



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

- Week 1: Introducing Philippians**
- Week 2: The Privilege of Suffering**
- Week 3: The Embrace of Anger**
- Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness**

Handouts: Philippians CEB. Anger H.O. Salvation Equation H.O.

COAT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS - HAVE A LONG "COAT" TO PUT ON. A COAT JESUS GIVES US. SCARIFICED TO GET FOR US.

Philippians 3

CEB Values and priorities

3 So then, my brothers and sisters, be glad in the Lord. It's no trouble for me to repeat the same things to you because they will help keep you on track. **2** Watch out for the "dogs." Watch out for people who do evil things. Watch out for those who insist on circumcision, which is really mutilation.**3** We are the circumcision. We are the ones who serve by God's Spirit and who boast in Christ Jesus. We don't put our confidence in rituals performed on the body, **4** though I have good reason to have this kind of confidence. If anyone else has reason to put their confidence in physical advantages, I have even more:

5 I was circumcised on the eighth day.

I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin.

I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

With respect to observing the Law, I'm a Pharisee.

6 With respect to devotion to the faith, I harassed the church.

With respect to righteousness under the Law, I'm blameless.

7 These things were my assets, but I wrote them off as a loss for the sake of Christ. **8** But even beyond that, I consider everything a loss in comparison with the superior value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have lost everything for him, but what I lost I think of as sewer trash, so that I might gain Christ **9** and be found in him. In Christ I have a righteousness that is not my own and that does not come from the Law but rather from the faithfulness of Christ. It is the righteousness of God that is based on faith.

10 The righteousness that I have comes from knowing Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the participation in his sufferings. It includes being conformed to his death **11** so that I may perhaps reach the goal of the resurrection of the dead.

12 It's not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose. **13** Brothers and sisters, I myself don't think I've reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. **14** The goal I pursue is the prize of God's upward call in Christ Jesus. **15** So all of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, and if anyone thinks differently, God will reveal it to him or her. **16** Only let's live in a way that is consistent with whatever level we have reached.

Imitate Paul

17 Brothers and sisters, become imitators of me and watch those who live this way—you can use us as models. **18** As I have told you many times and now say with deep sadness, many people live as enemies of the cross. **19** Their lives end with destruction. Their god is their stomach, and they take pride in their disgrace because their thoughts focus on earthly



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

things. ²⁰ Our citizenship is in heaven. We look forward to a savior that comes from there—the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform our humble bodies so that they are like his glorious body, by the power that also makes him able to subject all things to himself.

HCSB

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write to you again about this is no trouble for me and is a protection for you.

² Watch out for “dogs,”^[a] watch out for evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh— ⁴ although I once also had confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

⁷ But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ^[b]—the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ **My goal is to**

- A. know Him and**
- B. the power of His resurrection and**
- C. the fellowship of His sufferings,**
- D. being conformed to His death,**
- E. ¹¹ assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.**

Reaching Forward to God’s Goal

¹² **Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. [MAKE IT MY OWN]**

¹³ Brothers, I do not^[c] consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, ¹⁴ I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly^[d] call in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore, all who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you. ¹⁶ In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained. ¹⁷ Join in imitating me, brothers, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things, ²⁰ but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself.

- I... Righteousness Defined in O.T.
- II.. Righteousness Defined by Christ
- III..What Happens at Salvation
- IV..A Life lived Righteously



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

DECONSTRUCT:

- analyze (a text or a linguistic or conceptual system) by deconstruction, typically in order to expose its hidden internal assumptions and contradictions and subvert its apparent significance or unity.
- reduce (something) to its constituent parts in order to reinterpret it.

I. Righteousness Defined in O.T.

Schreiner, T. R. (2010). [40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law](#) (B. L. Merkle, Ed.; pp. 108–138). Kregel Academic & Professional.

T.R. Schreiner “A very important verse in understanding righteousness”

Leviticus 19:36

*You must have accurate scales and accurate weights, an accurate ephah^a [20 quarts] and an accurate hin.^b [one gallon]
I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*

“In other words, one must conform to a norm in matters of weights and measures. Justice means that people are charged fairly for goods and services rendered.”

Schreiner, T. R. (2010). [40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law](#) (B. L. Merkle, Ed.; pp. 108–138). Kregel Academic & Professional.

Covenant principles are not random but part of a CODE (we can interpret as life expectations)

Judges are to be:

Exodus 23:3

But don't privilege unimportant people in their lawsuits either.

Leviticus 19:15

You must not act unjustly in a legal case. Do not show favoritism to the poor or deference to the great; you must judge your fellow Israelites fairly.

Deuteronomy 1:17

Don't show favoritism in a decision. Hear both sides out, whether the person is important or not. Don't be afraid of anyone because the ruling belongs to God. Any dispute that is too difficult for you to decide, bring to me and I will take care of it.

Deuteronomy 16:18-20

¹⁸ *Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every city that the Lord your God gives you. They must judge the people fairly.* ¹⁹ *Don't delay justice; don't show favoritism. Don't take bribes because bribery blinds the vision of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.*

²⁰ **Righteousness! Pursue righteousness so that you **live** long and **take possession of** the land that the Lord your God is giving you.**

Amos 5:24

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.



Philippians
 Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
 Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

Job 8:3

Does God pervert justice, or does the Almighty distort what is right?

My ?:

What does the Covenant requirements in the O.T. reveal about Supernatural Laws?

1. There are requirements.
2. We do not get to vote on them.
3. They affect us whether we know/follow them.
4. Our involvement is required: Accept(DO) or Reject(DO)
5. They reflect the TRUTH.

I... Righteousness Defined in O.T. III..What Happens at Salvation IV..A Life lived Righteously

II. Righteousness Defined by Christ

Justify [dikaiōō] = Declare righteous

Luke 18:9-14 CEB

⁹ Jesus told this parable to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust:¹⁰ "Two people went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself with these words, 'God, I thank you that I'm not like everyone else—crooks, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.' ¹³ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, 'God, show mercy to me, a sinner.' ¹⁴ I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up."

John 6:29 CEB

Jesus replied, "This is what God requires, that you believe in him whom God sent."

In the gospel of John faith plays a central role as well. John uses the verb for "believe" ninety-eight times, showing how prominent believing is in John's gospel.
 Schreiner, T. R. (2010). *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law* (B. L. Merkle, Ed.; pp. 108–138). Kregel Academic & Professional.

John 20:31 CEB

But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.

John 8:24 *This is why I told you that you would die in your sins. If you don't believe that I Am, you will die in your sins."*

John 6:35 *Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

John 1:11-12 *The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him. But those who did welcome him, those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children,*

John 5:36-40 *"I have a witness greater than John's testimony. The Father has given me works to do so that I might complete them. These works I do testify about me that the Father sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me testifies about me. You have never even heard his voice or seen his form, ³⁸ and you don't have his word dwelling with you because you don't believe the one whom he has sent. ³⁹ Examine the scriptures, since you think that in them you have eternal life. They also testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you don't want to come to me so that you can have life.*

Psalm 89:14

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; faithful love and truth go before You.

I... Righteousness Defined in O.T. II.. Righteousness Defined by Christ IV..A Life lived Righteously

III. What Happens at Salvation?

The Salvation Equation:

{Grace > Atonement} Man can now respond: + **Repentance** + **Faith** → (and God answers) **Conversion** + **Regeneration** + **Justification**. [+ **Adoption** → **Sanctification**. **Perseverance**.]

JUSTIFICATION

"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." 1 Peter 1:23

1.) **What is Justification:** Reasonable, LEGAL grounds for an action.

Start with Justified:

- To demonstrate or prove to be just, right, or valid.
- To declare free of blame; absolve.
- To free (a human) of the guilt and penalty attached to grievous sin. Used of God.
- *Law* a. To demonstrate sufficient legal reason for (an action taken).

2.) So how can we, sinful humans, stand legally just, right, or valid before a Holy God? **Job 9:2**

a.) Begins with God being **righteous** and Him being infallibly consistent in His own nature.

James 1:17

CEB *Every generous act and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights; with Him there is no variation or shadow cast by turning.*

HCSB *Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above. These gifts come down from the Father, the creator of the heavenly lights, in whose character there is no change at all*

Malachi 3:6a

CEB *I am the Lord, and I do not change;*

Deuteronomy 32:4



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

HCSB *The Rock—His work is perfect; all His ways are entirely just.
A faithful God, without prejudice, He is righteous and true.*

b.) This **righteousness** both judges and saves. **Romans 3:23**

Christ's work is expiatory...in that it covers our sin so it is no more.

Christ's work is propitiatory...it shields us from God's wrath towards sin.

Romans 3:21-26

²¹ But now God's righteousness has been revealed apart from the Law, which is confirmed by the Law and the Prophets. ²² God's righteousness comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who have faith in him. There's no distinction. ²³ All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, ²⁴ but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ Through his faithfulness, God displayed Jesus as the place of sacrifice where mercy is found by means of his blood. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness in passing over sins that happened before, ²⁶ during the time of God's patient tolerance. He also did this to demonstrate that he is righteous in the present time, and to treat the one who has faith in Jesus as righteous.

2 Corinthians 5:21

God caused the one who didn't know sin to be sin for our sake so that through him we could become the righteousness of God.

This is Justification...to make righteous.

c.) This **righteousness** satisfies a legal spiritual law.

It meets an eternal requirement. Forensic Justification.

Galatians 3:24-25 so that the Law became our custodian until Christ so that we might be made righteous by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian.

Romans 3:21-26

²¹ But now God's righteousness has been revealed apart from the Law, which is confirmed by the Law and the Prophets. ²² God's righteousness comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who have faith in him. There's no distinction. ²³ All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, ²⁴ but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ Through his faithfulness, God displayed Jesus as the place of sacrifice where mercy is found by means of his blood. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness in passing over sins that happened before, ²⁶ during the time of God's patient tolerance. He also did this to demonstrate that he is righteous in the present time, and to treat the one who has faith in Jesus as righteous.

1 Corinthians 1:26-30

²⁶ Look at your situation when you were called, brothers and sisters! By ordinary human standards not many were wise, not many were powerful, not many were from the upper class. ²⁷ But God chose what the world considers foolish to shame the wise. God chose what the world considers weak to shame the strong. ²⁸ And God chose what the world considers low-class and low-life—what is considered to be



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

nothing—to reduce what is considered to be something to nothing. ²⁹ So no human being can brag in God's presence. ³⁰ It is because of God that you are in Christ Jesus. He became wisdom from God for us. This means that he made us righteous and holy, and he delivered us.

JUSTIFICATION: It is an objective word. This takes place outside of us.

JUSTIFICATION: Instantaneous.

JUSTIFICATION: Simultaneous with Regeneration.

JUSTIFICATION: Is complete. Once and for all.

- In the Old Testament it is the innocent man who is declared NOT GUILTY.

Old Testament: **Deuteronomy 25:1; Isaiah 5:22-23**

Exodus 23:7 *Stay away from making a false charge. Don't put an innocent person who is in the right to death, because I will not consider innocent those who do such evil.*

Proverbs 17:15 *Judging the righteous wicked and the wicked righteous—the Lord detests both of these.*

- In the New Testament, it is the sinners who receive salvation who are declared NOT GUILTY.

New Testament:

Romans 4:1-8 *So what are we going to say? Are we going to find that Abraham is our ancestor on the basis of genealogy? ² Because if Abraham was made righteous because of his actions, he would have had a reason to brag, but not in front of God. ³ What does the scripture say? Abraham had faith in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.^[a] ⁴ Workers' salaries aren't credited to them on the basis of an employer's grace but rather on the basis of what they deserve. ⁵ But faith is credited as righteousness to those who don't work, because they have faith in God who makes the ungodly righteous. ⁶ In the same way, David also pronounces a blessing on the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from actions:*

⁷ *Happy are those whose actions outside the Law are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*

⁸ *Happy are those whose sin isn't counted against them by the Lord.^[b] **Psalm 32:1-2***

Romans 5:1-11 *Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness,^[a] we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God's glory. ³ But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, ⁴ endurance produces character, and character produces hope. ⁵ This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

⁶ *While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people. ⁷ It isn't often that someone will die for a righteous person, though maybe someone might dare to die for a good person. ⁸ But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ So, now that we have been made righteous by his blood, we can be even more certain that we will be saved from God's wrath through him. ¹⁰ If we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son while we were still enemies, now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by his life? ¹¹ And not only that: we even take pride in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, the one through whom we now have a restored relationship with God.*



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

- What are some accepted fallacies that I have seen or experienced that deny Christ's obedience on the cross is the only thing that can justify me?
(Example: My good works will get me into heaven.)

3.. What is our Response?

Justification by Faith alone removes two erroneous stumbling blocks of Faith:

- a. **Pride** in our own self righteousness and self effort.

Galatians 2:21 *I don't ignore the grace of God, because if we become righteous through the Law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

Galatians 3:1-3 *You irrational Galatians! Who put a spell on you? Jesus Christ was put on display as crucified before your eyes! ² I just want to know this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the Law or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so irrational? After you started with the Spirit, are you now finishing up with your own human effort?*

Galatians 5:4 *You people who are trying to be made righteous by the Law have been estranged from Christ. You have fallen away from grace!*

- b. **Fear** we are too weak and sinful to bring salvation to completion.

Romans 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness,^[a] we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Romans 5:10 *If we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son while we were still enemies, now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by his life?*

A Fortiori: All the more certainly; with greater reason; marked by a certainty inferred from and taken to be even more conclusive than another reasoned conclusion or recognized fact.

- c. Or will I embrace:
 - Removal of **guilt**. Removal of **condemnation**. Removal of **separation**.
 - Christ's righteousness is imputed to us. Attributed to us.
Our sins are charged to Him. The consequences of our sin is imputed to Him.
Imputed: To relate to a particular cause or source; attribute the fault or responsibility to.

Because of Justification our sins are declared no more. When you wonder if you can be saved, or if you are good enough, or if.....you are picking these back up.

Justification means:

Acts 13:39	Freedom from the law.
Romans 5:1	Peace with God.
Romans 5:9	Salvation from wrath.
Romans 5:10-11	Reconciliation with God.
Romans 8:30	Assurance of glorification.
Romans 8:33-34	Freedom from condemnation.
Titus 3:7	Becoming heirs of God.

SOURCES: SOTERIOLOGY: A Study Guide by Daniel B. Pecota (Global University Textbook); *Newborn* by Harold M. Frelich; The Salvation Equation: Personal study notes Pastor Orleen Haseltine ©2011. Biblegateway. Com



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

I... Righteousness Defined in O.T. II.. Righteousness Defined by Christ III..What Happens at Salvation

IV. A Life lived Righteously

PAUL:

Romans 8:33 HCSB

Who can bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the One who justifies.

Romans 10:

HCSB

10 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them^[a] is for their salvation! **2** I can testify about them that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. **3** Because they disregarded the righteousness from God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to God's righteousness. **4** For Christ is the end^[b][goal] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. **5** For Moses writes about the righteousness that is from the law: The one who does these things will live by them.^[c] **6** But the righteousness that comes from faith speaks like this: Do not say in your heart, "Who will go up to heaven?"^[d] that is, to bring Christ down **7** or, "Who will go down into the abyss?"^[e] that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. **8** On the contrary, what does it say? The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.^[f] This is the message of faith that we proclaim: **9** If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. **11** Now the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame,^[g] **12** for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since the same Lord of all is rich to all who call on Him. **13** For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.^[h]

CEB

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire is for Israel's salvation. That's my prayer to God for them. **2** I can vouch for them: they are enthusiastic about God. However, it isn't informed by knowledge. **3** They don't submit to God's righteousness because they don't understand his righteousness, and they try to establish their own righteousness. **4** Christ is the goal of the Law, which leads to righteousness for all who have faith in God. **5** Moses writes about the righteousness that comes from the Law: *The person who does these things will live by them.*^[a] **6** But the righteousness that comes from faith talks like this: *Don't say in your heart, "Who will go up into heaven?"^[b] (that is, to bring Christ down) **7** or "Who will go down into the region below?"^[c] (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). **8** But what does it say? *The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.^[d] (that is, the message of faith that we preach).* **9** Because if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and in your heart you have faith that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** **Trusting with the heart leads to righteousness, and confessing with the mouth leads to salvation.** **11** The scripture says, *All who have faith in him won't be put to shame.*^[e] **12** There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives richly to all who call on him. **13** *All who call on the Lord's name will be saved.*^[f]*

THE COAT I.E.



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

Notes:

Lev 19:18 You must not take revenge nor hold a grudge against any of your people; instead, you must **love your neighbor** as yourself; I am the Lord.

Matthew 5:43 Law of love **"You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.**

*Matthew 19:19 Honor your father and mother, and **love your neighbor** as you love yourself."*

Matthew 22:39 And the second is like it: *You must **love your neighbor** as you love yourself .*

Mark 12:31 The second is this, *You will **love your neighbor** as yourself .* No other commandment is greater than these."

Luke 10:27 He responded, *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and **love your neighbor** as yourself."*

Romans 13:9 The commandments, *Don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal, don't desire what others have,* and any other commandments, are all summed up in one word: *You must **love your neighbor** as yourself.*

Galatians 5:14 All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement: **Love your neighbor as yourself.**

James 2:8. You do well when you really fulfill the royal law found in scripture, **Love your neighbor as yourself.**

17. Satisfied

3:9–12

'I can do no more than my best,' we often say. And yet, as we say it, we are so often acknowledging that, once again, our best has eluded us. It is a statement not of achievement but of failure. Even our own prejudiced and inadequate self-examination recognizes that there are heights and ideals which we have not realized. Few of us can say, with Paul, that 'as to righteousness under the law' we are 'blameless' (verse 6). But the Paul who could say it found no comfort in it, for it gave him no



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

confidence or standing before God. So it was with alacrity and gladness that he counted all his do-it-yourself righteousness as loss, and trusted Christ.

We have been following Paul's testimony along these lines in Philippians 3:4–8. In verses 9–12 the themes remain the same, but the apostle turns from facts to explanations. **In his testimony he has told us *what* happened; he now tells us *why* it must be so. Why is the *flesh* inadequate to provide us with acceptance before God? Why is Christ sufficient? And what is the nature of the satisfaction which he has found in Christ?**

1. Satisfied to be found in him

Paul has just portrayed the Lord Jesus Christ as an all-sufficient wealth which he is determined, as time passes, to **appropriate more and more** (verse 8). He now changes the picture: the Lord Jesus is a dwelling so attractive that Paul cannot bear to be away from home. He wants nothing except to *be found in him* (verse 9). There was a similar phrase in 2:8 where it says that Christ Jesus was 'found in human form'. This means that to any chance observer coming upon him at any time, the Lord Jesus presented a human appearance and would have been judged to be a man. Paul's desire to be 'found in Christ' means the same: he wants whoever looks at him, to see him as a man in Christ; whatever his experiences should turn out to be, he wants to face them as a man in Christ. Jesus is his permanent address. Paul may be in Rome, Philippi, Jerusalem; he may be healthy, sick, worried, free of care—but he will always be *in him*.

2. Satisfied to be blessed by him

In this 'permanent address', 'in Christ', there was one particular treasure: *righteousness*. In Christ, Paul describes himself as *not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith*. There is a righteousness which does not satisfy (*not ... a righteousness of my own*); there is a righteousness which meets the requirements (*the righteousness from God*); and there is a way by which this desired righteousness can be obtained (*that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith*).

Righteousness means being 'in the right with God'. Paul believes that in Christ, by faith, it is possible to stand under divine scrutiny and to secure the verdict: 'Paul is in the right'; 'Paul is all that I require him to be'; 'Paul is righteous'.

CAN I SAY THIS ABOUT MYSELF: _____ is in the right. _____ is all that I require them to be. _____ is righteous.

a. *The righteousness which he abandons.* [DIY RIGHTEOUSNESS!]

Being 'found in him', Paul has **no wish for a righteousness of my own, based on law**. This is a 'do-it-yourself' righteousness; it has arisen through self-effort or personal good works. These good works have been patterned on a legal code, and hence it is a righteousness *based on law*. Paul had once been able to boast of such a righteousness when it was his claim that he was 'as to the law a Pharisee



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

... as to righteousness under the law blameless' (verse 6). His own intense, demanding and sacrificial labours had produced conformity to a legal code of behaviour.

Of what worth was this conformist righteousness? Just that and nothing more, a 'certificate of good behaviour'! It was a righteousness *based on law*, literally 'out from the law', such a righteousness as proceeds from conforming to a standard. Now, such a righteousness does not give security. It does not make us confident that God will judge us favourably, and that for two reasons. First, even if we ever did attain such an unbroken record, we have still to maintain it until the judgment day, and one slip is enough to make the law pronounce an adverse verdict and make our 'righteousness' evaporate into nothing. But, more important, secondly, such a righteousness is self-conferred. We have weighed our own merits, examined our own right to the verdict. We have been both defendant and judge. We could never be certain that our verdict would command God's respect, or that our prejudiced and partial self-knowledge was as penetrating as his holy scrutiny. In particular we might award ourselves a high pass-mark by excusing or overlooking our inner defections from the path of obedience—just as Paul found himself beaten by the law when he faced its condemnation of covetousness. A certificate of good behaviour which we have awarded to ourselves is not enough to give us confidence as we face the judgment of God.

b. The righteousness which he desires

There is, however, the possibility of a certificate of righteousness which God awards, and in this case we can indeed be confident. For if God pronounces us right with him, then we are indeed secure for ever. This is what Christ means to Paul, and it is this which sheds lustre on his satisfaction at being *found in him*. **He tells us of its origin, the condition on which it is offered, and the way in which it is personally appropriated.**

As to its origin, it is the righteousness from God, and here again the word means 'out from'. This righteousness proceeds out from God; it is his award. The importance of this cannot be overstressed.

1. There can be no salvation unless God is satisfied. [JUSTIFICATION] Christ might die (may we say it reverently) a thousand deaths; sin might be cleansed away a thousand times; but if God is not satisfied with what has been done, then it is all a waste of time, effort and suffering. If God will not have us back, then every effort to bring us back is misconceived and pointless. But here is a salvation for sinners with which God is satisfied. It is a righteousness which 'proceeds *from God*'. Therefore it is certain from the start.

2. Secondly, it is offered on condition of faith, 'the righteousness from God that depends on *faith*'. Here is the simplicity and freeness of this salvation. Gone are the exertions of law-keeping, gone the disciplines and asceticisms of legalism, gone the anxiety that having done everything we might not have done enough. We reach the goal not by the stairs but by the lift. *Faith* means that we abandon works and efforts, and God pledges his promised righteousness to those who will stop trying to save themselves.

But this is not any old faith! There is a 'faith' (so-called) which is nothing more or less than credulity. **Faith is valuable only when it is reposed in a trustworthy object.** Of supreme value, then, is the righteousness which is ours **through faith in Christ**. How utterly and completely marvellous! **We rely upon the very Son of God himself to bring us home acceptably to God.** [RELATIONSHIP] The Son of God is the Mediator of the righteousness of God to those who place their faith in him.



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

What framework of knowledge did the Philippians possess, to enable them to understand these deep truths which Paul has expressed so briefly in verse 9? We must ask the same question for our own benefit: have we a framework of knowledge within which these references to righteousness, law and faith make sense?

Three keywords go far to providing the necessary setting.

1. The first is *substitution*. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the full expression of the righteousness of God: his words and teaching, his inner character and outer deeds, the works he accomplished, his relationships, his attitude to himself and his obedience to God, the absolute completeness of all he was, taught and did—in a word, everything that could ever be seen in him, said of him or sought from him is absolutely what the righteous God requires. It is not just that (so to speak), as far as he went, he matched what God required. It is rather that the Lord Jesus is the sum total of all that (even) God could ever ask. He *is* the righteousness of God. Now, in biblical thinking, it is this which fits him (and him alone) to be our substitute, to stand in our place, accept our condemnation and receive the penalty due to us. 'Your lamb shall be without blemish.' 'He made him to be sin who knew no sin.'³

2.. Move on now from substitution to *accountancy*. There is another side to the substitutionary work of Christ, for just as he became totally identified with us in our sin, so, in him, we become totally identified with his righteousness.

Behold him there! the risen Lamb!
My perfect, spotless Righteousness.

He was 'made sin for our sake ... so that in him we might become the righteousness of God'; 'your life' is 'in Christ Jesus, whom God made ... our righteousness'; 'by one man's obedience many will be made righteous'.

It is this total package—our sins laid on Jesus and his righteousness accounted to us—that we accept by simple faith. He has done it all; God promises all to us; we rest in faith on the divine promises and enter into the stated benefits. It is *not ... a righteousness of my own ... but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith*.

3.. The third keyword is *clothing*. 'You ... have put on the new nature', Paul says. That is to say, God's gift of righteousness is more than an act of accountancy; it is a new creation,⁷ a new heart and life within matching the perfect righteousness of Christ, ready and waiting to express itself outwardly in practical righteousness as we obey God as Jesus did—as we 'put on' the Lord Jesus Christ in our daily lives. To this thought Paul now leads us in Philippians 3:10.

3. Satisfied to be made like him

So free is this salvation, so completely independent of any efforts or merits of ours, that it is even open to the charge of making a virtue of sin. Paul faced this when he repeated the question some had levelled at him: 'Why not do evil that good may come?' For surely, if while we were sinners God showed this astonishing mercy to us, ought we not to continue in sin and thus provoke yet more and greater mercy? If, apart from our works and merits, God has blessed us with his gift of righteousness, ought we not to remain without works and merits and look for additional benefits?



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

The very fact that Paul's gospel is open to this charge is proof that he preached and believed in an absolutely, totally free salvation. If he had allowed the least room for us to contribute to our salvation his teaching could not have been slandered in this way. Salvation is indeed as free as that.

But we who have been saved have been given the gift of God's *righteousness*, and this implies a consequent 'right living'. For this reason Paul moves from verse 9, where he has taught free salvation, to verse 10, in which he shows that **the Christian is brought by salvation into the sphere of strict moral enterprise and endurance**. Paul, characteristically, calls it **becoming like Christ**. And does it not stand to reason that if we are satisfied with Christ for salvation, we will not rest until we are like the One who satisfied us so?

The topic of becoming like Christ is introduced with the words *that I may know him*. In scriptural terms, our definition of 'knowledge' as truth held in the mind offers only a third of the total. The Bible would add, first, a practical dimension. **Nothing is truly known until it becomes part of daily conduct**: 'To depart from evil is understanding.' Secondly, the Bible would add a personal dimension. In personal relationships, to 'know' is to **enter into the deepest personal intimacy and union**: 'Adam knew Eve his wife.' The Bible speaks in this way, not through reticence on sexual matters, but because this is what marriage is and this is what knowledge between persons is—deep, intimate union. Consequently, having been saved wholly and solely by Christ, Paul wants to enter into the deepest possible union with him. He wants to *know him*.

What does this involve? The career of Christ, as depicted in 2:5–11, was one of descent into death leading through into the glory of the ascension. To be made like Christ, to enter into intimate union with him, to know him, necessarily involves the same experiences, becoming *like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead*. How surprised we often are when (as we say) life brings its trials to us! But what did we expect? Do we want to be made like Christ or not? Christlikeness must lead to Calvary. We must be ready for—and we cannot hope to avoid—the downward path of the Crucified. It was true of Paul: down to the dungeon and thence to the executioner's block. 'All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted'; the servant must be made like his Lord; we must not 'be surprised at the fiery ordeal ... as though something strange were happening ... But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings'. This is the way the Lord Jesus went, and it is the way of Christlikeness for us.

But in dwelling on 'becoming like him in his death' we have taken the verse out of order. We must now retrace our steps and see what encouragements Paul uses as brackets round this reality of the cross in the experience of the Christian. First let us ask why he speaks of the resurrection of Christ before he has mentioned his death. Surely he has reversed the events of our Lord's experience? Indeed he has, but with a deliberate purpose. For Christ, death preceded resurrection, but for the Christian who sets out to follow the Lord along this path the power of the risen Christ is the first fact of experience. Thus, as we walk the path of Christlikeness in an apostolic determination to 'be made like him', even to the extent of sharing his sufferings, his risen power is made available to strengthen, keep and lead us through.

More than that, however, is available. For again, before he spoke of 'becoming like him in his death' Paul referred to 'sharing', or 'fellowship' in, his sufferings. Why does he thus make a double reference to the cross of Christ? **It is for this reason: he wants us to see that in desiring to follow**



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

him as faithful cross-bearers we are not left alone; he keeps fellowship with us; we are not copying a dead Model but walking in fellowship with a living Saviour.

These **emphases on power and companionship encourage us on the way. But the goal also encourages us: we aim at *the resurrection from the dead*** (verse 11). We could be misled by *if possible*, which seems to suggest that, after all, Paul was not sure of final salvation. If the verse meant this, it would not only be discordant with verse 9, but would flatly contradict 1:23, and many other passages in Paul's writings. Yet this verse does express uncertainty, not of the goal but of the way. The resurrection is certain; the intervening events are uncertain. We neither know how many days we have left on earth nor what those days will contain, but we do know that, be they many or few, smooth or rough, at the end of them there is the glory, *the resurrection from the dead*. Paul, therefore, encourages himself and us along the path of Christlikeness by sharing openly his determination, as though he said, 'so that by whatever route God in his providence shall ordain—and what it will be I do not know—empowered by the risen Christ and accompanied by Christ himself I will follow him, bearing my cross, descending with him into death, and then for all eternity, still with him, enjoy the glory of the resurrection'.

4. Satisfied to satisfy him

We come at the end of our study to a 'stock-taking' verse. Paul has expressed his readiness to 'go all the way' with Christ, so complete is his satisfaction in him. Now he pauses to assess the past (*Not that I have already obtained*), the present (*I press on*), and the future (*to make it my own; cf. RV*).

Three truths are stated here. **First, *the new perceptions which conversion brings***. We observed above that if we presume to be both defendant and judge in our own trial, we may not in fact arrive at a correct estimate of ourselves. We now see that that is indeed the case. Once upon a time Paul thought that he had 'arrived', for he judged himself 'as to righteousness under the law blameless' (verse 6). But hear his estimate now: *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect. Sinless perfection is not the experience even of an apostle this side of glory*. He sees himself with new eyes; he has received a spiritual understanding. Furthermore, knowing that he has not yet 'arrived', he sees something else: **that he is personally responsible to *press on***. The same Paul who, in verse 9, reminded us that we cannot by our efforts obtain the righteousness which is from God, is now determined to make every effort to live the righteous life. He says, *I press on*. The word is vigorous—'I pursue', 'I persecute'—as vigorous as the action with which once he persecuted the church (verse 6).

Secondly, we learn what is the ***inner story of conversion: Christ Jesus has made me his own***. We treasure the memory of our conversion, when we reached out the empty hand of faith to Jesus. But, behind this, making it possible, giving it reality, was the act of God who chose and took hold of us. Did Paul choose Christ? Indeed he did, but only because Christ first chose Paul. Christ's was the real choice; anything we did was derived from what God in Christ had already decided. We responded to, and were indeed enabled by, his prior choice. Thus Jesus himself said: 'You did not choose me, but I chose you.' It is this that gives us security and confidence: we are 'in Christ' because of his changeless, loving will that it should be so.

Finally, we find here ***the sole objective*** of those who are truly converted: ***to make it my own***. The Revised Version is quite explicit: 'that I may apprehend (*i.e.* grasp, accomplish) that for which I was



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

apprehended by Christ Jesus'. What did he have in mind when he took hold of me? In one sense there are as many purposes as there are individuals because, for each, God has already decided upon the good works by which we should serve him. But at the same time, for every converted person there is an identical goal: to be satisfied with Jesus and to grow into his likeness.

18. On to maturity

3:13–16

A bird's-eye view of verses 13–21 reveals that they are held together by two repeated ideas. According to verses 15 and 17 Christians are called to model themselves deliberately on the pattern set by Paul, and according to verses 14 and 20 this apostolic pattern of life is to be lived out by keeping our gaze steadfastly upon the future. The 'calls' issued by verses 15 and 17 are not substantially different from each other, but the future on which we are to look is variously expressed by the other two verses. According to verse 14, we have a goal to be attained, and according to verse 20 we have a Saviour to be awaited. Thus, there are two aspects to the life modelled on the apostolic pattern. On the one hand it is a life of personal commitment, effort and determination (verses 13–14); on the other hand, it is a life resting upon great certainties, in particular the abiding truths of the cross (verses 18–19) and the coming (verses 20–21) of the Lord Jesus. It is a life, therefore, of consecration and conviction.

Turning now particularly to verses 13–16, they fall into two sections. We find Paul's example in verses 13–14, as he continues the personal testimony which started in verse 4. Here he shares with us his determinations for the remainder of his life on earth. Verses 15–16 turn to the task of exhortation, for Paul has not spoken of himself out of a spirit of display but to provide a guide to the church and a standard of Christian living to which he does not hesitate to call other Christians. It is instructive to see here in Paul's experience a harmony often lacking in ours: the confidence of the leader and the companionship of the brother. Paul does not hesitate to put himself 'out front'. It is part of his calling as an apostle to give a lead to the church and he has a sturdy confidence that the life he has been enabled to live is not only exemplary but normative. Yet at the same time he speaks as a brother to *brethren* (verse 13) and with gentle grace allows the *I* of verses 13–14 to become the *us* of verse 15. We could not have a better illustration of the companionate leadership which we discussed in chapter 2 (on 1:1).

Paul is ever the attractive man, but even if his engaging revelation of himself in these verses failed to capture our attention, surely the subject he discusses must do so. For his topic is the Christian's energetic progress, heavenly goal and present maturity. Furthermore, he is confident that here is a scheme of things which God himself will teach to those who might at any point think differently.

1. Paul's example



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

Paul's formula for Christian growth, spelt out in terms of his own example, has four elements in it.

a. A correct self-estimate

Brethren, he says, *I do not consider that I have made it my own* (verse 13).

In the matter of progress towards perfection Paul is a brother among *brethren*. Christian leadership is a very demanding thing, costly in time and energy, imposing severe demands on mind and body, requiring much to ensure the present and future welfare of the church of God and the care of others. These things are absorbing as well as demanding and they come with the force of inescapable priorities in the leader's programme. It is easy, therefore, to be a leader and to forget to be a Christian, allowing personal targets of spiritual growth to become misted over; to encourage others to prayer and Bible-reading and to let one's own attention to these means of grace become perfunctory or even negligible—always with the excuse of the next duty, the coming meeting, the pressing appointment.

Paul did not say, 'I would love to pursue personal growth in holiness but sadly I must be otherwise occupied.' Neither will he allow anyone else to say, 'Such pursuit of holiness is only for apostles, not for ordinary folk like me.' It is for the *brethren*, the whole range of believers.

Paul's correct self-esteem, then, first puts him in company with all Christians, imposing alike on each one, himself included, the obligation to pursue perfection. But, secondly, he recognizes that he has not yet attained to all that God purposes for him, nor yet made it his own. The wording *made it my own* (verse 13) derives from the identical words in verse 12. In that verse Paul defines what he is determined to 'make his own', namely to be 'perfect'. This word, in turn, summarizes the theme of verses 9–10. To be 'perfect' means to become increasingly like our Lord Jesus Christ, with his righteousness, not only as an inward, spiritual gift but as an outward way of life. His pattern of life is reproduced as we suffer even unto death which alone issues in a resurrection like his. In all this Paul has not yet 'arrived' but was still on his way. Truly, knowing Christ has brought Paul to a very different self-estimate from that which his Pharisaic upbringing had inculcated (verse 6)—and a more realistic and sobering one at that. He did not 'think of himself more highly than he ought to think' and this lowly self-estimate was a springboard to progress.

b. A single-minded zeal

There is an impressive *activity* about Christian progress. It has, as a matter of fact, been a point of considerable stress in Paul's letter to Philippi: recall his exhortations to 'stand firm', 'work', 'run' and 'labour', the bond-service of 2:22 and the 'nearly died' of 2:30. There is no room for indolence in the Christian life. And here, when Paul is dwelling on his own personal growth as a Christian, his 'sanctification', he reveals himself as one shouldering a responsibility and getting on with a job. Sanctification does not permit spiritual abdication.

Equally impressive is the emphasis on *concentration*. The Greek (of verse 13) says literally, 'One thing! Forgetting what lies behind ...'. Needless to say we are not to imagine Paul forgetting God's past mercies—for he has, indeed, been dwelling most pointedly upon them since verse 7. Nor would he forget the valuable lessons of the past—these too have been his recent theme (verses 2–6). What,



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

then, is this forgetting of the past which he urges with such emphasis? It is the sort of dwelling on the past that hinders our present effort and our future progress. We do well gently to remind ourselves that a bereavement can sometimes make Christians live in the past; similarly we easily harbour a persistent bitterness about past wrongs (real or supposed). There are few things that have such power to lock us into the past. Again, there is despair over past sins which, in its severest form, can make believers doubt if they will ever be forgiven or which, in less tragic forms, gives rise to defeatism and backward-looking. There are many similar things that make us like the man in Zechariah 2:1–4 who wanted to measure the ruins of Jerusalem, allowing bygone glories and past failures to decide the dimensions of the future. By contrast the progressing Christian must cultivate a concentrated forward look to where the goal lies.

This requires *determination: straining forward ... I press on*. Here is the runner in the games, 'extended' in every fibre of his being—'the eye outstrips and draws on the hand, and the hand the foot'—everything is at a stretch to breast the tape. The metaphor changes with *I press on*, literally 'I pursue, I persecute'. No obsessive hatred ever dogged the heels of its adversary with more tenacity than the apostle held to the target of Christian perfection. This is a far cry from the teaching on sanctification which calls believers to 'let go and let God'. There was not much 'letting go' about Paul, but rather an example of the truth that the regenerate believer must appropriate the sanctifying grace of God by actively obeying him.

c. An absorbing desire

What is it that holds Paul's gaze as he turns from the past and preoccupies himself with the future? It is *the goal ... the prize* (verse 14).

Sometimes a thing is all the more impressive for being left undescribed. Paul tells us neither what the goal is nor what the prize will be. Yet suddenly the earthly scene with all its strivings, sufferings and sacrifices is suffused with heavenly glory. One scriptural picture after another fills and elevates the mind: the Lord's own 'Well done!'; 'the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day';⁶ 'the unfading crown of glory', gift of the chief Shepherd; the privilege (above all) that his servants should worship him, see his face and have his name written on their foreheads;⁸ the blood-cleansed robes and the unending presence of the Lord.¹⁰ All this and, in addition, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him'. That is the goal and the prize!

d. A sure foundation

All this activity is not 'whistling in the dark'; it is not the panic of someone trying by every means to make certain of something about which he feels basically insecure. In this active doctrine of sanctification which Paul is preaching by his example, he is not abandoning justification by faith; he is not denying that salvation is free. It is in fact because both our salvation and our sanctification have been perfectly and fully accomplished for us by Christ that we can be saved by responding in faith without works, and sanctified by responding in faithful obedience.

Paul ends his delineation of his example on this note of security and certainty. The prize towards which he is drawn in disciplined and concentrated activity is described as belonging to ('of') *the*



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

upward call (or 'high calling') of God in Christ Jesus. A study of the idea of 'calling' in the Epistles of Paul will reveal that its meaning is not 'invitation' into gospel privileges but the power of God over the wills of his people. It is not God's invitation to be saved; it is God's determination to save. The prize is part of, and is guaranteed by, God's saving purposes at work in Paul, and in all his called children. It is for this reason that, in the other passage where he mentions a 'prize', Paul depicts himself fighting 'not as aimlessly' or 'uncertainly'.¹⁴ His final salvation, with all the glories of its rewards, was secured for him by and with God's calling of him in Christ.

2. Paul's exhortation

As always in the Bible, we learn not only what is true but also how to respond to the truth. In the present passage Paul turns to make clear what bearing his example is to have on Christian living. He underlines two points: that the apostolic example he has set is normative for Christians (verse 15) and that Christians are to grow by honouring and responding to the truth as they at present grasp it (verse 16).

Paul was confident that he held a key place in relation to other Christians. In other passages in his letters he asserted his authority as an apostle in matters of doctrine, requiring the churches to receive what he taught as the commandment of God. But here his claim touches on his manner of life: he sets the pattern which every Christian is to follow.

His confidence comes out in two ways. First, he believes that every mature Christian will want to adopt the apostolic lifestyle (*be thus minded*, verse 15). The word *mature* in verse 15 is the adjective which corresponds to the verb 'am perfect' in verse 12. Bengel helpfully suggests that both are drawn from the vocabulary of athletics: 'Am perfect' means 'crowned as victor', 'having attained the prize'. 'Mature' means 'fit', 'in training', 'ready for the contest'. Such a Christian, Paul believes, will fully approve and adopt the apostolic principles and pattern of life.

Secondly, we see Paul's confidence in his own example in his assertion that God will set the seal of his approval on it. If anyone should diverge from the apostolic way of looking at life, God will even 'reveal this'—Paul's principles and practices—to that person. The mind of God and the mind of the apostle are at one.

This claim is both enormous in itself and also of great practical importance. The New Testament teaches the uniqueness of the apostolic band. Since the days of Paul and his fellow apostles, no-one has been able to say, 'Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' No-one has been able to say, 'The gospel which was preached by me ... came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.' No-one has been able to say, 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.' The apostolic band has the unique, unrepeatable position of church-founders.¹⁹ They were organs of revelation, infallible teachers. But they were also—as here in the case of Paul—divinely-given examples of the way to live the life of Christ in the world. The church today is apostolic, not by virtue of any man or order of men claiming to be apostolic, but by virtue of its adherence to apostolic doctrine and its imitation of apostolic life as enshrined in and taught by the Scriptures. Doctrine and demonstration go hand in hand. There is a knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness and there is a manner of life which adorns the doctrine. Since we today live at a time of (unprecedented?) challenge to apostolicity on both counts, we must be very watchful indeed. Paul anathematizes those who would alter the terms of the gospel of Christ,²¹ his words 'God gave them up' refers to those who, by exchanging the truth of



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

God for a lie, committed themselves to the dishonouring of their bodies, to lesbian and homosexual practices and to the subversion of all moral norms.

Even though Paul knew that he possessed this authority in the church, however, the spirit in which he writes to the Philippians is very far from authoritarian. Bishop Moule wrote at one point in the margin of his Greek New Testament, 'Apostolus, non papa!'—'An apostle, not a pope!' Paul exercised authority, not dictatorship. He addresses himself to those who, not in name only but also in reality, were his *brethren* (verses 13, 17). He modulates the *I* of verse 14 to the *us* of verse 15. Apostle though he is, yet he is a believer among believers, needing their fellowship, taking a common stand with them in the pursuit of holiness. When, therefore, he faces the fact that not all will at once concur with his teaching (verse 15), his word to such is not one of intolerance: 'Look out! I am the final arbiter in such things.' Rather he commits all to what God will reveal (verse 15b) and enunciates a rule of life for each individual (verse 16). *Only*—that is to say, 'understand all I have said in the light of this'—since we have each attained to some standing in Christ and some understanding of his truth, *let us hold true to what we have attained*. This is the way forward. The exercise of private judgment is essential if the individual is to grow in Christ.

In thus calling the individual to make responsible decisions, Paul is not countenancing the arbitrary or the whimsical; he is calling for a disciplined pattern of life in the light of truth already possessed in Christ. He addresses those who *have attained* and commands them to hold true. Each of the verbs he uses is important. First, the idea of attainment shows that he is not saying that in religious matters any individual's opinion is as good and valid as that of any other. That which has been attained can be only some awareness of the objective truth revealed in and by Christ. Paul, therefore, is not envisaging a situation where people stubbornly maintain their personal whims or intuitions or opinions against every argument to the contrary, but rather a situation where each Christian must be faithful to what he knows of Christ.

Secondly, the verb translated *hold true* indicates that he has in mind a thought-out and maintained lifestyle, based on and displaying the truth of Christ as the individual knows it. In other words, putting the matter in our own context, the individual believer is free to work out a rule of thought and behaviour in the light of the Word of God. This is the way of Christian progress, for we will constantly develop in both our beliefs and our conduct as God allows more and yet more light to break forth out of his Word.

Three remarks must be added, briefly, in conclusion of this study. First, what Paul proposes here is a true educational procedure. Education, growth to maturity, involves risk, for it has to make room for a process of trial and error. A child guarded by over-fond parents from every knock of life and every adverse result of its own behaviour will never emerge from childhood. Thus God 'takes the risk' of giving us his Word. The totalitarianism of an all-provident ecclesiastical authority, complete with all the answers, shouldering all the responsibilities, cushioning from every adversity, sounds safer. But such safety can be purchased only at the expense of fixation in spiritual infancy. We need the 'trial and error' of living by Scripture in order to grow: to discover what the Bible teaches, put it to the test, find where we were mistaken, return and try again. This is truly 'scientific'.

Secondly, since each biblical truth must be held in the context of all biblical truth, this call to exercise 'private judgment' does not put a premium on isolated 'individualism'. We live in the fellowship of the church, heirs to all that the past has garnered in understanding the Scriptures, enriched by the light which we contribute to each other in the mutuality of church life. It is as James



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

says regarding progress to maturity: 'the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.'

And finally, the risk is not all that great! For Paul does not expect us to achieve everything on our own. There is a God who is over all, whose irresistible purpose is to make us like his Son. As we obey the truth he has already given us, he will himself take charge of the process, and where we are still in error, deficient or weak, he *will reveal that also*.

19. Enemies of the cross

3:17–19

For the second time within a few verses Paul calls us to follow his example. The summons in verse 15 (to share his determination to 'press on') follows naturally from his extended testimony in verses 4–14. Because he is an apostle of Christ, the way he lives sets the standards and enunciates the principles of true Christian living—his growing delight in the Lord Jesus, reliance on him alone for salvation, determination to be like him and to do his will, single-minded pursuit of the prize (verses 8–14). The summons in verse 17 is significantly different: we are to esteem the truth as he did, marry the truth to love, and balance individualism with pastoral care.

The truth occupied a primary place in apostolic living. When he commands us to follow his example (verse 17) he adds an explanation: *For ...* (verse 18). The link between the verses is as follows: Imitate me because by doing so you will live a life which accords with the truth about the *cross* (verse 18) and the *coming* (verse 20) of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, when the truths about the cross and the coming are grasped, a certain way of life naturally follows. This integration between what we believe and what we do lies close to the centre of Paul's thinking. He expressed it beautifully in writing to Titus: some 'profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds'; Christians must 'adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour' by the way they live.

The truth—rather, we ought to say, the knowledge of the truth—must be married to love. Paul was a great weeper. He wept over those whom he taught and over those whom he rebuked. Here he weeps for those against whom he must warn. In him there was a sincere union of truth and love. Paul engaged in controversy, but he was no hard-faced controversialist; he taught the truth but he was not a detached, disinterested teacher; he warned about error and wept over those who held it. This is part of his example to us.

There is also a third new feature in Paul's example. He has previously shown himself as a zealous individualist, all out for his own spiritual growth. The prize-winner dare not pause to help others over the hurdles. But see here another side of the apostle, when he weeps with care for people, and when he takes pains to lead the Philippians in the way of Christ. Individual care for one's own spiritual progress must keep in touch with pastoral responsibility for the souls and welfare of others. The Christian has no right to expect anything else but that he must bear his own load. Yet he must be ready at all times to bear the other's burden.⁴ There is of course a due priority to be observed, for



Philippians
Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness
Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

Paul depicted himself as the zealous runner before he turned to be the zealous pastor, and it must always be so. 'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock'; 'Take heed to yourself and to your teaching.'⁶ We can never help keep someone else's vineyard if we neglect our own, but the apostolic example says to us, 'This you should have done, and not have left the other undone.' Both activities are equally obligatory.

1. Contrast

Having observed these incidental aspects of Paul's example, we turn to the main line of his teaching. He has already outlined his manner of life and called for unanimity and imitation. Now, in order to sharpen our awareness of what he is asking of us, he gives us a negative example. He calls attention to the life he requires by contrasting it with the life he rejects. We shall more clearly see what to follow if we know what to avoid.

Whom precisely is he warning us against? Some say that these 'enemies of the cross' are the 'Judaizers', the 'Christ-plus' people of verse 2. Some say that he is warning against anti-nomianism, the sin of those who abuse their liberty in Christ, making it an open licence to every sort of indulgence. Or, equally, he could be warning against the pull of the world, the ever-open door to depart from the way of Christ.⁸ In the long run it makes no odds whom he is decrying, and it is better not to attach the verses too firmly to any situation in the past. For the threat is still present to the Christian, as we shall see, and the description is perfectly clear even if names are absent.

First, Paul says that *their end is destruction*. He looks beyond this world to the next and finds no hope at all for them there, nothing but eternal loss. The same fate awaits them as awaits the opposing world and the 'beast' of Revelation—a fate described as 'the lake of fire' and 'the second death'. Bible students differ as to how this is to be understood, and it would take us far off course to enter into details. It is enough to know that their ultimate end is an eternal and irreversible separation from God. But the 'end' for Paul, the goal and outcome of the apostolic life, is very different: 'the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus'.¹⁰

Secondly, they worship themselves: *their god is the belly*. They recognize no need and no authority outside personal satisfaction. Their appetites dictate their lives. Again, this is not the apostolic way. Paul, who had 'no confidence in the flesh', testified to being far from perfect ('not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect') and very far from content with present attainments ('straining forward ... I press on ...'). Thus, again, two ways of life are in contrast.

Thirdly, they find cause to glory in things of which they ought to be ashamed. Their sense of values justifies as allowable things which it ought to condemn. Paul was wholly absorbed in 'glorying in Christ Jesus' (verses 3, 7–12) and in making every effort to attain what Christ had purposed for his life. The contrast here is between making the self and making Christ the moral authority for life.

Finally, there is a contrast of horizons. They are earth-bound. Their minds are *set on earthly things*. Their whole attention, their point of view or way of looking at things, their general frame of mind, their customary objects of study—all these are earth-centred and bounded by the horizons of this world. But Paul's eyes are on heaven, and the prize of the heavenly calling (verse 14).

Why does Paul go out of his way to depict this contrasting life? Because he must warn against it. This is no external danger or far-off contingency. He sees his Philippians as faced daily by this contrary example: *mark those who so live* (verse 17). There are two ways of life constantly inviting the



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

obedience of the Christian, and Paul had nothing else to offer but the constant pulling of the one against the other. There is no recipe for 'peace' (so-called) here. There is no promise of deliverance from struggle, tension and persistent temptation. Like Israel of old, the Christian of today stands between the blessing and the cursing, the way of life and the way of death, and the whole Christian pathway is the battle to choose life. This is the meaning of the stark contrast between the life of the apostle and the life of those whom he calls *enemies of the cross*. Faithfully and in love to us Paul has raised the warning sign.

2. Diagnosis

Since we can never escape the pull of temptation till we are safe with Christ, we must dwell a little on Paul's diagnosis in order to see more precisely the character of those whose end is destruction. As they progress towards this end, there are three points of spiritual degeneration: *their god is the belly*, *their glory is in their shame*, and *their minds are set on earthly things*.

The first point at which they are spiritually degenerating is *their devotion to self-indulgence*. Their appetites and emotions have ceased to be subject to them and have been accorded the place of lordship and worship. They are governed by self-pleasing in bodily matters. Paul does not elaborate. He does not call them fornicators or drug-addicts or particularize their pet sensualities. If he did so we might stand aloof from the warning, if it did not happen to apply to us. The warning is not against particular sins, but against the underlying sin of pandering to self. In one Christian the temptation may be towards sexual sin, in another towards gossiping, in another towards lying in bed instead of being alone with God in the morning. Paul raises the warning. Here is the downward path and those who walk it are enemies of the cross of Christ. There must have been many mature believers in the church at Rome, for Paul was inspired to write to them his major doctrinal epistle. But he still thought it appropriate to call them away from revelling and drunkenness, debauchery and licentiousness. The bodily sin is never far beneath the surface even of the most advanced saint, and the warning is always necessary.

Paul's second observation as he diagnoses spiritual degeneration is *their reversal of moral standards: they glory in their shame*. In other words, they exalt things and practices which they ought to be ashamed of but are not. Clearly this is the next stage downward. First they give themselves to indulgence; next they justify themselves in doing so and say that this is a proper and allowable way of life. Long ago the prophet Isaiah saw the very same thing in the life of his nation. He observed those who 'call evil good and good evil'. He noted two aspects of their reversal of moral standards: they 'put darkness for light and light for darkness' and they 'put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter'. Light and darkness are objective facts governing all alike. By this illustration he showed how they tried to make their topsy-turvy moral code a law of public behaviour. Bitter and sweet are matters of individual preference. By this illustration he showed that their public code was rooted in their life of self-pleasing. So it is with those whom Paul describes. But once more he does not particularize. There is no dwelling upon this or that reversal of moral values, but upon the thing itself. The warning has been given. Here is the downward path and those who walk it are enemies of the cross of Christ.

We are sometimes inclined to think that no period of history has ever been like ours in attempting to reverse moral standards. This is most unlikely to be true. Now, as always, the world is preaching its own standards and very, very often they are not the standards of God's Word. The Christian must



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

remember that we are called not only to believe revealed doctrine but to obey revealed law, and the book of the law should not depart from our mouth, but we should meditate on it day and night in order to make our way, our public life and conduct, prosperous.

In the final diagnosis the root of the trouble is discovered in *their cultivation of an earthly mind*: their *minds* are *set on earthly things*. At the very centre of their being, where their life finds its direction, where attitudes and tendencies are fashioned which subsequently influence decisions and govern likes and dislikes—at this vital centre the world and its ways are the whole object of attention. The mind is set upon earth.

Consider another passage in the Bible in which Paul reveals why the world is under the wrath of God. Men 'suppress the truth'; 'although they knew God they did not honour him as God'; they 'became futile in their thinking'; 'they exchanged the truth about God'; 'they did not see fit to acknowledge God'; 'God gave them up to a base mind'. The point of spiritual collapse was where people know, grasp truth, reason, make up the mind. The rebellion of the mind from God is the fundamental state of the sinner.

Turn now to other passages in which Paul reveals the life of regeneration: 'be transformed by the renewal of your mind'; 'be renewed in the spirit of your minds'; 'set your minds on things that are above.' What a vital part the mind plays in the experience of the Christian! Paul will soon say to the Philippians, 'Whatever is true, ... honourable, ... just, ... pure, ... lovely, ... gracious, ... think about these things' (4:8). The wise man advised, 'Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life.' The mind astray from God is the most potent of all forces for spiritual disaster. Paul has raised his warning again. Here is the downward path, and those who walk on it are enemies of the cross of Christ.

3. Remedy

The fourfold description, touching on the destiny, emotions, conscience and mind of those over whom Paul weeps, is summed up in one statement: they are *enemies of the cross of Christ*. It is easy to see why destruction should be the destiny of an enemy of the cross, for no-one but Christ can bring us to God, and no name but his can save. It is by his cross that he achieved these purposes, bringing us to new life in his kingdom.²⁰ But in what ways do self-pleasing, perverted standards and a worldly cast of mind class us as enemies of the cross?

The first answer to this question is the hardest to accept. We are by nature in a state of enmity against God and these conditions of the emotions, conscience and mind are at the heart of that hostile nature. When we think of ourselves in our pre-conversion days, or when we look around at our non-Christian friends, 'enmity' against God and Christ is not a word which would all that often spring to our minds. For the most part, we did not feel hostile. It was just that we did not really want to be bothered, or to have to face the demands of Jesus, or to think too much about that rather threatening business of giving our lives over to him. But we must remind ourselves that Jesus described as his 'enemies' those 'who did not want me to reign over them'. We are no more the best judge of our condition than is the patient who, on hearing the doctor's diagnosis of cancer, replies, 'But I feel all right.' The divine Diagnostician notes that it was 'while we were enemies' that 'we were reconciled' by the death of Christ, and that 'the mind of the flesh is enmity against God'.²²



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

Secondly, when we contemplate the cross—or rather, the One who died on the cross—we see embodied there values directly opposed to, inimical to, those against which Paul warns us in verse 19. In Gethsemane our Lord denied himself. On the cross he upheld and displayed the righteousness of God and his law, took with the utmost seriousness (even as far as death) all the legal demands against us, and cancelled them, nailing them as receipted bills to his cross.²⁴ In all this he had the ‘heavenly mind’ we studied in 2:5–8: the determination to obey God and love sinners, whatever the cost to himself.

Thirdly, on the cross Christ identified himself with all our self-pleasings, reckoned as his own all our shady moral compromises and open moral lapses, and became in himself the sin which anchored us to earth and destined us for hell. By bearing our sin in his own body on the cross, he discharged our debt before God, wiped away our past and re-created us in his own image. To continue in sin as if he had never died, to value sinful practices as if he had not exposed and discredited them, to live within earthly horizons as if the Son of God had not opened before our eyes a vision of heaven, and to remain bound by the trammels of the old life when he has achieved new life for sinners—is not this to oppose all that the cross means? Is it not enmity?

But those who love his cross find it to be ‘the power of God’, and find their union with the crucified but now living Christ to be the ground and means of transformed living. Bishop Handley Moule died in 1920. In January 1919 he wrote to a nephew: ‘I have often prayed that daily, and to the end, I may live as in a tent pitched between the Cross and the Grave of our Lord—the *empty* Cross, symbol and seal of His finished work of sacrifice and redemption, the *empty* grave, likewise the evidence and pledge of His eternal victory for us over the last enemy, death, and of our life hid with Him in God. May your tent be ever there also’—and there, we might say, not only because of the power of the cross and resurrection in the face of death, but also because of their power in the face of life:

Safe sheltered from alarm and loss
I sit within my quiet tent;
'Twixt here a Grave and there a Cross
My days and nights in peace are spent.
Peace, grace and glory now he gives,
Fair fruits of his unfathomed woes,
And with me in my tent he lives,
The Lamb that died, the Life that rose.

20. Christ our hope

3:20–21



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

The Bible is a great book for insisting on living in the present: 'Now is the day of salvation.' But it never draws a foolish line between past, present and future. Successful life in the present takes account of the lessons and blessings of the past, and of the demands and prospects of the future. In this present passage, Paul has already shown that life lived in the apostolic mould rests upon the past event of Calvary. It is a proper relation to and love for the cross of Christ which rescues us from the danger of spiritual degeneration. But equally we must have that forward look which was such a characteristic of the New Testament. Did the apostles believe that Christ would come back in their lifetime? Of course they did, for no other attitude is permitted to the New Testament Christian—then or now.

This is a doctrine that has very largely been forgotten—where it is not denied altogether—by the church today. And very often in those sections of the church where it is still held and studied, the joy of the Lord's return is lost in controversies and speculations of a most forbidding nature. Paul has a word for all in these present verses. Those who have forgotten the Lord's coming again will find here a thrilling reminder of it. Those who have almost lost sight of the coming Saviour amid the complexities of theories about when and where and how, will be recalled to the bare and glorious essential, that he will come again. Those who dismiss such a doctrine—for whatever reason—must face here an apostolic reaffirmation of it in the most unequivocal terms.

1. A distinctive Christian belief

In the last study we saw how the life and prospects of the enemies of the cross of Christ contrasted, point by point, with the personal life and hopes of Paul. In verse 20, where he turns to speak of the hope that is common to all Christians, he naturally changes from the 'I' of testimony to the 'we' of shared truth. But again, and as if deliberately, he points up the contrast between the 'enemies' and those with whom he identifies himself.

The 'enemies of the cross' are heading for destruction (verse 19), but we are waiting for *a Saviour* from heaven (verse 20). They are devoted to the body, worshipping and making a god of its appetites. But we, quite the reverse, look for its transformation, for we consider it to be *our lowly body*, literally 'the body of our humiliation' (verse 21). They have a perverted, topsy-turvy scale of values, glorying in shameful things, but we possess a true perception of value, having some appreciation even now of his glory (verse 21). And finally, they are earth-bound, while *our commonwealth is in heaven* (verse 20).

Thus the contrast is complete, but the description—or the implied description—is unexpected. They are 'enemies of the cross of Christ'. We might have expected that when the apostle describes the opposite sort of people he would call them 'lovers, or friends, of the cross of Christ'—and such a description would be true, for Calvary is the source of all that makes us different from Christ's 'enemies'. But he does not do so. He describes us as 'watchers for the return'—*we await a Saviour*.

This parity of the cross and the return is noteworthy. Is it not true to say that we think of the cross as a cardinal Christian doctrine to a degree that we do not usually accord to the second coming? But Paul makes the two events equally the basis of present Christian living. Indeed the more one studies these verses the more it becomes apparent that Paul could equally well have described the 'enemies' as hostile to the Lord's return and Christians as living on the basis of his past work of salvation on the cross.



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

The return of Christ, then, is a distinctive Christian doctrine and cannot be jettisoned from our statement of faith if we are to return to the New Testament. We must learn, in fact, to think in God's way. We have been taught already that 'he who began a good work in you' is continually completing it with a view to 'the day of Jesus Christ'. The second coming is the designed end of all God's saving work. Again we have been taught that the death of Christ has been the subject of deliberate divine appraisal and response; that God has responded to the cross in the supreme exaltation of Jesus above every conceivable authority,³ and that the intended outcome of this is universal submission to Jesus Christ who is Lord. In God's estimation Calvary requires the return as its only just and adequate acknowledgment. Nothing else will suffice to express what God thinks of the obedience of his Son. To deny the return is to fail to appreciate the cross; to forget the return is to lose hold of the excellence of the cross.

2. The Christian's personal longing

Because he has this awareness of the return of Christ as a central Christian belief, alongside the cross, Paul expects that all Christians will be one with him in looking for it expectantly. He speaks, therefore, of *we*. What is this expectation?

First, we note a longing for the blessings which the returning Christ will bring with him. Very practically Paul puts his finger on the point of our present need, *our lowly body* (verse 21). It is no wonder that he had to warn us so strongly of the power of the example of those whose 'god is the belly' (verse 19). For Christians are very aware of the downward pull of their bodies. Here is an area where Christians constantly fall short and fail: we fail to control our lust, manage our tongue, overcome the laziness which keeps us out of bed too late at night and in bed too late in the morning, and subdue the 'unwilling flesh' which clogs the ambitions of the 'willing spirit'. This is not to mention the gradual failing of bodily strength with the passing years, so that our mental powers wane and understanding diminishes, or the debilitating and often humiliating aspects of illness, or failing sight, or any of the other numerous ways in which the body holds us back and keeps us down—truly *our lowly body*.

But we hope for One who will change our lowly body *to be like his glorious body*. Paul elsewhere described this refashioning as the continuation of personal identity in the midst of remarkable alteration: the seed growing into its own characteristic flower. A seed is a humble thing, unprepossessing and to all outward appearance unpromising. Yet this seed becomes that flower in a continuous process of wonderful transformation. So it will be for our loved ones who are already with the Lord. We shall know them when we see them, for there is continuity within the glory; so it will be for us who love his cross and his coming.

When Paul says that our destiny is *to be like his glorious body*, we must be cautious in what we understand it to mean. The (literally) 'body of his glory' is the vehicle of outward action and expression which perfectly matches and responds to his inner, perfect nature. But what do words like 'outward' and 'inner' mean in relation to the heavenly state? We are in no position at present to say. The Bible—indeed Jesus himself—permits us to use the familiar language of space and time in relation to heaven, while giving us reason to believe that it all transcends our present powers of thought and description. We have a clue to Paul's meaning here in the fact that *like* in verse 21 translates the same word as *like* in verse 10. There it obviously refers to experiences like his, not to



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

an appearance like his. In the present verse surely the balance must be the same: when the Lord Jesus comes again it will be to bring us into full possession of the total salvation he obtained on the cross. In particular, according to the present verses, in place of a body which is so often at odds with spiritual aspirations, so often a drag on our spiritual endeavours, there will be a body matching his in being the perfect means of living the full, whole life of Christ. Yet, at the same time, can we exclude the thought that in appearance, too, we shall each reflect something of the likeness of our Saviour? After all, it is into his image that we are being transformed, and the glory of the day of his coming will in part be that we shall find ourselves like the One we shall then see.

The blessings which the returning Lord brings are thus very great, yet they are not the primary object of our longing expectations. The first longing is for the Lord himself: *we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*. The verb (*apekdechomai*) expresses concentrated eagerness and persistence of expectation. It suggests an eye detached from every other object to watch only for him when he comes in the fullness of his office as *Saviour* (here again is the link between the coming and the cross) and in the fullness of his divine-human Person, *the Lord Jesus Christ*. We can catch something of Paul's own longing in that he omits nothing here from the full title of his Saviour—*the Lord Jesus Christ*. It is he himself who is the supreme attraction in the Christian hope. We may well look forward to many things: deliverance at last from even the presence of sin and temptation; meeting the great ones of old—Abraham, Isaiah, Paul himself; reunion with loved ones we knew on earth; the glory of the heavenly places. Yes, indeed, all these things, but beyond them all that one feature which gives coherence and meaning and focus to heaven, that one Person through whom alone this great company is gathered and for whom alone is the glory, 'the Lamb standing, as though it had been slain', 'the Lamb in the midst of the throne', the *Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*. 'So shall we always be *with the Lord*', wrote Paul in another place. 'His servants shall worship him; they shall see his face', promised John.¹¹

3. A guaranteed certainty

No argument against the possibility of the second coming can survive the teaching of these verses. Here indeed is something that deserves the description 'hope', for in the New Testament there is no uncertainty in hope, but the assurance that what we hope for will happen at an unspecified time. Paul offers no dates for the return of Christ. It is an imminent possibility for which the Christian must be in constant readiness and it is capable of tarrying for a thousand years. But nothing can stop it happening at the moment which God the Father has foreordained for it.¹³

The guarantee is expressed here in the words *by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself* (verse 21). The ability of the Lord is stated in three ways here. First, it is available power, the power resident in his divine nature. This is expressed by the verb *enables*. This Greek word (*dynamai*) has contributed the word 'dynamite' to the English language, and that is not a bad pointer to its force. But, secondly, that is not all. Many people possess great powers, even great resources, but lack the opportunity, or the right, or the wisdom, or the ability to make them effective. Not so our Lord! His power is also effective power. We have already met the verb corresponding to the noun here translated *power* (2:13). Its significance is 'power in exercise', a 'working' which comes right in on target and cannot be deflected from its aim.



Philippians

Week 4: Deconstructing Righteousness

Wednesday Night Crew-Adult Bible Study, May 2023

Thirdly, it is the invincible power enabling him *even to subject all things to himself*—the ‘forces’ of nature, the ordered universe, the unbelieving hearts of men, spiritual wickedness in heavenly places, the prince of the power of the air: mention any opponent of the return of Christ and Scripture will nullify its opposition by the power that subdues all things. The power of Christ is thus inherent, applied and invincible, and it is this power which underwrites the promise of his coming again.

4. Present implications

We do not gaze into the future in order to satisfy the ‘horoscope’ mentality. The promise of his coming is given without date so that we may live daily preparing to meet our Lord. Life in the present is motivated by awareness of the future. Indeed, Paul opens his discussion of the future coming with a present tense: *Our commonwealth is in heaven*. The word is really ‘citizenship’ (as RV), the noun corresponding to the verb discussed at 1:27. Christians are, even now, citizens of the commonwealth of heaven, and this is our status as we await our Saviour. We belong to a far-off homeland and wait for the King of that land to come and fetch us. Our names are on the citizenship rolls there and our place is secure, but while we wait here we must live as if we were there.

All this would have appealed to the Philippians, for they were already living as citizens of the far-off Rome and they knew the sort of life citizenship involved. In our heavenly homeland, the primary feature is the constant presence of the King. Very well, then, as citizens, that is the present privilege of our lives; in the heavenly homeland, all are conformed to his likeness: let us occupy ourselves till he come in becoming ‘like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead’. In heaven, all things obey his will: we must give ourselves to the primary duty of obedience. And in heaven the reality of his almighty power is evident and experienced: this is the power at work in us¹⁶ and available to us to live out our lives in the apostolic pattern and in accordance with the truth of Christ.¹

¹ Motyer, J. A. (1984). [*The message of Philippians*](#) (pp. 145–198). InterVarsity Press.