

# Philippians 3:4-9

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please open up in your copy of God's Word with me to Philippians chapter 3. Philippians chapter 3. Our main text for this morning is going to be from verses 4-9.

! This morning I want to read starting in verse 2. This is the Word of God and it reads, Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

For we are the real circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people 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 righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

[ 1 : 17 ] 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 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. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection.

And may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. That by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead. God, this morning I just pray that you would feed your sheep, not by human will or exertion, but for your good and for the good of your people, that your word would go forth.

In your name we pray, amen. So, during Paul's day, author of this letter, the early church found itself in much division.

Certain groups were exalting themselves over one another because of cultural differences, ethnicity, worldly status, what teaching or whose teaching they should follow.

[ 2 : 33 ] I think that should sound familiar to us. There was a particular disagreement with which the New Testament writers spent a great deal of ink addressing differences between Jewish and non-Jewish believers.

Gentile believers in the Roman Empire sought to exalt themselves above Jewish believers because of their worldly skill or because of their status within the empire. Think like Paul's appeal to the Corinthians not to view himself as lesser because he laid aside oratory skill or because he was poor and shared in Christ's sufferings, unlike the sarcastically named super apostles.

Likewise, Jewish believers were treating Gentiles as second-rate Christians because they were uncircumcised, didn't follow Hebrew feasting traditions, and so forth. Nathan last week spoke of the Judaizers, and this is a particular party of people who taught that circumcision was necessary in order for salvation.

And in Galatians, Paul calls this belief a false gospel. So then adding one single work to the work, the finished work of Christ, makes it null.

In our passage today, Paul is arguing that he has more of a reason for confidence in the flesh to approach God in righteousness than do any of the Judaizers. So if Paul's righteousness isn't enough, the Judaizers, and likewise our righteousness, is not enough either to approach God.

[ 3 : 59 ] We need a righteousness which comes from the outside, an alien righteousness from Christ. So to look at our text this morning, I've broken it up into four headings, and I'll go through them, naming them again as I go.

Firstly, we see Paul's pre-conversion confidence. Paul's pre-conversion confidence. Secondly, the great transfer of confidence. Thirdly, indicators of confidence in the flesh.

And fourthly, placing confidence in Christ alone. A lot of confidence this morning. So Paul, in our passage, begins by listing off seven resume items, if you will.

Four of these items are from birth, and three of them are attained through his own work. So the first item in this list is a proper beginning. Paul was circumcised on the eighth day, he says.

And this was a sign of the covenant of God with his people. It was meant to point forward to a time in that person's life, and a time in general when God's word would cut away the unrighteousness of the heart.

[ 5 : 08 ] Paul had done what God commanded and what the Judaizers would require, and yet he counts it as rubbish, as trash, as refuse, in order to stand before righteous God.

So maybe we, some of us in this room, grew up in the church. Some of you were likely dedicated as a little baby, or maybe even sprinkled. Not in this church, but maybe sprinkled somewhere.

Secondly, we see Paul's proper nationality. Paul was of the nation of Israel, which were, of course, God's chosen people, who were given the oracles of God.

And he says in Romans 3 that this is of much value. He spoke, God spoke with them, he sent them the prophets, made his covenant with them, and yet this nationality gave him no righteousness before God.

There are many in our culture, particularly here in the South, who would view America as God's new chosen people, as the promised land, viewing American interests at the expense of all others as equated with moral goodness.

[ 6 : 09 ] This is not a proper view for myriad reasons that we won't be going into today. But God works in this world in spite of the sinfulness of man, not because of the goodness of man.

And even if you believe that we are in God's country, Paul's point here is clear that our nationality gives us no standing before a holy God. Thirdly, we see Paul's proper lineage.

Now, I don't know how much you know about the Benjamites. I certainly didn't know a whole lot before preparing for this text. But Paul says that he's of the tribe of Benjamin. And this was the only tribe to remain faithful to the throne of David along with the tribe of Judah.

And together, those two tribes formed the southern kingdom of Judah, which is the less evil of the two, Old Testament Israel. Benjamin also produced Israel's first king, being Saul.

And Jerusalem was located within Benjamin's borders. So these people had been among the most faithful to God. Now, while we may not take pride in our ethnic lineage as much today, we certainly have a tendency to feel pride in our spiritual lineage.

[ 7 : 17 ] We act as though our parents' or grandparents' faith somehow reflects on our own standing before God. We may identify ourselves with the Reformers, the Puritans, Augustinian philosophy, Piper, MacArthur, Dever, or Rainer.

You like that company? Yeah. So while these are certainly faithful examples with their flaws, a more in-depth knowledge imbues us with no righteousness.

Fourthly, we see Paul's proper upbringing. Paul says that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. Different people had different perspectives on what that means. But certainly, Paul had a proper upbringing. He was raised according to Jewish tradition, as religiously Hebrew as he could be.

Many of you in the room probably went to Awana, your youth group. You memorized the right verses. You might know the catechisms. And these are filthy rags to clothe us before a holy God.

Next, we have the proper standard of living. So we're getting into the things that Paul has accomplished himself. So Paul is a Pharisee, meaning that he was among the most committed to knowing and understanding the very word of God.

[ 8 : 28 ] He believed it. He taught it. He memorized it. And he did everything he could to live by it, according to his unbelieving heart. The historian Josephus notes that there were never more than 6,000 Pharisees at a time.

So Paul is in elite company. And he even notes elsewhere that he rose above his peers in standing as a religious leader. The Pharisees humble me, not because they're scary or intimidating or had a lot of knowledge, but because they were following after the right God.

They were using his very word. We're way more devoted than I am or many of us are to studying his word. And yet we're making twice other people, twice the children of hell as they were, to use Jesus's words.

And we are a very knowledge heavy congregation. This is not a bad thing. It's commendable. But we must regularly remind ourselves that our justification or approval or standing before God comes

not from a theological perspective or a certain tribe.

Next, we see Paul's proper sincerity. He says that he was a zealous persecutor of the church. From Paul's perspective, if Christ was not indeed the Messiah, he would have rightly seen himself as a protector of the truth.

[ 9 : 48 ] After stoking in the numerous Old Testament examples of God's people being led astray, he was not about to let a new sect of God's people be taken away by a false Messiah. Likewise, our passion for good works, our going on mission trip, mission trips for a week or years.

The number of disciples or converts that result from our teaching don't elevate us in God's sight. And lastly, we see his proper morality. And I want to put a note here, maybe proper outward morality.

The Pharisees had devised a complex system of laws and of hedge laws, which were there to keep you from getting close to breaking the actual laws, which focus mostly on outward behavior.

While God's law was always meant to be an expression of inward faith, that he would have to be the one to grant mercy, the Jews believed if they could act in accordance with the law and sacrifice when they felt short, then it would be enough to make them righteous.

Some of you have responded to altar calls, said the sinner's prayer, and have been baptized only to realize that it was all due to social pressure. Many testimonies follow that pattern and only later coming to true repentance.

[ 11 : 01 ] Now, while God certainly has worked through, and sometimes in spite of, some of these actions, the actions themselves, the right outward behaviors, give us no righteousness.

So, Paul has an impressive resume that we see here, certainly to that people that he's writing to more so than our context today, because we know Jesus' teaching on the Pharisees.

But what are we to make of Saul and the Pharisees, and where did they go wrong? I think sometimes we wrongly distance ourselves from seeing ourselves and our tendencies in the life of the Pharisees, so we would be wise to not learn from their mistakes.

I don't know if that sentence made sense. All right, you get what I'm saying. So, let's look at Matthew chapter 5. So, turn there with me.

It's the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 17.

[ 12 : 19 ] Jesus himself teaches here. Do not think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets. I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

So, Paul's family had kept the covenant. They had stayed faithful to David's throne. They knew God's law in and out. They cleansed what they thought was the evil leaven among God's people. And he did his best to keep the law. Aren't these great things that we should find ourselves striving towards? This seems like the camp that we would like to find ourselves in. And it really comes down to one word from our text.

[ 13 : 26 ] And that's the word confidence or trust. We'll stick with confidence. Paul's problem was not in his outward behavior. The behaviors generally were correct.

But it came down to a tragically wrong understanding of the purpose of the law that many in our day continue to hold. Now, the Pharisees, Old Testament Jews, would not have claimed to be sinless, else they would have not sacrificed.

Rather, they had confidence in their own ability to follow God's law, to cover over their sin with animal sacrifice, in a way that did not rely on God for mercy and did not necessitate inward repentance.

And this is part of the reason why John the Baptist or baptizer's message was so poignant or pointed in that day and age, calling Israel to repent.

Like, if they had a context for ongoing repentance, that probably would have made more sense to them. The psalmist in Psalm 130 writes, Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, hear my voice.

[ 14 : 35 ] Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope. Sacrifices and obedience to the law were meant to be worshipful in nature, as they recognized God as the only one who could grant mercy. Right? And this is simply not true of Old Testament Israel, or the way that they're painted in the Scripture. That the outward behavior was not followed with inward worship and an inward attempt at sinlessness.

The Jewish people had turned obedience to the commands of God into acts of self-idolatry. In their mind, mercy was deserved because of their obedience. Their view of man was huge, and their view of God's mercy was small.

It is as if the Pharisee would answer back to God, to that question, who could stand if you were to mark iniquities. The Pharisee would raise their hand and say, Me, I could stand. I have followed your law.

[15:42] What arrogance. Right? What arrogance when we look backwards. But we need to see that same arrogance in our own heart. This is the same arrogance that we show when we put confidence in ourselves to gain status before Holy God through our thoughts and through our deeds.

There are likely some in this room who aren't believers. Most people, apart from Christ, consider themselves generally to be good people, and you're probably no exception. But hear Paul's word to us today.

Failing to bow the knee before Christ as Savior and Lord in repentance from sin, whether for the first time or in an ongoing fashion as a believer, Scripture expresses this arrogance and entitlement to waltz into God's presence, however we like, on our own terms, because of our own goodness. Paul has reminded us already that all will bow one day. Some people will bow in humble submission and worship. I hope that you are counted among that number. And others will be crushed in the weight of God's wrath, still recognizing Him as Lord, but not in worship and submission.

Do we dare prolong repentance another day? So, what changed in Paul's case, and how do we change? At Paul's conversion, there was a massive shift in his confidence.

[16:57] So that brings us to point number two, the great transfer of confidence. And this is really the main point of our text this morning. Picking up in verse 7, he says, First, I want us to note the past and present transfers of confidence.

We see that Paul counted these specific areas that he's listed as loss, but then he says, Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

Right? So both things are going on. It's the past tense. I did this. Right? It's perfect. The perfect tense in the Greek. It's a completed work. And then the present tense. So it's in the past and ongoing.

This kind of repentance and faith in Christ certainly happens at conversion, but should be the practice or should be practiced in an ongoing fashion, as Paul displays here. Oftentimes when explaining the Christian life, especially to unbelievers or those young in the faith, it can be difficult to describe exactly what denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Christ means in more practical terms.

We're answering the question, What does it mean to put faith in Christ? At first, at conversion, and then in an ongoing fashion. And I think our text helps us to understand at least one aspect of that.

[18:30] So Paul here is speaking in accounting terms. Okay? He's talking about assets and liabilities, talking about gains and losses. Okay?

So on one side, he has this list that he previously understood as adding to his righteousness or giving him standing before God. And then he's got a list of things that take away from his standing before God.

So on that list, we found zeal, obedience to the law, keeping the covenant, and sacrificing when he fell short on his list of gains. And notice in our text that Paul does not merely erase these things and replace them with Christ.

This is an important point. Paul does not merely take those things off of the list on the gains column and then put Christ on the gains list. He actually transfers it. Right?

He takes it from what was gain and moves it over to the loss column. So what are we to make of this? These things that he previously understood as gaining him status before God actually count against his righteousness before God.

[ 19 : 36 ] So how is that? How is it that Paul's outward obedience to the law actually counts against him? And this is how. When we see the acts of obedience as a means to attain righteousness or status in God's sight, they become an abomination to the Lord.

When we see our acts of obedience as our means to attain righteousness or status in God's sight, they become an abomination to the Lord. This is the reason for the prophet Isaiah's harsh words in chapter 1 where the Lord describes Israel's multitude of sacrifices as a trampling of his courts. Their feast as something that his soul hates and is burdensome. Right? These things that they were doing. They were obeying part of what God had commanded to do, and yet the Lord saw them as an abomination because of how they were counting them, how they were considering those works. Paul's example here shows us that even the most fervent acts of zeal can become a loss to us, a hindrance to our relationship with the Lord. So this means that good theology, reading good books, teaching the word, leading music, or a small group and discipling can become gross and self-exalting depending on how we count them.

And the implications from this are huge. Part of what it means then to deny ourselves and follow Christ is to recognize that the outwardly moral things we did pre-conversion were not attractive to God.

[ 21 : 06 ] He did not look at you or me and see a hint or a glimmer of light that caught his eye and made him think, Oh, how I could use him for greatness. Instead, he saw, rightly, a rebel, an enemy, someone who was spiritually dead, and praise God, he sent his son to die for us in that state.

And now he does not see the believer's obedience and think, Oh, what would I do if it weren't for Piper or for Platt or for, again, Nathan?

Faithfully teaching and leading his church. Right? This is not how God sees us. And that may be a blow to your ego or our ego, but there's great freedom in this message.

And that's what I want us to see today. We are expendable tools in the Redeemer's hands. He does not need you and he does not need me, but he delights to use his people to accomplish his purposes.

And while this may feel like a shot to our ego, as it likely did the Pharisee, this reality will set us free from the weights that we place on ourselves. For the unbeliever, to repent and believe in the gospel means to take everything that you've been telling yourself about why you're a good person and recognize the arrogance, the self-exaltation, and the rebellion of that claim, as Paul does in our text.

[ 22 : 22 ] You have placed yourself as judge over God's word, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. For the believer, this looks like vigilance to keep our regular acts of obedience from slipping into self-righteousness.

This can be really subtle. So I want to give us some indicators as to when we may be putting our confidence in the flesh. That we believe gives us standing before God. So we're not moving away from the text, but we're going to set it aside and then come back to the text for the solutions of how we get rid of this confidence in the flesh.

So I have four indicators of confidence in the flesh. So this is sub point three, if you're taking notes. Indicators of confidence in the flesh. Two of them that we're going to talk about are a bit more obvious, and two a little bit more subtle.

And I hope that as we're thinking about these things that we may be putting confidence in the flesh that we didn't realize that we were. I hope that you don't see them as a further burden on our shoulders or a way that, oh, now I'm falling short in a way that I didn't know I was.

Anytime that the Spirit reveals those things to us, it's an invitation of freedom, right? To turn away from that sin and to live and think how God would have us live and think. Okay, so first one, first indicator of confidence in the flesh.

[ 23 : 38 ] Any belief or perspective that makes us feel superior to other believers. Indeed, all ground is level at the foot of the cross. And to be clear, that bar is set low, right?

The ground is level on a very low plane at the foot of the cross. Apart from Christ, we are spiritually dead. There were those, hopefully not in here, who would teach that certain giftings like tongues and prophecy or certain vocations indicate a higher status in relationship with God.

Here, we're probably more likely to act or subtly speak as though our theological outlook, our viewpoint on schooling and parenting methods, our beliefs about dating or courtship, and I'll stop there, indicate a more genuine relationship with God or that He is more pleased with us because of our enlightened state.

And there are certainly serious issues at stake. I could go on in that list. But the attitude that many, or the attitude of derision that many in the faith have on others outside of their particular camp is troubling.

Dare we look down on, or view ourselves higher than, or mock such a brother or sister? Where is our compassion for those led astray by wolves in sheep's clothing, as if we had something to do with keeping ourselves from similar deception?

[ 24 : 57 ] In the words of Francis Schaeffer, there is nothing more ugly than Christian orthodoxy without understanding or without compassion. We must be careful not to let the love of truth slip into an idolatry of the self or a mockery of the souls led astray.

By way of advice, talk to someone in that camp. Expose yourself to a person with this or that belief, remove it from the theoretical, and see the damage that wrong belief can do.

Secondly, second indicator of confidence in the flesh is self-sufficiency. Let's flip over to Galatians chapter 3. I believe Nathan read this last week, but I want to remind us of it this morning.

Galatians chapter 3. Galatians chapter 3.

Are you so foolish, having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain?

[ 26 : 25 ] Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Like the Galatians, many of us function as though we are saved by hearing through faith, but are made perfect for our own willpower, intellect, or record of righteous behavior.

Paul clearly here is saying that our sanctification is no different than our justification in this way. It happens through hearing the Word of God and receiving it with faith.

Now, we have to work out what the Spirit works into us. We have to be obedient to be sure, but it happens by hearing the Word of God and receiving it with faith. So what does this self-sufficiency look like?

It may look like burnout. It may look like anxiety. It may look like fear. As we try to accomplish by ourselves what the Spirit is meant to be working in and through us.

As I was prepping this yesterday, Ross walked into the coffee shop that I was sitting in, and I asked him what he thought were some ways that Christians manifested confidence in the flesh, and two things popped into his head that I agreed with, obviously.

[ 27 : 37 ] Firstly, he said, Paul's resume sounds exhausting. What a life and image to maintain. For us, it may feel like we're continually pouring out without getting filled up or caring mostly what others see in and about us rather than what God sees.

We often treat God, secondly, he said, we often treat God like we should treat our boss at work. We try to handle the day-to-day on our own, but if something big comes up and we need help with it, then we'll reach out to him for help.

If the very Son of God was dependent on the Father, how much more do we need him as our daily spiritual sustenance? So, how did God's sovereign reign over this world and the realities of the freedom of the gospel come to bear in your attitude towards parenting, towards career choice, and towards evangelism?

Beloved, we are not in control as much as we pretend like we are, but we are stewards of the children God gives and the opportunities that come our way. This isn't always the case, but oftentimes fear and anxiety arise as we see the guise of our control slipping and a deeply rooted discontentment with the way God has decided to rule our lives shows itself forth.

Third indicator of confidence in the flesh is self-pity. Okay, so this one, we're getting into more subtle realms here. Self-pity. Now, this may seem counterintuitive, but feeling sorry for oneself is an expression of pride.

[ 29 : 10 ] John Piper puts it in this way in his book, Future Grace. He says, both boastfulness and self-pity are manifestations of pride. Boasting is the response of pride to success.

Self-pity is the response of pride to suffering. Boasting says, I deserve much admiration because I have achieved so much. While self-pity says, I deserve admiration because I have sacrificed so much.

Boasting is the voice of pride in the heart of the strong. Self-pity is the voice of pride in the heart of the weak. The reason self-pity does not look like pride is that it appears to be needy.

But this need arises from a wounded ego and the desire of the self-pitying is not really for others to see them as helpless, but as heroes. The need self-pity feels does not come from a sense of unworthiness, but a sense of unrecognized worthiness.

It is the response of unapplauded pride. Do we really believe that our Father who sees what we do in secret will reward us? Or do we so value the opinions of others that we feel sorry for ourselves when they don't recognize what we're doing, they don't recognize our potential and the sacrifice we make?

[ 30 : 29 ] Do we believe in a sovereign Lord who sees, who hears our prayers and has each one of us where we are in life for a reason? Do you really believe that? God sees your faithful mothering.

He sees your diligent hard work that your boss doesn't recognize. He sees integrity in school work when those around you would take shortcuts. Don't give in to the prideful temptation to feel sorry for yourself.

There is beauty in the mundane. Work to believe in these realities. And fourthly, lastly, is penance or self-punishment.

Penance or self-punishment. It's similar to self-pity because it may look like humility on the outside. Many believers find themselves battling with the same sins they've been struggling with for many years, sometimes decades.

And this has led many to an attitude of self-hatred, viewing oneself as a lesser Christian, viewing ourselves as unworthy to enter God's presence because we haven't been able to overcome a certain sin pattern.

[ 31 : 29 ] We feel like we don't deserve redemption and therefore run away from the graces God has given us, which can quickly spiral into isolation and to further sin. We punish ourselves.

On this topic the other day, Nathan cheekily remarked that if he put a whipping post in his office, it might get put to good use with the attitudes that many of us have.

So what's the issue? Both self-pity and penance assume that if we could just get our outward behavior right, if we could just get our attitude before the Lord right, then we would be worthy to enter into the presence of God, to go to Him for help, and to take part in the good gifts that He gives.

That sounds an awful lot like the Pharisee. By punishing ourselves, we say to God that Christ's payment on the cross, the bearing of the wrath of God for His people, wasn't quite enough.

So we want to inflict a bit more pain in ourselves, and if we can act sincere enough, like Paul the Pharisee, then maybe God will approve. Is our inadequacy not the very point of the gospel?

[ 32 : 38 ] Where we were not adequate to fulfill the law, that Christ was, and His righteousness has been freely given to those who place their faith in Him. Wrath that we deserved punished in His body, that we might know and enjoy God forever.

Praise be to the land who was slain, so that we could live free from the bondage of the law. So from the Pharisee, to the bitter, to the self-loathing, there's one factor in common.

The self and not Christ is at the center. Our view of ourselves is too big and of Christ and His glory too small. Our thoughts are consumed with ourselves and not God's glory.

So returning to our text, we have the solution. How do we transfer this confidence? How do we do that in an ongoing fashion? Go back to the text if you're not there already.

I'll start in verse 8. Indeed, I count everything as lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

[ 33 : 49 ] For His sake, I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order 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 comes through faith in Christ.

The righteousness from God that depends on faith. So how do we transfer confidence? How do we see Paul transferring this confidence? Firstly, we are to believe that knowing Christ, but by whatever means God deems necessary, surpasses everything that we might gain from this world. And a belief in this will help us to transfer that confidence from ourselves onto Christ. So knowing and enjoying Christ. This is the chief end of man. It is the reason we were created.

This type of knowledge is not merely knowing things about Christ, but knowing Him intimately, experientially, and in relationship with Him. Jesus taught in Matthew 13 that the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up.

Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. And again, in John 17, Jesus says, this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

[ 35 : 05 ] Does that reflect on your attitude toward the means of grace, towards knowing God and knowing Christ? If not, then we may not be valuing Christ in the surpassing worth of knowing Him enough.

Is this how we view our time in the word and prayer, time listening to preaching and singing these glorious songs together? Do we view them as partaking in eternal life through the knowledge of Christ?

This knowledge is worth sacrificing everything for, including this guise of self-righteousness. We must remind ourselves of this often. Secondly, we must believe that our identity is found in Him. Our identity is found in Him, not in our actions, whether good or bad. We must believe that we are new creations with new natures. We are saints who struggle against sin, not sinners who fight to act like saints.

Again, we are saints who struggle against sin, not sinners who fight to act like saints. Humans do not vary in degree before God, but we vary in type before God.

[ 36 : 12 ] He does not see us as more or less Christ-like, which is how we experience progress in our faith, but He sees us on the basis of Christ's righteousness or lack thereof, which is how we ought to think and speak of ourselves.

We must be careful about the language we use to talk about our sin. Language changes the way that we think. And with all due respect to those who struggle in these areas, Christian, you should not refer to yourself as an alcoholic, a homosexual, a drug addict, as if our primary identity resides in outward behavioral patterns.

Now, you may have a biological or socialized predisposition to strong temptation in this or that area, but it does not determine your identity. If you want a further text for that, I would suggest Romans chapter 6, 6 through 14.

We must find our identity primarily in Christ and consider ourselves dead to sin as we look to Him day by day. And lastly, we must believe, remember that our righteousness is alien.

It's outside of ourselves. In verse 9, he said, 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.

[ 37 : 31 ] This is great news. If you have done nothing to earn Christ's righteousness, then we can do nothing to lose it. What security and freedom are found in this reality?

Christ's righteousness given to us freely, apart from our good works and apart from our bad works, and anchors our soul within the veil to the very presence of God.

In order to gain Christ, we suffer the loss of all things, our ego, our preference, our desire, our self-sufficiency, and oh, is He worth the cost. You no longer have to prove your worth or your worthiness to God, but can rest in the finished work of Christ.

May we be a people who put no confidence in the flesh for righteousness under the law or elevated status before God, but see Christ's atoning blood as our only plea before a Holy Father, looking to Him as our sole hope in this life and in the life to come.

Let's pray.