

The Righteousness of God

Phil 3:9-12

It's hard to believe but the fall season is upon us. When you think of fall what comes to mind? Is it the colors of changing leaves? The smells of the produce giving way to the winter months? Or the feel of perfect temperatures and chilling breezes? Or the taste of pumpkin spice? Fall is my favorite time of year because it is full of experiences that appeal to my five senses. It is these very experiences that thrill and excite us. So let me ask you a question this morning. Does the idea of experiencing Christ in his death and resurrection excite you? And could you accurately describe what this experience of Christ looks like? We see in our text this morning.

As we move on from our two-fold defense of the gospel, that is to abandon hope in our fleshly confidences and embrace fully the reality of Christ's work on our behalf, we see the fruit that this defense produces. What we see in our passage this morning is that the goal of repentance and faith is **to experience the righteousness of God that is found in Christ.**

Philippians 3:8–12 (ESV) — 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— **10** that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. **12** Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Last week we saw that our chief goal in this life is to find ourselves in Christ. And the reason that is so important is because when we rest in Christ we experience Christ. Just like finding ourselves on a park bench in the middle of fall gives us the pleasures of enjoying the fall weather, so our fight to remain in Christ gives us the pleasure of enjoying Christ. And there is one thing in particular that we see from our text that we have the joy of sharing in.

We see it at the end of verse 9;

9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

What do we enjoy when we find ourselves in Christ, we enjoy a righteousness from God that depends on faith.

And here we have to ask another important question. It is a question that we will try to answer in our time together this morning. What is Paul referring to when he says we have a righteousness from God that depends on faith? There are two options available to us. When the bible speaks of Christ's righteousness and how it relates to the believer it speaks about it in two ways.

The first way that the bible talks about righteousness is in a forensic way.

1. Forensic Righteousness

What do I mean by a forensic righteousness?

Well, when we think of forensics, what do we think of? We probably think of a crime show like CSI or NCIS or something similar. And I think that is an appropriate idea to attach to this theological concept. What is the job of the forensic investigators in those shows? It is to discover evidence that undeniably condemns a criminal. That evidence is then presented to the judge as a means to convict or exonerate the accused.

Now when you think of the human race, is there any evidence to condemn us before a holy God? Absolutely, Yes. Listen to Romans 3;

Romans 3:9–20 (ESV) — **9** What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, **10** as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; **11** no one understands; no one seeks for God. **12** All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”... **19** Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

And just to be sure, not only do our works condemn us, but our hearts condemn us as well. Jesus made sure of this. In order that none of us would be able to claim self-righteousness on that great day Jesus not only condemns our works but he also condemns our hidden motivations.

Matthew 5:21–22 (ESV) — **21** “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ **22** But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

Matthew 5:27–28 (ESV) — **27** “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ **28** But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If our standing before the Holy and Righteous Judge on judgement day is based on the evidence of our unrighteousness then we all stand condemned.

But this is where Jesus steps in. For those who trust in Christ, our standing on judgement day will not be based on the evidence of our works but on the evidence of his works.

Romans 3:21–25 (ESV) — **21** But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— **22** the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and **are justified by his grace as a gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

When we stand before the Judge on that great day, there will be no evidence to condemn us because Christ has canceled our debt on the cross and has imputed to those who believe in him his perfect

righteousness so that we can stand before God positively righteous. **Hear this Beloved; Jesus Christ has replaced the evidence for our condemnation with the evidence of his exoneration.**

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) — 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is a settled reality. It is a declaration. We will stand before the Judge of the Universe justified because of his righteousness. Amen!

But here is the question I have for Phil 3:9, is this the righteousness of God that Paul has in mind here? When the Spirit impresses upon us the joy of resting in Christ, does he have in mind here our resting in justifying righteousness? Or is he speaking about something **more practical**. That is something that relates to **our practice of righteousness** in our daily lives.

2. Practical Righteousness

Let me give you three reasons why I think this passage is talking about practical righteousness.

a. It is Sourced in the faithfulness of Christ (vs 9)

Last week we saw that this righteousness is a righteousness sourced in Christ's faithfulness. When we find ourselves in Jesus, we rest in his ability to keep the law of God perfectly. That is the faithfulness of Christ was his ability to maintain absolute obedience to the Father's will in joy-filled submission.

John 6:38 (ESV) — 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

This faithfulness becomes the grounds for our ability to practice faithful obedience to the Father.

Like I said last week:

“The sap of obedience that is supplied to the branches finds its strength in Christ's ability to maintain faithful obedience to the Father to the end.”

As we rest in all that Christ has secured for us then we can faithfully obey as he works his obedience through us. Since we spent so much time on this last week I am not going to rehash it this morning except to say that the reason **I think the Spirit is talking about a practical righteousness here is because it is sourced in Christ's practice of righteousness on this earth.**

Second reason I believe this is not talking about justifying righteousness but a practical righteousness. And this is where we will spend most of our time.

b. It is Experienced through our union with Christ (vs 10-11)

Philippians 3:10–11 (ESV) — 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Now, in order to understand what is happening here we have to figure out how verses 10 and 11 connect to verse 9. And the way we do that is by figuring out how the infinitive, “to know” at the beginning of verse 10 relates to the previous section.

Almost all commentaries agree that in some way the infinitive, “to know him”, is showing purpose, end, or goal. **That is to say that reason God has united us to Christ’s righteousness is so that we might know Christ more intimately.** This righteousness from God that depends on faith somehow feeds our connection to Christ’s saving ability. **Which means that our knowing of Christ in verse 10 is directly connected to having this righteousness of God in verse 9.**

So then what does it mean to know Christ in verse 10?

The word, “to know” is the word **ginosko**. In this context it means **to have knowledge of someone or something through personal experience. (repeat)** This isn’t simply a head knowledge but an experiential knowledge as well. A few weeks ago we talked about the importance of reason in the Christian life and this verse doesn’t diminish that. It just shows that to truly know Christ, our knowledge of him must not merely rest in our heads, it must also penetrate down into our hearts, emotions, and even our wills. **There is a big difference between knowing of Christ and knowing Christ personally, between knowing facts about Christ and experiencing Christ first hand.**

Let me see if I can **illustrate** this.

As a parent, it is my duty, so I have been told, to take my children to water parks. And so, if you are a parent, and you have lived in the Poconos for any number of years I am sure you have been to all the water parks. I think my kids **favorite** water park in the Poconos is **Kalahari**. Why? Because it has the best water slides of course. You know the older I get, **the less excited** I am about water slides. But the year we went to Kalahari my kids were **insistent** that I try this one slide in particular. It’s called **the Barrelling Baboon**. Now to try to convince me that I had to go on this water slide **they told me all about**. It went something like this, “Oh Dad, it’s so cool. You go down this slide that turns back and forth. Then out of nowhere, you shoot into this huge barrel and you go super high up on the sidewall. And dad, I almost fell out of the tube we were going so fast.”

Now at this point, **I know of the Barrelling Baboon**, but I don’t *know* the Barrelling Baboon, if you catch my drift. ***I don’t know it until I get on the ride myself. I don’t know it until I experience the twists and the turns. I don’t know it until I feel the drop in my stomach when I am catapulted out into the barrel. I don’t know it until I burst out in laughter from the pure joy of adrenaline from the speed and height of the barrel. It is not until I ride the ride that I can say I know exactly what you are talking about.***

That is what we see here. Paul didn’t want to just know about Christ and his righteousness, he wanted to experience Christ and his righteousness. He didn’t want to just hear about the humility that Christ demonstrated by taking on the form of a servant, he wanted to experience that humility and sacrifice by becoming a humble servant himself. He didn’t want to just hear about Christ granting forgiveness to those who nailed him to a cross, he wanted to forgive others that beat and abused and mocked him, himself. He wanted to know the death of Christ in denying himself, and the power of the resurrection by living in the obedience of the Son.

And we know that this is the idea that Paul has in mind because of the synonyms he uses to clarify what he means.

Philippians 3:10–11 (ESV) — **10** that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may **share his** sufferings, **becoming like** him in his death, **11** that by any means possible **I may attain** the resurrection from the dead.

All of those words, sharing, and becoming and attaining, point to Paul's desire to experience Christ's righteousness in the here and now. To experience the life-giving reality of dying to self and being raised to walk in new life. **Beloved, the end goal of our resting in Christ's righteousness is to experience Christ's righteousness in our daily lives. It is to see the life of Christ practically worked out in our love for God and love for others.** And this righteousness is made available to us as we exercise faith in our intimate union with the Lord Jesus himself.

So not only is this righteousness of God sourced in the faithfulness of Christ, not only is this righteousness of God something we experience in the here and now, but it is also something we grow in and strive for.

Which is the third reason I don't think Paul is talking about justifying grace here. Now we will get more into this next week but I just want to highlight it here.

c. It is Obtained as we press into Christ (vs 12)

Philippians 3:12 (ESV) — **12** Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

This may be the most substantial argument concerning what kind of righteousness Paul is talking about here. Is it possible for us to say that we have not already obtained justifying righteousness? Is it possible to say that we are not already perfectly justified on the basis of Christ's person and work? Is it possible for us to say that we are pressing on to make Christ's propitiation our own?

The answer to all of those questions is an emphatic no. In Christ we have already obtained justification. In Christ we are perfectly righteous before a holy God. In Christ our justification is settled.

Romans 5:1–5 (ESV) — **1** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **3** Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

What we see in Romans 5 and in Phil 3 is that there is another aspect of Christ work on our behalf. Not only are we declared righteous (Romans 5:1) but we are also made righteous in the new man (Romans 5:2-5). The new heart, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, desires righteousness because it is a heart united to the heart of Christ. And so now our lives of suffering produce a new kind of fruit,

the fruit of Christ. Our lives of suffering produce endurance, and character, and hope, because our lives of suffering provoke the Spirit of Christ in our hearts. And that is what we see in Phil 3.

Why does all this matter?

The Spirit's desire is that we would not only rest or abide in Christ's justifying righteousness but that we would also rest in Christ sanctifying righteousness. And often the problem in the our discipleship to Christ is the short circuit between these two realities.

The problem in many of our Christian lives is that we build our justification on the basis of Christ's righteousness but **we fail to build our sanctification on the basis of Christ's righteousness.** We often build it on the basis of our own righteousness. We are confident that when we stand before the Judge on Judgement day we will be justified in Christ righteousness but then we doubt that Christ's righteousness, and our union with it, is sufficient to produce lives of faithful obedience to God.

Brothers and sisters hear this, **Christ is enough, in this life and the life to come.** It is only as we depend upon the new man, created after the likeness of Christ, that we can live lives that demonstrate Christ's righteousness. Which means that our striving in the Christian life is not necessarily after something we do not have, no instead it is a striving to realize what we do have in Christ. It is a pressing on to make all of Christ our own, because Christ has made us his own. It is a putting off and putting on. It is a denying and embracing. It is a repentance and faith.

And this pressing on is where we will go next week, God willing.