

Philippians XXI – Gospel Confidence (*Phil 3:4-11*)

Introduction – Remember that “Judaizers” and “Pharisees” were not bad guys in the minds of many first century Jews and Christians. They were in fact the conservative parties, among the Jews (the Pharisees) and then among the Jewish Christians (the Judaizers). Their zeal for holiness was honored. Their attempt to separate themselves from the unclean world was respected. Their scrupulousness over the law and all the details their teachers added was unsurpassed. Yet Jesus mocked them as blind leaders (Matt 15:14) and Paul mocked them as self-made eunuchs (Phil 3:2).

Confidence in the Flesh (vv4-6) – We must see what this term boils down to so that we then can apply it to more than just Judaizers. We don’t know any Judaizers. But we are tempted ourselves, and we certainly can see in the religious and agnostic worlds around us those who place their confidence in the flesh.

“I’m Not Changing The Rules In Order to Win” (v4) – Paul is not knocking their pedigree or their accomplishments because they have bested him there. He’s been there, done that, got the tee-shirt, and threw it away.

Confidence in Who I Am – Not only circumcised, Paul had the kind of family that was careful to follow the law in all the details. He was no proselyte, but a true Israelite of an upstanding tribe. As a Hebrew, he could boast even among the Hebrews.

Confidence in What I’ve Done – He was a scrupulous Pharisee, trained under Gamaliel, committed to securing his consistency in the law by following a long list of additional requirements (Acts 22:3). His zeal for the law and against the Christians was unparalleled (Acts 22:4-5), even provoking men to blaspheme (Acts 26:11). His Pharisaical observance of the law was beyond reproach, much like the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-25).

Confidence in Christ (vv7-11) – Faith in Christ is, by definition, a rejection of every other man-made system of justification before God.

Repudiating Any Boasting (vv7-8) – Paul rejects with the strongest language (*counted loss, all things loss, rubbish*) any hint of self-righteousness before the judgment seat of God. Remember, Jesus had rights, but made Himself of no reputation (Phil 2:5-6). We have this mind when we rightly consider ourselves unworthy. And Paul doesn’t simply drop these fleshly-confidences down a rung or two. He figuratively casts them upon the dung heap.

Found In Him – Here is the antithesis to confidence in the flesh. It is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. But this imputation is not simply a tricky accounting move by God. We are righteous because when He finds us, He finds us in the Son (2 Cor 5:21).

Through Faith in Christ – “*the righteousness which is from God by faith*”. The obedience (faithfulness) of Christ is the basis of His righteousness before God as the God-man. That faithfulness becomes the Christian’s righteousness by means of faith. It is not an object-less faith, nor is that faith the ground of our salvation. It is the instrument, itself a gift of God, granted by the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the gospel.

Knowing Christ – Here is the result of such faith. Paul uses the term “know” not to simply say that one has an intellectual understanding of Christ. Adam knew Eve and she conceived. Such knowledge refers to a covenantal union which bears forth fruit. This was the promise of the Old Testament prophets (Jer 31:34) and the ongoing prayer of saints in Christ (Eph 3:19).

Resurrection/Suffering/Death/Resurrection – To know Christ is to know the power of His resurrection (which was the declaration of Christ’s vindication – Phil 2:9-11 and Rom 1:4) and would also correspond to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This union with Christ and identification by His Spirit of us to Him unites us to His suffering and death as well.

Suffering/Death – Paul was able to rejoice in all situations because of this. All suffering, and even death itself, was a means God chose to have us fellowship in Christ, up to and including His final vindication. Here, in Christ, is the only place to make sense of all the suffering one endures. Just as Christ’s death led to His resurrection victory, so God uses our trials and sufferings to the end, the purpose, of God’s victory in us. We do not share in His sufferings to add to the atonement – that is not His point. We share in His sufferings and are conformed to His death for the result of the vindication of His name (and ours in Him) (2 Cor 4:7-11).

The Resurrection – Our resurrection will be our life from the dead unto eternity. But that is not all Paul has in mind here. Jesus Christ did not die to show us how to be courageous. He did not die to help build up your self-image. He did not die to show up before the Father empty-handed.

Jesus Christ died to secure the salvation of the world. He died on the cross to humiliate the devil and to ultimately put death to its end. He died to lay hold of His people and to bring them with Him (who is the firstfruits of the resurrection) to a full vindication over all of God’s enemies. In the end, Caesar does not get Philippi. In the end every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus. And this is your salvation, not by any works you can offer the King, but through His righteousness given to you by faith. Believe the Gospel.