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EDINBURGH

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# Total Righteousness

## Philippians 3: 7-14

*"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

### 1. Relationship with God is the greatest possession you can have

*"... and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith."\_ (Phil 3:9)*

The gospel is about a clothing you receive. Isaiah 61:10: *"For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness".*

Paul says his righteousness is not his own making, but from God through faith. If you wear a uniform for your job, it provides you with a sense of identity, inclusion, confidence. Every Christian gets to wear the “uniform” of God’s righteousness; he includes us all in his family on the same basis.

In fact self-righteousness counts for nothing:

*"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things."*

*"I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ."*

Paul uses an idea of “profit and loss”- an accountancy term. When companies earn more money than they lose they do well. Every other religion operates on that basis: do more good than bad and you should be ok.

But Paul says that he counts all his previous gains as loss in comparison with the righteousness that is his in Christ. What an amazing statement! The things Paul counted as loss was not his past failures, but his past self-righteous successes! All the things he admired about himself and others held him in high regard for = loss now. Because his standing with God is not based on those things, but on Jesus alone.

This helps us in real life: when we count our personal popularity or success as overly important it makes us emotional yo-yos when things go wrong! Paul by comparison has “lost all things” yet his confidence is in tact as he has already counted those things as loss.

## 2. Relationship with God is our greatest experience

Christianity isn’t merely transactional. It’s a deeply experiential RELATIONSHIP:

*"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."*

Paul wants to “Know Christ” referring not just to head knowledge but intimate understanding. He mentions Christ 13 times in our 7 verses today! From someone who didn’t know Jesus and rejected him he now seems pretty smitten! And this is 26 years

after the event. Isn't it amazing that Paul has been through various seasons of his life, including some dark and difficult ones, yet the strength he finds in walking with Christ is stronger than ever.

*"Resurrection power"*: as a Pharisee Paul used to pay a lot of attention to observing the correct protocol, aligning himself with the law. Now he's experiencing power in his life, transforming him from the inside out.

*"Participating in Christ's sufferings"*: In preference to comfort and respectability, Paul now prefers to suffer for Christ. Not contributing to Christ's finished work for us on the cross, but seeing personal suffering as a chance to draw near to Christ, to experience something of the pain he endured for our salvation.

### 3. Relationship with God is our greatest purpose

*"... and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

Knowing Christ, experiencing resurrection power, suffering with Christ; these are all things that Paul already experiences. But he regards it as an incomplete experience; the best is yet to come. In Colossians 1, Paul talks about the Spirit as a *"deposit guaranteeing what is to come"*.

What does he not yet have? A resurrection body free from pain and suffering. Full knowledge of Christ. Full experience of God.

So how does he respond?

He forgets about his past achievements and keeps counting them loss. This keeps his dependency on Christ. He uses the image of a runner. A runner doesn't think about his past victories, but on the next.

Taking hold of Christ in each subsequent season of life looks different than last season. Ask yourself what does it look like for me not to rely on past success but on Christ today.

Many of the great hymns meditate on God's gift of righteousness to us:

*"Just as I am without one pleas but that thy blood was shed for me."*

*"Foul I to the fountain fly, wash me saviour or I die."*

*"No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine; Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine."*

*"My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus Christ, my righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name."*

*"When Satan tempts me to despair, And tells me of the guilt within, Upward I look, and see Him there Who made an end of all my sin."*

*"Because the sinless Savior died, My sinful soul is counted free; For God, the Just, is satisfied To look on Him and pardon me."*

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## Questions

- **Relationship with God as our Greatest Possession:** Consider Paul and ourselves: How does the value we put on knowing Christ shape the decisions he/we make?
- Why is it challenging to keep valuing Christ above other things? And how can we keep correct perspective?
- **Our greatest experience:** Share a time when you have been especially grateful for a meaningful relationship with God. Or share a challenge you faced (like Joni Eareckson) where some adversity was made more bearable through knowing Christ.
- Think of the season of life you are in. What does it look like for you to value Christ and pursue him in this season (in comparison to a previous season of life).



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