for their own sense of value and security.

Share with the group.

Divide into groups of 3-4 and give each group a marker and newsprint. Ask each group to imagine what Paul might say to them, and to put it into a letter similar to the one he wrote to the Philippians.

Share letters with the group.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Make sure each student has a Bible, and ask them to quietly read Philippians 3:7-11 and reflect on it for themselves. If time permits, let students go outdoors or to other parts of the church to a space alone to read and reflect on these verses.

When students return, close with a prayer together.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

- “Dog” is one of the lowest names you could call a person in Paul’s day, and it often meant someone who wasn’t a Jew or who was unclean.
- In verse 3, Paul says that we are the true circumcision. Circumcision was the removal of the foreskin of the penis, and it was a sign of God’s covenant relation with his people, beginning with Abraham. Circumcision of the Jewish male was required as a visible, physical sign of the covenant between the Lord and his people. In this passage, Paul says that the new creation we become in Christ replaces the need for a physical circumcision.
- Paul continues in verse 3 to say that our confidence is in Christ rather than the flesh. This means that Christ is wholly sufficient for our salvation. Our own virtue or effort means nothing.
- A person can only renounce what he or she has—you can’t give up something you don’t have. Paul had a lot in terms of heritage, advantages, achievements, and religious actions. He could match up with anyone and had a lot of self-confidence in himself. But when Paul came to know Jesus, many of his values were reversed. What once meant a lot to him now meant nothing. The one whom he had despised he now called his Lord. Paul found a new life by losing his own.
- Knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord came to be the most valuable thing in Paul’s life. To “know” meant more than mind knowledge. It meant the knowledge that masters the heart and will as well. Knowing Christ is more than knowing about him. It is the personal relationship of inviting Jesus to be the Lord of our hearts and minds.
- Freedom from legalism does not mean lawlessness. Righteousness remained as Paul’s consuming goal, but in Christ he came to a new understanding of righteousness, both as to its content and the means to obtain it. Whereas a righteousness of his own had formerly been his goal, now in Christ, he sought the righteousness which is from God and which is received through faith. It is God’s achievement, not ours.
- In verse 10 Paul returns to the decision to surrender all to Christ in order to know him in a deep way. This is a two-sided coin: to live with Christ, one must die with him. It is by Christ’s power alone that we can “be crucified” to our own selves and “die to live.”
- Paul finds life by pouring it out to God for others, just as Christ poured out his life.

WORKS CITED:

NRSV Harper Study Bible, translated by Harold Lindsell. Michigan: Zondervan, 1991

The Broadman Bible Commentary. Translated Clifton J. Allen. Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1970

STUDENT WORKSHEET:

- 1** Why did Paul open with “my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord”?

- 2** Why did Paul say the reader should be aware of dogs and evil workers? Who do you think those people were?

- 3** What did Paul mean by “we who are the circumcision”? (See Romans 2:25-29)

- 4** What does it mean to have no confidence in the flesh?

- 5** What did Paul say about his life and actions?

- 6** What did Paul lose in order to gain Christ? Why?