

Justification
Just by Faith Alone (Part 3)
Philippians 3:1-11
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Well, as probably all of you are aware, yesterday was the anniversary of one of the most horrifying days in our history as a nation. The anniversary of the September eleventh terrorist attack on New York City and Washington D.C. It was a day, as you heard, and the days that followed, and has been accounted for in many articles and books since, filled with stories of triumph and tragedy. But I think one of the most frightening stories to me on that day in addition to just the overall loss of life, happened in the south tower.

After the first plane struck the north tower, many reported that there was an announcement made in the south tower that all was safe, and it was okay for them to return to their desks. Many put their confidence in those reassuring words and did just that, they went back to their desks and resumed their work. But in God's goodness, in a way, and God's expression of grace to those folks, many south tower survivors say that what caused them to refuse to follow that announcement and return to their desks was the unimaginable sight, a few minutes following the striking of the north tower was the unimaginable sight, of people jumping from the north tower to their death.

And so, it created an urgency that caused them to leave immediately and to ignore the announcement that had been made over the intercom. About 1400 people, we're told, evacuated the upper floors of the south tower before the second jet hit just a few minutes later, and it was because they ignored the announcement and moved instead out of the building.

Those who listened to that announcement that day, they put their confidence in the wrong thing, and as a result of that many of them, in fact, all of them who were above the impact of the airplane died. There were only a handful of survivors from above the point of impact. Those who listened to that announcement that day in the south tower put their confidence in the wrong thing, and it cost them their physical life. But sadly, there are many people in today's world, and in the Christian culture, and even in a church like ours, who put their confidence in the wrong thing, and it doesn't merely cost them their earthly life, but it costs them their eternity.

In Philippians 3, as we've been discovering, Paul explains the only way someone can gain a right standing before God. But before he deals with how to gain that right standing before God, he utterly dismantles any hope of gaining that standing before God, gaining an acceptance with God, gaining God's approval by human merit.

Let me read it for you again, Philippians 3:1 through 11, you follow along. Paul writes,

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision: for we are the *true* circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

The theme of these verses is simply the doctrine of justification, biblical justification. Justification is simply defined as that act of God's grace by which He declares the believing sinner to be forgiven and to be righteous on account merely and solely of the death of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this passage is to show us one simple reality and that is that this doctrine, this doctrine of justification is to be the very center and focus of our lives. And as Paul goes through it, he identifies for us all of those key issues, all of the key truths that relate to this great doctrine. And we've been looking at those truths together.

Let me just remind you that we saw in verse one, the truth that justification is absolutely essential. In verse two we saw that justification is constantly under attack from its enemies. And in verse three which we looked at last week, we saw that justification is a mark, or the mark I should say, of all true Christians.

That bring us to our text for today verses 4 through 6, verses 4 through 6. And the truth that we learn from these verses about this great doctrine of justification is this; it is the antithesis of all human merit. It is the opposite, the antithesis of all human merit. Let me remind you of the context, Paul has just explained in verse 3 that all true believers including himself put no confidence in the flesh. They don't rely on anything related to the flesh, and he's about to explain what he means. But when he says that he doesn't put any confidence in the flesh, that doesn't mean that from a human standpoint there aren't things on which Paul could rely, on which he could depend. In fact, he sets forth this reality in verse 4. Notice verse 4, "although I don't put any confidence in the flesh." He says, verse 4, "although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:"

Now Paul isn't bragging, that is a remarkable statement. Paul is saying, listen if anyone thinks he can rely on or depend on his own personal merit to gain God's approval, I far more. And then he sets out in the remaining verses of the text, 5 and 6 to identify, really to list for us, all those things which he at one time put his confidence, all those things that were to him his hope of heaven that provided that paved the way for him to enter into God's presence to be to be accepted with God. He once thought of all of these things as assets. But something happened something dramatically happened in his mindset and now he considers them all to be liabilities.

As he outlines the seven things he once relied upon to achieve a right standing before God, Paul provides us with a list of where most people mistakenly put their trust and put their confidence to their own destruction. As we briefly examine each of these seven false hopes of a right standing before God, ask God to open up your own heart and to show you if you have any confidence in any of these things. Don't put your hope; don't put your confidence in the wrong thing. What are these false hopes?

Well the first one is found in verse 5 its religious ritual, religious ritual. Notice he says, "I was circumcised the eighth day" this is what the Judaizers wanted the Philippians to do. Because circumcision marked those who were the physical descendants of Abraham, and spiritually circumcision was supposed to symbolize that their hearts were set apart to serve and worship

God. Paul says I was circumcised on the eighth day, that was the time required by the Mosaic Law. He wasn't like Ishmael who was circumcised when he was thirteen years old, or he wasn't like a Gentile proselyte who was circumcised later in life, he said I was circumcised by the rules on the eighth day. He was a Jewish boy, raised in a Jewish home, circumcised in exact accordance with the requirements of God's Law. And Paul says there was a time when I depended on my circumcision to gain acceptance with God. But now I put no confidence in it whatsoever. Remember circumcision was demanded by God. It was in the Old Testament it was required of all Jewish males. So, it doesn't matter if your confidence was in a ritual even one required by God if your confidence is in a ritual to gain a right acceptance before God, then you're not in Christ. You've put your confidence in a false hope.

The most obvious parallels in professing Christianity to those who put their confidence in circumcision. There are two, unfortunately in professing Christianity; the first is the Church of Christ. The Church of Christ teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation. That is an almost parallel issue to circumcision with the Judaizers. And it's another gospel. Those who embrace that as the truth are lost without Christ, even though they confess to believe in Him, just as the Judaizers.

Another parallel in professing Christianity is the Catholic Church who embrace infant baptism, the partaking of mass, other good works, many different works are required. And in the process of that, you gain a right acceptance before God. It is not an imputed righteousness that makes you righteous before God in Catholic theology, it is an imparted righteousness. In other words, it's the righteousness of God that enables you to do good works, and the basis or the grounds of your acceptance before God are the good works that you perform. Those who embrace those truths are outside of Christ no matter how much they profess Him.

Sadly, there also some Protestant rituals in which people put their confidence. There are a lot of people sitting in churches who put their confidence in walking an aisle, in praying a prayer, in signing a card, in being baptized. And whenever they think about what's going to somehow please God and gain them acceptance before God, their mind goes back to one of those things, as if somehow those things, those rituals if you will gain them acceptance with God. Paul says salvation from God's wrath is not and never has been by ritual. And if you're putting your confidence in ritual, then your confidence is in the flesh, and you're outside of Christ.

There is another false hope Paul identifies in verse 5, not only religious ritual but ethnic background, ethnic background. Notice he says, "of the nation of Israel," "of the nation of

Israel.” Paul was a physical descendant of Abraham. This is what the Judaizers were after. They wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised so they could begin to enjoy the privileges of being Jewish; and Paul says what they’re after, I had by birth. I understand the privileges that come with being a part of the nation. Sadly, those privileges that came with being Jewish, that are outlined in Romans 9:4 and 5. Those served as a continual source of confidence for the Jews. You remember in Luke 3:8, John the Baptist is preaching and the Jews come out to be baptized him in the Jordan, and he says to them, he says listen, I want you to bear fruits in keeping with repentance; and don’t say to yourself, so John the Baptist is addressing something that was a common reaction on the part of the people of Israel. He says don’t say to yourself that we have Abraham for our father. Don’t fall back on that again, because he says God is able to raise up from the stones children of Abraham. They were forever putting their confidence in their ethnic background. In fact, notice John 8, John 8: 31. In an encounter with Christ the same thing happens, John 8:31,

So, Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in my Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;” [In other words, there was a sort of immediate acceptance but it wasn’t full fledged faith at this point. They had not yet become disciples.] “and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’”

Again, putting their confidence, their trust in their ethnic background. Paul says there was a time that he put considerable weight on the fact that he had been born into the nation that God had chosen as His own people. Sadly, that kind of misplaced confidence, that false hope has a long history, not only in Judaism, but also in the Church of Jesus Christ. It goes all the way back to the emperor Constantine and his conversion, from that day forward there have been people who believed that they were Christians simply because of the nation in which they were born, because of their ethnic background. Today there are people all over our world who call themselves Christians simply because of the blood that flows through their veins or the place they were born. This attitude pervades our country as well.

Sometime ago I, became familiar with, saw both a film and read a book about the life of a man named Robert Sheffey. Robert Sheffey was an itinerate southern evangelist back in the 1800’s, and when he was a young man, Sheffey decided to join some of his young friends to go to a local evangelistic meeting to throw things at the preacher and to disrupt the service. And in God’s grace and providence Sheffey ended up hearing the Gospel and repenting and becoming a

Christian. He went home to tell his parents, to tell his mother, and when he got home, and he told his mother, mother I've become a Christian. The biographer reports that she became absolutely incensed, and she said to him, "Robert, how dare you, you were born a Christian." Sadly, there are many people in our country, who, in our world who still think that way. If you think because you were born in a country that isn't Muslim, that that makes you a true believer in Jesus Christ, Paul says your confidence is in the flesh, and you're still in your sins.

There is a third false hope of being just before God and that's spiritual heritage, spiritual heritage. Notice verse 5 again, "of the tribe of Benjamin." You see the tribe of Benjamin enjoyed an exalted status in Israel for several reasons. First of all, their territory included Jerusalem and the Temple, which was a prized possession to the nation. Also, the first king of Israel was from Benjamin. Saul was a Benjamite. In fact, it's possible that Paul's parents who originally named him Saul, named him that after the first king of Israel and of the tribe of Benjamin.

But there is another reason Benjamin was held up and esteemed in Israel. It goes back to the time of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. You remember Rehoboam was a king who was unwise, and he ended up by his decisions splitting the kingdom. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel defected politically from the line of David, and they started their own kingdom in the north, and they named a man by the name of Jeroboam king. They also defected, ten of the twelve tribes. They defected spiritually because Jeroboam made two golden calves, and he put one in Dan and one in Bethel, and they worshiped those calves as the true god of Israel. During that dark period of Israel's history only two tribes remained loyal and faithful to God and to David, Judah and Benjamin.

Paul had a wonderful, Spiritual heritage by being born into the tribe of Benjamin. By Paul's day many Jews had forgotten which tribe they were associated with, they didn't know. But Paul's family obviously carried on the family pride that they had been part of a tribe that had stood true to God, and they had passed along the records, and so Paul knew he was a Benjamite. Paul said I put my confidence in my spiritual heritage. Perhaps you were born in a Christian home. Maybe you were raised by Godly parents. Maybe you were part of a generational line of those who stayed true to God. That's a great asset, but it becomes a terrible liability if you're putting your hope of heaven, your hope of acceptance with God in that reality, if your reliance is in your spiritual heritage.

There is another place people wrongly put their confidence. Its traditional lifestyle, traditional lifestyle. Notice verse 5 again, “Hebrew of Hebrews” he said. By this time in history there were Jews scattered all over the Roman Empire. Sadly, many of them, though, had been influenced by the prevailing Greek culture, a mission you’ll remember Alexander the Great set out to fulfill, to Hellenize all of the peoples of the world including the Jews. But those Jews who remained uncompromised by the surrounding Greek culture, and who were committed to their own culture, are often referred to as Hebrews. The phrase Hebrew of Hebrews means that both Paul and his parents were steeped in the language and culture of their heritage.

Now we know that Paul was born in Tarsus. Tarsus is in modern day Turkey. We know that he was familiar with the Greco Roman culture. But in Acts 22:3 Paul says something very interesting about himself. He says that he was brought up in Jerusalem, so born in Tarsus, but brought up in Jerusalem. Apparently, Paul’s parents were so intent on his being a part of their culture, brought up in that culture, that they sent him to Jerusalem as a boy, perhaps to live with relatives. As a teenager, he went to school. He was educated in Jerusalem. Paul obviously knew Greek because he wrote most of the Epistles of the New Testament, or all the Epistles that he wrote were in Greek. But in addition to that he apparently learned Hebrew as his primary language. In fact, you’ll remember on the Damascus road we’re told in the book of Acts, Paul tells us that God, that Christ Himself spoke to Paul in the Hebrew language on the Damascus road. He also learned Aramaic, the language commonly spoken in Palestine, and he speaks to the people in Jerusalem in that language in the book of Acts.

So, Paul, and his parents, this is the point, were closely connected to their home country and to its culture. They were Hebrew of Hebrews. And this traditional cultural purity became a source of spiritual pride for them, and something that Paul depended on before God, something that would ensure God’s favor. Today there are many who think that because they remain true to their sort of religious upbringing, because they’ve continued to hold to the traditions that their parents taught them, because they go to church regularly, and they do the basic things that their parents brought them up to do, that God will receive them. Listen, Paul says there is no salvation in tradition.

A fifth false hope in this passage is in religious association, religious association. Verse 5, he says, “as to the Law, a Pharisee,” a Pharisee. Paul was educated in Jerusalem, I mentioned that before, but Acts 22:3 Paul adds that his professor, the one at whose feet he sat, was a man by the name of Gamaliel. Gamaliel was the leading rabbi of the day, and in fact, he was the leading Pharisee of the day. That shows up later in the history of the book of Acts. Now you and I have

a hard time appreciating what it meant to be a Pharisee in that day because today Pharisee has such a negative connotation to it. I told someone last week I have a book in my library that's really a fascinating book called *The Pharisee's Guide to Total Holiness*. Immediately, when you hear that, you chuckle because you don't think of them as holy at all, you don't think of them as being devoted to God at all. So, you have to divorce yourself from our thinking of the word Pharisee, and you have to take yourself back to the first century. In the first century to be a Pharisee meant that you had reached the highest level of devotion to God.

Josephus estimates that there were only about 6000 Pharisees in the entire land of Israel in the time of Christ, and yet they had incredible influence, because they were widely respected because of their commitment to the Word of God. Paul says I'm a Pharisee, and by calling myself a Pharisee I'm defining the nature of my relationship to the Law of God. He is saying my approach to the Scripture was that of a Pharisee, in other words, I embrace the Scripture like the Pharisees do, and here's how they thought of the Scripture. The Pharisees thought of the Scripture, when they saw it and thought about it, it was as crucial to them as anything in life. They saw the Scripture as all sufficient just as you and I do. They interpreted it literally just as you and I do. They saw themselves as defenders and preservers of the Law of God, and they were absolutely committed to studying it and to teaching it and to living it out.

So, when Paul looked at his association with the Pharisees with the sect of the Pharisees with those who loved the Law and sought to preserve it and sought to obey it, when he saw his association with them, he saw it as a great asset. In his mind he thought that this credential must earn him favor with God.

But Paul says, in Philippians 3, I no longer put any confidence in my connections. I no longer put any confidence in my affiliation with the right group. Are you tempted to think that because you belong to a certain church or a certain denomination or a particular religious organization, that God somehow takes that into account and that God will receive you as right before Him? Let me come closer to home. Do you think that because you attend a Bible Church where we attempt to teach God's Word and to live it out and to hold it as crucial and sufficient, because we interpret it literally, because we stand on God's Word as the only thing, do you think that somehow that is going to earn you a position with God? Do you think God is impressed? Listen, if the slightest part of your hope of heaven is in your religious association, then you are not in Christ.

There's a sixth false place to put your confidence, and that's in spiritual zeal, spiritual zeal. Notice verse 6, "as to zeal, a persecutor of the Church." Zeal simply means enthusiastic devotion, single minded allegiance. The Jews held this up as a great virtue, in fact, sort of the prototype of this kind of zeal was an Old Testament character by the name of Phinehas. Phinehas is found in Numbers 25, the story of how he demonstrated his zeal. You may remember that Phinehas took a spear, and he approached an Israelite and a Midianite woman. The Midianite woman had led this man's heart away from God to worship false gods and Phinehas took the spear. He followed them into the tent, and he killed them both. In the same way, Paul demonstrated his zeal for the Law by trying to stamp out those he saw as its opponents, those, if you will, who were teaching people to worship a false God, Jesus Christ. He says as to zeal I was a persecutor of the Church.

The word persecute literally means to chase after, to pursue. It's used of an army pursuing its enemy. It's used of a hunter chasing his prey and causing it to run; and that's exactly what Paul did. Turn to Acts 7. Paul recounts this or Luke recounts it I should say and Paul does on a couple of occasions in the book of Acts. Acts 7: 58, and "When they had driven Stephen out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul."

That doesn't mean that Saul was just keeping their coats for them. keeping their coats for them, that was an official way to endorse the death of Stephen. They were stoning Stephen under the authority of a young man by the name of Saul, a young Pharisee by the name of Saul. Verse 1 of chapter 8,

Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. [He voted for it.] "And on that day a great persecution began against the Church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered ... [about] the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. [Verse 3,] But Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

Paul himself recounts this in Acts 26. Acts 26:9, he says before Agrippa,

So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem. Not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. [There it is,

that's exactly what he did with Stephen, and in verse 11,] And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

And that's what happened when he was on his way to Damascus. Do you remember what happened on the Damascus road? What did Christ confront Paul of? He confronted him of this very thing, He said Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me? And after that confrontation, after that encounter on the Damascus road, this sin of persecuting the church became the greatest sin in Paul's mind. You remember 1 Corinthians 15:9, Paul says, "For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." He says it's unimaginable, I'm ashamed. Listen, spiritual zeal, enthusiastic devotion, are not in any way the basis of our acceptance before God. If you think on the day you stand before Christ, you can offer Him your spiritual enthusiasm as a sort of get out of jail free card, then you're terribly deceived.

There is another lesson here in this zeal that Paul felt, and that is that sincerity doesn't mean anything to God. The world is full of people who are sincere, . just as Paul was, it may be devout Muslims who make a pilgrimage to Mecca. It may be devout Roman Catholics who go to mass daily, orthodox Jews who are zealous in all of the pursuit of their Judaism and its traditions, devoted Protestants who attend and serve and give. And in every case, they may do those things with sincerity, they may give their lives to serve others. They may take a vow of poverty they may care for the dying destitute, as Mother Teresa did. But sincerity matters nothing to God if you don't have a right standing before Him. Paul said I thought my zeal was an asset. I thought it pleased God. I thought it made me acceptable to God until God opened my eyes, and then I considered it as manure, as excrement.

There is a final false hope of being accepted by God, it's the end of verse 6, it's your own righteousness, your own righteousness. "As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." This is kind of the climax. Paul has been building to this. What does it mean to be "blameless" in this context? "Blameless" means observable conduct with which no one can find fault. Paul was not claiming, and this is important for you to note. Paul was not claiming that he perfectly kept the Law of God to God's satisfaction. That is impossible. That also contradicts not only Jewish theology, but what Paul later wrote. He meant instead that as far as others could see him and evaluate, he was right. He kept the Law.

But there is a serious problem; you see Paul had misunderstood the whole point of Law. Galatians 3:24 says that God gave the Law in order to show men their sinfulness. It was to serve as a tutor to drive them to Christ, to show men that they could never earn a right standing before God through their own efforts. That's what the Law was for, but Paul and the other Jewish people misunderstood. In fact, I think in Romans we have a sort of self-description of Paul before he came to faith in Christ. Look at Romans 9. Romans 9:30, he says,

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law.

He says how is it that the Gentiles get righteousness and the Jews don't? Here's why, verse 32, "... Because ... [the Jews] *did not pursue it* by faith but as though.... they could become righteous before God by works." "They stumbled over the stumbling stone" [of Christ as their righteousness he goes on to say.] Chapter 10:1,

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God," there it is "but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes. [They missed the whole point of the law.]

Paul used to rely on his outward obedience to God's law as the ground of his acceptance with God. In fact, Philippians 3:9, he refers to a righteousness of my own derived from keeping the law. Like the rich young ruler of Mark 10, Paul would have said to you if you had confronted him, all these I have kept from my youth up. But what was God's perspective of Paul before he came to Christ? Of all of that external righteousness, turn to Matthew 23. God tells you exactly in the mouth of Christ what He thinks about the righteousness that Paul had before he came to faith in Christ. Matthew 23:25,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, [here's what you really are] hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside

appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. [So, you too, (Paul), outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.]

In God's grace, Paul eventually became to see himself like this. How? How did that change in his thinking occur through the work of the Holy Spirit and one commandment? We don't have time to turn there, but sometime we will, in Romans 7. Paul tells us exactly what brought him to his knees before God. It was the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet." Because Paul thought he did everything right externally, but when he came to number ten, and he saw that God was concerned not merely about what was going on on the outside, but what was going on on the inside. He began to see himself just like Christ described in Matthew 23. It's tragic that that which God designed to produce guilt and an awareness of sin that is the Law of God, sinners redefine and then wear it as a badge of pride.

The truth is, listen carefully to this, if you and I ever break one commandment, then we have broken them all James 2:10 says. Why? Why is that true? Because what is the essence of God's Law? What is the essence of the moral Law of God? It's essentially love. Love God perfectly every moment of your life, and love your neighbor unselfishly as yourself every moment of your life. Slip up one time, one sin, in thought in word or in deed, and you have slipped away from that standard of perfect constant love like God's love. I mean how many links does it take to break a chain? Some people break a lot of links, and we call them criminals, perverts, outlaws; but many others, most in our world simply take and pry open a few of the links, and we just overlook that because we're guilty too. But God, unlike most of our teachers, doesn't grade on a curve.

Before, Paul understood that the law wasn't merely external, but it was internal as well, Paul thought that he could gain a right standing with God by his obedience. Sadly, the majority of the people in our world who wear the label Christian think just like Paul thought before he came to Christ. God will accept me on the basis of my efforts to obey Him. The same Paul wrote Romans 3:19 and 20, listen to what he says there. But

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, [here's the purpose of the Law,] so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;" [There's what the Law does, it simply says, shut your mouth you have no excuse.] because by the works of the Law, (verse 20 of Romans 3) by the works of the Law no flesh [not a living

person] will be justified [declared righteous] in ... [God's] sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. [All the Law does is show you your sinfulness. It can never declare you right with God. Your keeping of it will never give you a right standing before God.]

But you know most of us aren't so naïve as to think that our good works alone are what save us. Instead we take the grace of God, we take faith, and we add to that some little thing that we contribute. But if in your mind anything you are, Let me start over because I want you to grasp this sentence. If in your mind anything you are or anything you have done contributes the smallest degree to your acceptance before God then Paul wants you to know that you have your confidence in the flesh, you have embraced a different gospel, and you are on your way to an eternal hell. Spurgeon said, "that such is the depravity of the human heart. That if it can't earn its entire way to heaven, we'd be happy to have just a small part in the last mile."

And Paul says if you add a single thing to the work of Christ and the grace of God received solely through faith, then you have lost everything. You've put your confidence in the wrong place. There was a time, Paul said, when I relied on all these things, but through the work of the Spirit, he had what we might call a paradigm shift. You know the most important word in Philippians 3:1 to 11 is the little word "but" that begins verse 7. "But" he says "whatever things were gain to me" all those things "I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." Notice, Paul didn't decide that all those personal credentials were good, but Christ was better. Instead, he realized that all of it was absolutely worthless to God. In fact, when we get to verse 8, he says it's no better than manure, than excrement. They have nothing at all to do with knowing Christ.

Listen, this morning, if you've realized that your confidence, your reliance is in any one of these things, then you must come before God, and you must fall down, and you must say, God I renounce my own merit, I renounce my background, my position, my achievements, my efforts, my obedience, my baptism, my personal righteousness. I renounce everything I am and everything I have ever done, and I cling to Christ alone as my only hope of heaven and a right standing before God. I love the way Spurgeon puts it in one of his sermons. He says this,

"and yet I fear I have not been able to make you think of the blood of Christ. I beseech you then just for a moment, try to picture to yourself Christ on the cross, let your imagination figure the motley crew assembled around the hill of Calvary. Lift now your eyes and see three crosses put upon that rising knoll. See in the center the thorn crowned brow of Christ. Do you see the hands that have always

been full of blessing nailed fast to the accursed wood? See you His dear face more marred than that of any other man? Do you see it now as His head bows upon His bosom in the extreme agonies of death? He was a real man remember. It was a real cross. Do you think of these things as figments and fantasies and romances? There was such a being and He died as I described it. Let your imagination picture Him, and then sit still for a moment and think over this thought. The blood of that Man whom I now behold dying in agony must be my redemption, and if I would be saved, I must put my only trust in what He suffered there for me.”

Today we partake of the Lord’s Table. By taking of these elements the bread and the juice, we are saying just that. Christ, and Christ alone, is my only hope of a right standing before God. Christ is my righteousness.