

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

Tel/ Fax: 020 8340 1566

No: 19

Philippians Chapter 3: 1 - 21

INTRODUCTION

The student aiming for a good degree, the young man starting out in business, the mum bringing up a family have all got goals for which to work. They will work hard and sacrifice much in order to achieve those goals. This week's study presents a challenge to us as Christians about our aims and goals. The first half of the passage takes us to the heart of the Gospel when we are reminded that we cannot put our trust in our own pedigree or good living as the basis for our acceptance by God - indeed we have to totally renounce any such attempts to earn our salvation by our good living. We have to put our trust in Christ alone in order to receive his righteousness, which enables us to stand before God without fear of condemnation. As we trust in him we also gain so much more - his life at work within us and the hope of eternal life too.

If we are to enjoy this life with Christ to the full, however, we need to give Christ the first place in our lives. We must allow him to determine the shape of our lives. We must live to please him. It is very easy for other things to become more important to us than Christ and so this week's study challenges us to weigh up the gains and losses of the Christian life and to reassess our goals.

AIM

To renew the vision of that whole-hearted commitment to Christ which is essential if we are to experience to the full the Joy of Christian living.

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:1-21

- Summarise the passage in your own words using not more than 4 sentences.

Questions for discussions

Losses

- How can our religion or our family background get in the way of our relationship with God?

- Why do people often prefer the way of earning salvation through good works to the way of receiving it by faith?

- What things in our lives are barriers to our knowledge of Christ and should, therefore, be counted as loss?

- How does Paul describe the non-Christian way of life in vv.18-19? What are its consequences? What examples of that way of life can you think of in today's world?

- What does the passage tell us about Paul's life before he became a Christian? (w. 1-6) Why did he count it all as loss? vv.7-8) What sort of things must we count as loss in ' order to experience Christ's life? Are they all bad things?

- How do twentieth century English people put "confidence in the flesh"?

Gains

- What does Paul mean by "the righteousness from God that depends on faith"? (v.9)

- How does Christ's resurrection power change our lives?

- In what ways does the picture of the athlete help us understand the Christian life? (w. 12-14).

- How does Paul describe the future of God's people?
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- List the things Paul speaks of as 'gains' in the Christian life in verses 8-11.
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- How do they make the Christian life positive and worthwhile?
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Notes

v.2-3 Paul uses three descriptions for the Jews who insisted on the practice of circumcision and the keeping of the law, arguing instead that Christians are the true people of God. "Dogs" was a name the Jews used of the Gentiles whom they despised - here Paul uses it of them; those who pride themselves on their good works are called workers of evil, while those who pride themselves on their circumcision (peritome in Greek) are called those who mutilate the body (katatome). The truly circumcised people of God are the Christians whose religion is an inward and spiritual one instead of an outward and ritual one, who put their trust in Christ instead of in their own ability to save themselves.

vv.4-6 Paul outlines the ways he could beat the Jews at their own game - if he wanted to do so. He was circumcised on the eighth day as the law required, of pure Jewish blood, from the tribe of Benjamin which had remained faithful to the family of David, a true Hebrew-speaking Jew. His concern for the law led him to be one of the small group of Pharisees, his zeal led him to oppose Christians. Outwardly he had kept the law (elsewhere he speaks of the inward conflict of which he was aware).

v.7 Because of all that Christ means to him Paul is willing to count all his former privileges and achievements as loss. He treats them as a liability because any boasting in them gets in the way of his knowledge of Christ.

v.8 Paul speaks of the relationship which he has with Christ far outweighing the things he must put aside. Paul's rejection of his law-keeping good record is so firm he describes it as rubbish to be thrown out. Christ alone is the source of our salvation.

v.9 In a few words here Paul summarizes the teaching at the heart of his letters to Rome and Galatia. In order to be declared righteous by God and acquitted on judgement day we need to acknowledge that our own good deeds will never make us good enough. We need to admit that we cannot earn God's approval but can only accept, by trust in Christ, his offer of forgiveness which brings us a new status of righteousness before God.

vv.1 0-1 1 The Christian finds new forces at work in his life -the presence of Christ's resurrection new life, which changes us within, enabling us to bear suffering for Christ's sake, letting our old life die so that the new may live. These things we experience now - but we can look forward to their final fulfillment when we are raised to life with Christ.

vv.1 2-14 Paul reminds us that all these tremendous gains should not lead to us resting on our laurels and boasting of a new status. He uses a new picture - that of the race to remind us to put all our effort into living this life with Christ. We are not instantly made perfect but our lives are constantly being transformed, until the day when Christ brings that process to completion at his second coming and we enjoy the life of heaven. Paul reminds us that this is in response to Christ's initiative - his making us his own, his call to the glory of eternal life.

vv.1 5-16 Paul argues that the mark of true Christian maturity is an awareness of the need to keep on making progress in the Christian life. We can never claim to have "arrived" or be "perfect". He expects others to agree with him on this - but if they don't then God can give them the insight to see the truth of what he is saying.

v.17 Paul often urges people to imitate him - to live the life of faith in the way which he has done. In doing so they will be imitating the Christ whom Paul followed. If Paul was not present with them they could follow the example of those who lived the same sort of life that he did. It is helpful to see the way others faithfully live out the Christian life.

vv.1 8-19 There are those who claim to be Christian, whose example they are to follow. Their beliefs and behaviour are sub-Christian. In the early church, as today, there are those who seek to water down Christian faith and remove the "offensive elements", such as the cross, or who argue that Christian freedom permits a pursuit of pleasure and even immorality.

vv.20-21 Paul speaks of Christians as members of a heavenly kingdom - a colony of heaven on earth. From heaven we expect Jesus to come again and at his coming he will transform us, so that we receive those bodies which are fitted to the life of heaven. (See 1 Corinthians 15.49-53).