**Philippians Chapter 3:4-6**

**Pastor Peterson**

**The “Pressing On” of the Christian Believer, 3:1–21**

**B.** **Pressing On: Paul’s Personal Testimony—Rejecting Self-Righteousness and Seeking Perfection, 3:4–16**

**Introduction**: all across the world men sense they need a relationship with God. They have a sense of God, but they sense there is something wrong between them and God. Sometimes they feel things are right; other times as though things are wrong. But underlying whatever feelings they have, men are never sure whether or not things are right with God. They lack perfect assurance and confidence that they please God enough to be acceptable to Him. They have a hope that God will accept them, but they do not know, not with absolute certainty.

It is these feelings that have stirred the religions of the world. Men want to be right with God; they want to be approved and accepted by God. They want God to look after them and help them, and they want God to accept them when this life is over. Therefore, they set out to do what they feel will make them *good enough* to be acceptable to God. They try to do whatever good they feel is necessary to please *their god*. Granted, the degree to which men feel this differs among all men. One man will feel that he has to be extremely good, whereas another man feels that he has to be moderately good. The point to note is this: *this kind of religion* is a religion …

• of works

• of doing good

• of securing God’s favor

• of making oneself acceptable to God

• of being good

• of preparing oneself for God

• of making oneself approved by God

It is a religion of self-righteousness—of becoming as righteous and good as a person can—of earning and meriting God’s favor—of working one’s way into God’s presence. There is, of course, a severe fallacy with this approach to God.

⇒ God is perfect and not a single person is perfect. No person can do enough good to become perfect no matter what he does. In fact, man is already imperfect; and once perfection is lost, it is lost. Imperfection can never become perfection, not by the efforts of human (imperfect) flesh. Imperfection cannot make perfection.

The point is this: no person can ever earn or merit the right to live in God’s presence. If a person is ever going to live in God’s presence, it will be because God loves the person enough to accept him and to transform him into a perfect person. This is exactly what God does through Jesus Christ. God accepts men *through His Son*, through the love and grace of His Son.

It was this, the gospel of Jesus Christ, that Paul had missed. And it is this that so many in the world miss. Paul had never seen the great love of God for man. Yet, *above all men*, he had given his life to seeking after God, doing all the good he could to make himself acceptable to God. But despite all his achievements, he still did not have peace with God. Perfect assurance and confidence—of living eternally with God—was still lacking. This is the message of the present passage: Paul’s personal testimony—his rejection of self-righteousness and turning to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

1. Paul had achieved the height in self-righteousness (vv. 4–6).

2. Paul sought to win Christ—His righteousness, His perfection (vv. 7–11).

3. Paul did not count himself as having yet arrived—he was not yet perfect (vv. 12–16).

**2** (3:7–11) **Righteousness—Perfection—Paul**: Paul sought to win Christ, to win His righteousness and His perfection. The one thing in life that Paul sought was the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ. He knew that no matter how good he could become, he could never become perfect. He still came short and he was still doomed to face death. Therefore, his only hope for living forever was the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ. He had to trust Christ; he had to focus his heart and life—all he was and had—upon Jesus Christ. He had to trust the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ to *cover him*. Therefore, he cast his heart and life upon Christ. He lived for Jesus Christ, and he trusted God to honor his commitment. He trusted God to *count his faith* as the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ. If God did not do this, he was lost and doomed to death forever; he could never gain perfection. His only hope was Christ and Christ alone. This is what the present passage is all about. Paul believed with all his heart that if he trusted Jesus Christ—that if he sought after the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ with all that he was and had—God would take his faith and *count it as righteousness*. God would honor his commitment to His Son by accepting and giving him eternal life. Note five significant points.

a. Paul had a *past experience* with Christ: there was a time when he had counted *his own righteousness* as loss (v. 7). Paul was referring to his conversion experience. There was a time when he had given up his own self-righteousness and works, his own attempts to become perfect. There was a time when he had accepted the fact that he could not become perfect—he could not gain righteousness—he could not make himself perfectly acceptable to God.

1) Note that this is a past experience, a once-for-all experience. It is a definite time when Paul made a definite decision—a decision that he was unable to secure righteousness and perfection himself. If he was to become righteous and perfect, he had to trust the love of God—that God loved him enough to cover him with the righteousness and perfection of Christ.

2) Note also that this did not mean that Paul quit trying to live for God. On the contrary, it meant that Paul tried more diligently than ever to live for God. When God saw Paul’s total commitment to Christ, God knew that Paul’s faith was genuine. He knew that Paul really believed that Christ was his Savior, his hope for perfection and righteousness—for eternity. If Paul had not committed himself totally to Christ, God would have known his faith was not genuine and God would not have saved Paul.

**Thought 1.** God sees our faith; whether or not it is genuine. Genuine faith makes a total commitment to Jesus Christ. A person who truly believes in Jesus Christ gives all he is and has to Christ. He counts his own effort and works, his own righteousness as loss—as nothing—in order to gain Christ.

**“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Lu. 9:23).**

**“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (He. 11:6).**

b. Paul had a continuous experience with Christ: he constantly counted all things as loss and as waste in order to win Christ (v. 8). The word “count” is in the present tense; it is continuous action. When a person has made the decision to seek after Christ, he is *to continue* to seek after the knowledge of Christ—to learn all he can about the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ.

⇒ It is not a matter of making a decision to follow Christ, and then turning and walking on as a person has always walked—doing his own thing and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind.

⇒ It is making a decision to follow Christ and continuing to seek after the knowledge of Him—continuing to seek to know Him more and more.

1) Note that the knowledge of Christ is said to be excellent: it is the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. The knowledge of Jesus Christ is the most excellent knowledge in all the world. No other knowledge can give a person righteousness and perfection. No other knowledge can make a person acceptable to God and give him the right to live eternally.

2) Note what Paul says: “I have suffered the loss of all things.” The words “have suffered” mean to forfeit and to cast away. The phrase *all things* includes not only the religious position Paul had attained, but the “social, financial, intellectual, and political” gains he had made as well (Lehman Strauss, *Devotional Studies in Philippians*, p. 163). Wuest gives a graphic description of what Paul gave up to become a Christian believer.

*Paul was a citizen of Tarsus. At the time he lived there, only families of wealth and reputation were allowed to retain their Tarsian citizenship. This throws a flood of light upon Paul’s early life. He was born into a home of wealth and culture. His family were wealthy Jews living in one of the most progressive of oriental cities. All this Paul left to become a poor itinerant missionary*.

*But not only did he forfeit all this when he was saved, but his parents would have nothing to do with a son who had in their estimation dishonored them by becoming one of those hated, despised Christians. They had reared him in the lap of luxury, had sent him to the Jewish school of theology in Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the great Gamaliel, and had given him an excellent training in Greek culture at the University of Tarsus, a Greek school of learning. But they had now cast him off. He was still forfeiting all that he had held dear, what for? He tells us, ‘that I may win Christ” (Kenneth S. Wuest. Wuest’s Word Studies, Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966, p. 91)*.

**“Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee” (Mk. 10:28).**

**“And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me” (Lu. 5:27).**

**“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Lu. 9:24).**

**“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Lu. 14:33).**

**“And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting” (Lu. 18:29–30).**

**“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Ph. 3:8).**

c. Paul sought a future experience with Christ: he sought to be found in Christ (v. 9). Paul was looking ahead either to death or to the return of Christ. When he came face to face with God, he wanted to be *found in Christ*. He wanted to stand before God in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, not in his own righteousness.

Note that the righteousness of God is *Christ Himself*. The righteousness of God does not refer to behavior or works or deeds of righteousness. No person can ever secure the righteousness of God by behavior or works or deeds—no matter how good the works or deeds may be. The righteousness of God is Jesus Christ Himself. A person has to trust the righteousness of Christ to cover him if he wishes to become acceptable to God.

**“Christ, the righteousness which is of God” (v. 9).**

**“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” (Ro. 3:21–22).**

**“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For *Christ is* the end of the law for *righteousness* to every one that believeth” (Ro. 10:3–4).**

**“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Co. 1:30).**

d. Paul sought a victorious experience with Christ: he sought to know Christ—to know His glorious power over the world and all that is in the world (v. 10). This is one of the Bible’s great verses of Scripture, a verse that should be memorized and that should dominate the believer’s life. As clearly seen throughout this whole passage, Paul’s great pursuit in life was to know Christ. This verse spells out exactly what he meant by knowing Christ.

1) To know Christ is to know the power of His resurrection. The power of the Lord’s resurrection refers to three great things (see note, *Power*—Ep. 1:20 for discussion).

2) To know Christ is to know the fellowship of His sufferings. Most of us are willing to share in the blessings of Christ but we want nothing to do with the sufferings of Christ. We shrink from the ridicule, questioning, and abuse He had to bear. There is nothing pleasant about suffering pain and having people oppose us. There is nothing wrong with being honest about the fact. Paul said that he wanted to know the *fellowship* of the Lord’s sufferings. That is, he wanted to share in *the purpose for which Christ was suffering*. Why did Christ suffer? He suffered because He proclaimed the righteousness and salvation of God—because He proclaimed the way men could become acceptable to God and live forever. Paul was saying that he wanted to suffer right along with Christ, suffer for the same cause—suffer for proclaiming the righteousness and salvation of God.

There is no question about it: if we live for Christ—proclaim the righteousness and salvation of God—we shall suffer persecution. Why? Why would the world persecute anyone who brings the hope of eternal life to them? Because some persons want to live their lives like they want, and a righteous life and message condemns them. Therefore, they oppose anything that keeps them from living a life that pleases their own personal desires and flesh. The believer must know: he shall suffer persecution if he truly follows Christ.

**“Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Ac. 14:22).**

**“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Ph. 1:29).**

**“Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Ti. 2:10).**

**“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Ti. 3:12).**

**“But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pe. 3:14–16).**

**“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pe. 2:21).**

Note one other thing: God draws close to the believer when he suffers for the cause of Christ. God gives a very special sense of His presence, love, and care when the believer is suffering. In fact, His presence is so near and dear it is called “the spirit of glory and of God” which rests upon the suffering believer.

**“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified” (1 Pe. 4:14).**

3) To know Christ is to be made conformable to His death. Jesus Christ subjected Himself totally to God. He put His own flesh and desires to death; He did only what God willed and desired. Even when He died, His flesh did not desire to die. He did not want to take the sins of the world upon Himself and be separated from God (see Mt. 26:39, 42). But He subjected Himself to God’s will. God willed Him to die for the sins of the world; therefore, Christ subjected His flesh and desires to do exactly what God willed. He subjected His flesh and desires and died for the sins of men.

Paul sought to be conformed to the death of Christ. He sought to subject himself totally to God—to put his flesh and desires to death and to do only the will and desire of God.

⇒ Paul sought to *deny himself and take up the cross* of Christ daily.

**“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Lu. 9:23).**

⇒ Paul sought to *crucify his old man* with Christ.

**“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Ro. 6:6).**

⇒ Paul sought to count himself dead to sin but alive to God.

**“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Ro. 6:11).**

⇒ Paul sought to *kill himself* all day long.

**“As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Ro. 8:36).**

⇒ Paul sought to *die daily*.

**“I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily” (1 Co. 15:31).**

⇒ Paul sought to be always *delivered to death* for Jesus’ sake.

**“For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Co. 4:11).**

⇒ Paul sought to be *crucified with Christ*.

**“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Ga. 2:20).**

⇒ Paul sought to be *dead with Christ*.

**“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances” (Col. 2:20).**

**“It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him” (2 Ti. 2:11).**

e. Paul sought an eternal experience with Christ: he sought to be resurrected from the dead (v. 11). Paul sought to use all means—to commit himself totally—for this one great purpose: to attain to the resurrection of the dead. The words “if by any means” are not expressing doubt and uncertainty. Paul was not questioning the resurrection nor if he would be resurrected. Paul was simply saying what he had already stated (vv. 7–11). He uses all he is and has—all the means at his disposal—for this one great purpose: to attain to the resurrection from the dead. He is totally committed to that glorious day of redemption. He lives for that day and for that day alone.

What is so significant about the resurrection of the dead? What is to be so different about that day? At death, we go to be with the Lord. Quicker than the eye can blink, when our time comes, we shall stand face to face with Christ. What is the difference between meeting Christ then and the resurrection? Why did Paul long for the resurrection over and above his meeting the Lord at death? There are at least two significant reasons why the resurrection, the glorious day of redemption, takes precedence over our meeting the Lord at death.

1) The glorious day of resurrection will launch the events that will soon bring about the new heavens and earth. At death, when we go to be with the Lord, the world continues on in its sin and shame, disease and death, evil and corruption. *God is still being* …

• cursed and dishonored

• denied and ignored

• rebelled against and rejected

But as stated, the resurrection will launch the events that bring about the glorious day of redemption—the new heavens and earth—the day when all evil and sin and the cursing and dishonor of God will be stopped. God will become All in All: worshipped and served in glory and majesty, dominion and power forever and ever.

**“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (Jn. 5:28–29).**

**“And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:40).**

**“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (Jn. 11:25).**

**“And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Ac. 24:15).**

**“Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Co. 4:14).**

**“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:16–17).**

**“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pe. 3:10–13).**

**“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away” (Re. 21:1).**

2) The glorious day of resurrection will be the day when believers will have earthly bodies transformed and recreated into perfect eternal bodies. At death when we go to be with the Lord, we do not receive our perfect eternal body. We will either be given temporary spiritual bodies or live with Christ as disembodied spirits. But as stated, at the resurrection the elements of our present bodies will be called forth by God from all over the world, and the elements shall be transformed into perfect and eternal bodies. And we shall live with and for God forever.

**“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body: it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Co. 15:42–44).**

**“And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Co. 15:49–54; see 1 Co. 15:12–58).**

**“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2 Co. 5:1–4).**

**“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Ph. 3:20–21).**