

Session 9

becoming righteous

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 3:1–11

BUILDUP THEME**BELIEVE THE GOSPEL**

God makes righteous those who trust in Christ for salvation.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will consider ways to better pursue knowing Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

"And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Have you ever watched a Catholic high mass on TV or perhaps participated in one before you were saved? On the surface, it appears holy, righteous, and worshipful. But those aren't the words God would use to describe it, for the mass at its core celebrates human efforts above God's saving grace.
- ☐ Read Philippians 3:1–11. The Judaizers claimed to have thousands of years of history on their side, going all the way back to Abraham. Their rituals, like those in the present Catholic church, seemed to demonstrate their devotion to and worship of God. But they taught self-righteousness and thereby led people away from God's saving grace.
- ☐ This session will help your learners evaluate whether they are depending on themselves for either their salvation or their Christian walk. Paul taught that salvation and Christian maturity both come by God's grace and through faith in Christ.

Session Summary

The believers in Philippi were plagued by evil teachers who tried to distract them from the purity of the gospel by demanding the observance of old Jewish rituals. Paul strongly warned the Philippians to beware of these teachers. Then he gave his readers a look into his own religious background and accomplishments. He had lots to brag about, from his heritage to his personal training in the law, but he refused to cling to those outward standards for obtaining righteousness before God. When he met Christ as his Savior, he no longer trusted in those seemingly important things. Paul dedicated his life to knowing and living for Christ, looking forward to when he would be with Christ in the resurrection.

Session Starters

Option 1—Mass Evaluation

Gather

- Video of Catholic high mass.

Steps

1. Before class, choose a video of a Catholic high mass to play in class.
2. Play clips from the Catholic high mass as you discuss it with your class.

ASK: Based on appearance alone, how would you describe the Catholic high mass?

ASK: What would you say about the effort that goes into putting on a Catholic high mass?

ASK: What is wrong with the underlying premise of the mass? *It promotes salvation by works.*

3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul warned the Philippians about religion based on self-righteousness. His words were pointed and personal. His teaching challenges us to evaluate whether we are trusting in Jesus for salvation.

Option 2—Beware of Dog!

Gather

- Resources 48-R8 and 48-R9.

Steps

1. Show resources 48-R8 and 48-R9 and use the questions below to lead a discussion.

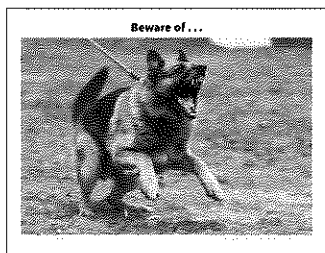
ASK: How would you finish the title for each? Beware of what?

ASK: Do you have a “beware of dog” sign posted at your house? Why?

ASK: What might be a more appropriate beware sign for your dog?

2. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul used the phrase “beware of dogs.” He had the vicious, tear your leg off dogs in mind when he gave a warning about false



48-R8



48-R9

teachers. We will study his warning and why he gave it. His teaching should cause us to consider in whom we have put our faith.

Bible Study

Gather

- Resource 48-R10.

I. Reject False Teaching (Phil. 3:1–3)

A. True teaching is Christ-centered (3:1)

READ: Philippians 3:1.

When Paul commanded the Philippians to rejoice, he called them to outward, verbal praise to the Lord, Who was both the object and the source of their praise. It would be easy to read right past Paul's command. But he didn't include it flippantly; he intentionally gave the command as a fitting introduction for the next major section of his letter. Paul wanted to plant in his readers' minds the centrality of Jesus in their rejoicing before moving on to the centrality of Jesus in their faith.

ASK: What happens to our focus on ourselves when we begin to think of reasons to rejoice in the Lord? *We stop focusing on ourselves and recognize the Lord for His gracious provisions and His greatness.*

The object of a person's rejoicing says a lot about that person's faith. Believers who don't rejoice in the Lord likely rejoice in themselves. That was certainly the case for the false teachers, the subjects of Paul's stern warning.

Paul had given the Philippians a similar warning at some point in the past. Lest they think it was tiresome to hear it again, he added that he repeated it as a safeguard for their spiritual development. The false teachers threatened the gospel's purity by insisting Gentiles add the adoption of Jewish customs to their salvation experience. Paul thought the continued presence of the false teachers in Philippi warranted a second warning.

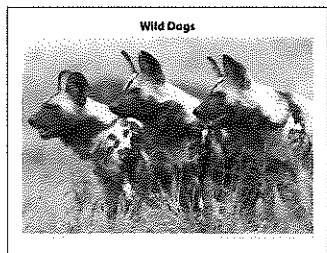
Paul refused to tinker with the gospel message's focus on Christ, for to change the gospel is to destroy the gospel. He made that abundantly clear in his next statement.

B. False teaching is man-centered (3:2, 3)

READ: Philippians 3:2.

Paul warned the Philippians to beware of certain Jews (Judaizers),

referring to them as “dogs.” Ravenous, wild dogs prowled through city and countryside in Paul’s day, scavenging, fighting among themselves, and preying on the helpless. They were ruthless and carried filth and disease.



48-R10

DISPLAY: Resource 48-R10. Wild African dogs are closer to what Paul envisioned than our domesticated dogs.

Paul wanted the Philippians to keep track of the Judaizers’ moves, watching them as if they were a pack of wild dogs roaming around the church. The Judaizers employed strategies to create opportunities to steal members of the Philippian flock. The Judaizers wanted believers to think everyone needed to adopt Jewish standards and laws in order to be saved. What they proposed ruined the gospel.

Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs. So Paul flipped the term by using it to describe Judaizers. The term let both the Judaizers and believers know Paul wasn’t messing around.

Paul also said the Judaizers were evil workers because of their intent to destroy the gospel. Such a term should be a warning for religious leaders today who preach a tweaked gospel. At heart they are evildoers in that they are fooling people into thinking they can have eternal life based on good works. Gospel-believing Christians should reject opportunities to conduct joint ventures with them. They are a mission field rather than co-laborers.

ASK: With what groups that preach false gospels should our church not join in ministry endeavors?

Paul used a third term that means cut up or mutilated, a direct reference to the Judaizer’s teaching on circumcision. God gave the rite of circumcision to Abraham and his descendants as a physical mark to identify them as chosen of God. More importantly, it spiritually symbolized their covenant relationship with God. The false teachers ignored the spiritual meaning. They emphasized human effort—the physical rite. So Paul wrote that the Judaizers committed a spiritual mutilation on their converts by adding circumcision and the Old Testament law to the gospel.

The Judaizers’ message, although apparently not pressing at the time of Paul’s letter, would eventually be attractive and plausible to the Philippians. Paul wanted to warn them again of the danger of accepting the Judaizers’ demands for circumcision and recognition of the law. What truly mattered was a spiritual relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

READ: Philippians 3:3.

After describing the Philippians’ opponents as the mutilation, Paul identified believers as “the circumcision,” the true people of God,

or true believers, in this present age. Paul didn't mean church-age believers are the new Israel. God will one day resume His dealings with Israel and fulfill the promises He made to them. Christ will return to sit on the throne of David and rule in Israel while the Jews occupy the Promised Land. Paul didn't intend for us to think the church has now replaced Israel and that His promises to them are being fulfilled by us in non-literal ways.

Paul described the true believer's worship, rejoicing, and confidence. Believers worship God in the Spirit in that the Holy Spirit indwells every true believer, guiding and empowering the believer's worship. True believers rejoice in Christ Jesus because of His substitutionary death on the cross. And they put their confidence in Christ alone rather than in their own flesh. When God examines worshipers, He looks at their hearts, not their rituals. He honors faith in Christ rather than confidence in the flesh.

The messages of today's false teachers sound different from those of Paul's day, but the danger is the same. Satan wants to distract people from the true gospel, leading them to believe that righteousness can result from their own goodness or from their works.

ASK: How forthright have you been with religious people who trust in their works for salvation?

ASK: What does loving them involve? *It involves be honest with them about their false beliefs, refusing to join them in religious endeavors, praying for them, and presenting them the truth.*

II. Relinquish False Confidence (Phil. 3:4–6)

A. Confidence in heritage is futile (3:4, 5)

READ: Philippians 3:4, 5.

Paul argued that if anyone could stand on personal merit, it would be him. Unlike those who were born Gentiles and became Jews by adopting Jewish beliefs and submitting to Jewish rites and rituals as adults, Paul was born a Jew. His family tree went back to Benjamin, one of Jacob's two favorite sons. The tribe of Benjamin produced Saul, Israel's first king. The land deeded to that tribe included the city of Jerusalem, the very center of Judaism. Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He spoke Hebrew and had studied the Old Testament Scriptures in the Hebrew language. Yet Paul considered any merit he gained from his heritage to be worthless in his quest for righteousness.

ASK: What did God conclude when He considered Paul's Jewish heritage? *God concluded there was nothing of value and nothing He could use as the basis for Paul's salvation.*

B. Confidence in devotion is futile (3:5, 6)

In the last phrase of verse 5, Paul states he had been a Pharisee. People looked on the Pharisees as the separatists and as the religious group that had devoted the most time to understand the law.

READ: Philippians 3:6.

Paul had taken his Jewishness seriously, always doing his best to measure up to its high standards. He had sincerely and ambitiously given his all to be a good Jew and further Judaism. He was convinced that he was doing God a great favor by persecuting those who believed the “heresy” that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. Paul was not a religious spectator or a nominal Jew; he was heavily involved in promoting Pharisaical beliefs.

As far as personal moral conduct was concerned, Paul had nothing to be ashamed of. He could testify that he was blameless according to the standard of the Jewish law. He followed it meticulously. Paul’s devotion to the Jewish law was beyond criticism. He had led an exemplary life that conformed to the Pharisees’ perspective on Old Testament law. If someone wanted to boast, he could boast more.

ASK: Who is the central character in verses 5 and 6? *Paul.*

Before salvation, Paul was all about Paul. After salvation, Paul understood self-promotion and disciplined devotion can’t make a person righteous.

ASK: To what might we compare Paul’s attempt to please God with his good deeds? *Perhaps preparing a dish using putrid roadkill.*

III. Receive True Righteousness (Phil. 3:7–11)

A. Give up self-righteousness (3:7, 8)

READ: Philippians 3:7, 8.

So he might gain Christ, Paul counted as worthless all he had once believed was gain to him. He recognized that nothing good could come from his efforts to impress God because all his efforts were laced with sin and death. God found Paul’s “good” works to be repulsive. When Paul encountered Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul finally saw the inadequacy of his self-righteousness (Acts 9:1–22). Only faith in Christ’s payment on the cross for his sins could bring him into a right relationship with God.

ASK: In what sense were Paul’s good works a “loss”? *Paul lost years of his life he could have been serving Christ. Those lost years were gone for good.*

Paul had a settled conviction to disregard not only his works but also “all things” (Phil. 3:8) that would come between him and his

developing relationship with Christ. He wanted to know Christ through the experience of intimate companionship and communion with Him. He wanted nothing to get in his way of becoming more like Christ.

ASK: What pursuits threaten your relationship with Christ?

Paul was originally from Tarsus, where only wealthy, reputable families were allowed to retain citizenship. He had belonged to a family of wealthy Jews living in one of the most progressive cities of the day. All this Paul forfeited to become a poor, itinerant missionary so that others could know Christ. Paul suffered the loss of all things, counting his earthly heritage as rubbish when compared to his Savior.

B. Gain Christ's righteousness (3:9–11)

READ: Philippians 3:9.

Paul wanted to be found in Christ, knowing that in Him he stood righteous before God. Paul rested in Christ's righteousness, not in a righteousness of his own works through keeping the law. When Paul put his faith in Christ for salvation, God declared Paul righteous based on Christ's work on Paul's behalf. God accepted Paul based on Christ's righteousness.

Paul used "righteousness" as a legal term. God pronounces individuals legally righteous based on their trust in Christ as Savior (Rom. 4:5). That doesn't mean a believer loses the ability to sin. All believers still have a sin nature. We must confess those sins to God (1 John 1:9), but we don't need to be "resaved." Legally, God sees Christ's righteousness credited to our account. Either when we die or when Christ returns, God will glorify us and release us from the presence of sin in our lives. Until then, we should be seeking to be more like Christ in our every day lives. That process is called sanctification. Paul had a goal to become as sanctified as possible as he anticipated his future glorification. He talked about that goal in verses 10 and 11.

READ: Philippians 3:10, 11.

Paul's burning desire was not to preach to huge crowds or become famous but to know Christ. He didn't mean simply learning about Christ. Knowing about Jesus Christ and knowing Him personally are two different matters. We can get the facts about Christ from many sources and still not know Him. The knowledge of Christ that Paul desired was not book knowledge but knowledge based on constant personal contact with the Lord.

Second, Paul wanted to know the power of Christ's resurrection. He wanted to experience the same power that raised Christ from the dead. The same divine power displayed at the resurrection would enable Paul to leave behind his old life—the old deeds, desires, and attitudes of the flesh—and to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6).

ASK: How might you tap into the resurrection power in your daily life? *Maintain daily habits of prayer and Bible study; connect regularly with other Christians; try to emulate Jesus; ask for the Holy Spirit's power.*

Third, Paul wanted to participate in Christ's sufferings for righteousness' sake. Paul did not mean Christ's physical suffering on the cross. We can't add to the atoning work of Christ. But consider what Christ endured in obedience to God's plan. He was misunderstood, ridiculed, and falsely accused; those who follow Him can expect similar treatment. In fact, Christ identified persecution and suffering as characteristic of His followers (John 15:18–25). Paul wanted to be earmarked as a dedicated follower, one who willingly suffered for the name of Christ.

ASK: Have you considered whether you want to know the fellowship of Christ's suffering? What might a typical believer want instead? *To know a comfortable life free from troubles and conflict.*

Paul wished to be like Christ even in death. The apostle knew that to live for the Lord, he had to die to his selfish interests. He desired the same yielded spirit that Jesus demonstrated as He faced death on the cross (Luke 22:42). Even if Paul had to face physical death, he was able to look past this life to the resurrection in the next. His present experience of resurrection power was no substitute for the future resurrection of his body. Whether through death or through the return of Christ at the Rapture, the final resurrection was his goal.

ASK: Finish this sentence: When I am resurrected or raptured, I will be . . .

ASK: What can you do to make what you will be at your resurrection your goal for this life?

Paul was suffering for the sake of the gospel and intended to keep doing so until he saw Christ and stood in complete righteousness before God. Many of us may not face death because of our relationship with Christ, but we can still strive to have the same mindset as Paul. All believers should refuse bragging rights for their heritage or accomplishments, trusting only in the righteousness of Christ for salvation. As we understand the great value of living in Christ, we can aim to live righteously through His power while waiting for our final resurrection.

Session Application

Steps

1. Help the learners evaluate their present lives.

ASK: What does your past week reveal about the primary goals for your life?

ASK: How prevalent is the goal of knowing Christ better?

2. Direct your learners to consider how they might allow more time to know Christ better.

ASK: What are some “good” things that occupy your time?

ASK: What is one “good” thing you can set aside as “rubbish” in order to know Christ better?

3. Pray your learners will keep their future resurrected, glorious state as the practical goal for their lives.