



# Central Peninsula Church

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Philippians 3:1-11

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## How to Get Right with God

*SERIES: Philippians: A People and A Place Transformed by the Gospel*

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**“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. 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. 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 his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead”** (Philippians 3:1-11).

We don't know much about what the man who wrote these words looked like. The Bible tells us very little about the apostle Paul's appearance. However, 100 or so years after Paul's death a document was written that gives us what most think is a fairly accurate description of the man who authored more of our New Testament than anyone else. This document describes Paul as: “[A] man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, and full of friendliness.”

Though he was a man “full of friendliness,” when those verses that I just read for us were first read to the church in Philippi 1,945 years ago (give or take a few

years), Paul's words would've at first sounded, not like the words of a friend, but like the words of a surgeon. Those 11 verses would've struck the Philippian church like a scalpel. With Philippians 3:1-11 Paul performs surgery on a church in critical condition. And as we explore these verses some of us will also feel the sting of the scalpel, for these 11 verses address the biggest problem in our lives, the biggest problem faced by every single human on the planet.

If *Time* magazine were doing a cover story on the biggest problem the human race faces here in 2007, what do you think *Time* would identify as our biggest problem? Maybe it would be AIDS, or terrorism, or the war on terror, or cancer, or the breakdown of the family, or global warming, or racism, or poverty. The Bible's cover story, from Genesis straight through to Revelation, is that our greatest problem is a broken relationship with God. Though *Time* would never cover this story, the Bible makes it clear that all of these problems that our media spotlight are problems that, if you really trace them out, ultimately stem from this greatest problem of all—we humans have a broken relationship with God. God is righteous and we are not. We are not right with God.

So our question this morning is how do we get right with God? How do we repair this relationship? How do we become righteous so that we can relate with our righteous God? How do we solve this problem?

Paul's language in these verses is as sharp as a scalpel because there were a group of people in Philippi who were proposing a false answer to our question, a deadly solution to our problem. If you were here last week you learned about the heroic man named Epaphroditus who traveled the 800 miles from Philippi to Rome to report to Paul about all the difficulties going on in the Philippian church. Well, shortly after he first arrived at Paul's prison in Rome, heavy hearted Epaphroditus would've poured out to Paul the story of how some false teachers had filtered their way into the church and begun sharing a counterfeit message about how to get right with God that slowly, sentence by sentence, person by person, week by week, caused great confusion, hurt, and division to come upon the church. Hearing that news would've broken Paul's heart. So, with an aching heart, after taking some time to process

Epaphroditus' report, after much prayer and thought and pacing back and forth, Paul wrote a letter to the Philippians.

We've seen that in the first two chapters of this letter Paul alludes to the troubles going on in the church, but now, halfway through the letter, here at chapter 3, Paul devotes the lengthiest portion of this letter to confronting the false teachers head on and correcting their false ideas about how to get right with God. We don't know if this false teaching had infected 10, 20, or 40% of the church; we just know that it had spread far enough in the church body that friendly Paul now uses sharp, penetrating language in hopes of once and for all removing the source of the infection.

Paul performs this surgery on the Philippians and on us in three parts. In part one, Paul gives us a warning. And for the second and third parts Paul does what he does in only a few places in his letters—he tells us his own story, he gives us a slice of his autobiography. In part two Paul gives us the story of his past. And in part three we get the autobiography of Paul's transformation. So in three parts—a warning, a past, and a transformation—Paul presents the solution to our biggest problem. He slowly unravels the answer to our big question, how do unrighteous humans get right with a righteous God?

As we come under the scalpel of God's word this morning to explore this question it's my hope that a few things would happen in our lives today. For those of us here who are Christians it's my hope that we'd come to better understand, or simply be reminded in a fresh way, how exactly we've come into a right relationship with God so that we could better enjoy this relationship and better express the nature of this relationship to others. These 11 verses will equip us to better enjoy our God and to better speak of him in our evangelism. It's also my hope this morning that those of you here who've never faced up to this gigantic problem of having a broken relationship with God, you'd face this problem. My hope is that you'd feel this problem, that you'd sense that there's nothing worse than being separated from God. My hope is that any false notions you have about how to repair this relationship would be cut away and you'd learn the truth about how to be made right with God and that you'd take action in that direction. So for both Christians and non-Christians we have a "how to" sermon this morning. If you're an engineering type or a practical type or the kind of person who reads the directions before putting something together, this sermon is for you.

## I. A Warning (vv. 1-3)

Please turn in your Bibles to Philippians 3 so that we can look at these 11 verses part by part. In vv.1-3, we have part one of our passage, Paul's warning. You'll notice that Paul begins verse 1 with the word "finally." Now this seems odd for Paul to say "finally" when he's only halfway finished with this letter. But if you think about it, this isn't odd at all. Because remember, Paul's a preacher. When a preacher says the words "finally" or "in conclusion" or "in closing" it doesn't mean anything. I've listened to a sermon before where a preacher said "finally, I want to conclude by saying..." and then he went on to talk for another 20 minutes.

So, halfway through his letter Paul gives us a fake "finally" and then, in verses 2 & 3, he issues a severe warning. What these two verses really do is divide teams. With this warning Paul wants to make it crystal clear what kind of person is aligned with the Christian understanding of how to get right with God and what kind of person is on the opposing team.

As a boy, when my parents wanted to make sure that I really understood the firmness of a particular instruction or truth, they'd say to me "Justin, there's no ifs, ands, or buts about it." Because I had a tendency to debate and argue my way around what my parents told me, looking for loopholes in their logic, my parents would settle all discussion. They'd make the finality of their words crystal clear by telling me "there's no ifs, ands, or buts about it." I couldn't "if" my way out of it: "but what *if* I still did the dishes, but just saved them all up and did them once a month instead of every night?" I couldn't "and" my way out of my parent's instruction: "how about I go over to Joey's house tonight *and* still get my homework done for tomorrow?" And I couldn't "but" my way around my parent's words: "*but* that's not what my friends' parents do...*but* that's not fair." As Paul begins to address the problem in Philippi, he wants to make it clear that there's no ifs, ands, or buts about it. There's no arguing with this point; there's no middle ground. If you're playing with the false teachers team you're offside, you're not in line with the message of Christianity.

Notice that in verse 2 Paul issues his warning three times: "look out, look out, look out!" Paul wants the Philippians to really get the point—this infection of false teaching is dangerous, they must beware.

But Paul does more than give a triple warning. He also calls people names. Paul's three words of warning are accompanied by three bad names. In Greek these three names all begin with the same letter, so Paul's using alliteration here. He's

using poetry to call people names and drive his point home.

This first name, “dogs,” was a derogatory term that Jews used for Gentiles to express their uncleanness before God. The false teachers who’d infected the church at Philippi were Jews who had accepted the gospel message but who believed that this gospel wasn’t enough, the cross wasn’t enough. In addition to the work of the Messiah people needed to keep laws to get right with God. They were putting a plus sign alongside the gospel. Paul will not tolerate this and so he uses their own derogatory term against them. Paul wants a red and white sign that reads not, “Beware of Dog,” but “Beware of Dogs,” posted on the backyard fence at the church at Philippi, not to keep people away from the dogs, but to keep the dogs away from the people.

Next, Paul calls these false teachers “evildoers.” These teachers were telling people that they could become righteous through their own efforts. Paul’s saying that in reality, these teachers are the exact opposite of righteous, they are evil.

Paul then concludes his burst of name calling with the insult, “those who mutilate the flesh.” This is a reference to circumcision. These evildoing dogs were teaching that circumcision was a requirement for getting right with God. If an uncircumcised male crossed paths with these false teachers, he’d be told that to get right with God he’d need to undergo not only a spiritual surgery, but also a physical surgery, he’d need to be circumcised.

That’s a hard pill for any uncircumcised man to swallow, so when the uncircumcised males in Philippi first read this letter they would’ve breathed a sigh of relief as they continued reading into verse 3 and came across Paul’s words “for we are the real circumcision.” Paul’s now coming to the positive side of his warning. He’s explaining that those who are truly circumcised, truly right with God, are those who understand that the Old Testament rite of circumcision never made someone right with God. Circumcision was simply, for a certain period of biblical history, a physical expression of having already been made right with God.

False teaching can be a gift to the church because it gives us an opportunity to clarify the truth. It’s only because heresy was present in the Philippian church that we have chapter 3 of Philippians. So, after three warnings and three name callings, here in verse 3 Paul begins to clarify the truth by giving three introductory statements on what a right relationship with God really looks like.

First, Paul talks about a different kind of person who “worships by the Spirit of God.” So we’re seeing that getting right with God has something to do with

experiencing the Spirit of God. Next, Paul speaks of those who “glory in Christ Jesus.” Getting right with God has something to do with glorying not in yourself, not in your achievements, but in Jesus. And, third, Paul says that one who’s truly circumcised, truly right with God, puts “no confidence in the flesh.” A good way to translate this word “flesh” would be with the word “self.” Your flesh is essentially your “self,” who you are and what you do. So we’re beginning to see that where we put our confidence, where we put our faith, is central to getting right with God.

Every person on the planet operates by faith. We operate by faith every day of our lives. We board an airplane because we have faith that that airplane will fly and not crash. Many of you stepped inside an elevator this week because you placed faith in that elevator. You had faith that you could push a little button with the number 4 on it and that elevator would safely lift you to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. This last week I drove over the San Mateo Bridge because I had faith that it would support the weight of my vehicle and the hundreds of other vehicles trying to escape from Hayward.

We all operate by faith, both on the day-to-day level of our lives and on the matters of life and death level of our lives. Paul’s going to make a big deal about this in part three, but here in part one, with this warning, Paul’s at least touching on this topic of faith because for Paul the most destructive and damaging thing a person can do is place faith in themselves.

This is why Paul’s so heated in these opening verses. To learn that some people in the Philippian church were teaching that you could fix the biggest problem in the world, you could get right with God, through placing faith in the flesh, that made Paul pound the table. This news made the greatest missionary that’s ever lived call people names. So our take away from this first section is that when the gospel is at stake, we can call people names! That’s your homework for this week. If you encounter a professing Christian, whether in person or in a book or late at night on channel 25, who’s teaching a false gospel, call them names. Some good names to go with are “dog,” “evildoer,” maybe try “mutilator of the flesh,” whatever you like! Be creative!

In all seriousness though, it would be a sign of maturity for us as a church if the thing that got us the most concerned, the most worked up, the most likely to call people names, were false teachers and their teachings. That’s just one way we can heed

Paul's command to "look out." Paul gives this warning three times because the danger is serious. The hurricane of heresy kills people and so Paul wants the church at Philippi and I want us to have sufficient discernment to detect false teachers. Call them the dogs that they are and hold fast to a course of putting our faith not in our flesh, but somewhere else, as Paul will soon describe.

## II. A Past (vv. 4-6)

In vv.4-6 we come to the second of three parts in our passage. We've looked at Paul's warning and now we come to the story of Paul's past. Paul is now illustrating his warning with the autobiography of his past. Paul wants to do everything he can to persuade the Philippians to look out for the spreading infection, so he reaches back into his past and tells his story of how putting faith in the flesh didn't work for him; it didn't make him right with God. It's precisely because Paul's "been there, done that" that he uses such strong language with these false teachers. When you've experienced the danger and damage of something firsthand, you're more vocal in warning others about that danger. If you're a recovering drug addict and you learn that some drug pushers have been pushing drugs on your friends, you'll call those drug pushers names and you'll tell your friends the difficult story of your past experience with drugs if you think that that's what it will take to keep your friends away from the drugs. Paul wants to keep the church away from the religious drug pushers, so he tells the church the story of his past, that he was a user for many years, but it got him nowhere.

In verses 5 & 6 Paul gives us seven descriptions of his past. The first four descriptions deal with Paul's religious upbringing. The last three deal with his religious resumé. Let's roll through these seven descriptions quickly, keeping in mind that just like Paul, we have a tendency to keep religious resumé's of our own, our own seven descriptions, bullet points of merit, that we mistakenly place our faith in.

The first thing Paul says about his past is that he was "circumcised on the 8th day." The book of Genesis commanded that all Israelite males be circumcised eight days after their birth. Not every family strictly followed this command. What Paul's saying is that from birth, he did the right thing, or, his parents did the right thing for him. Only eight days old and Paul was on a track towards righteousness.

Next Paul points out that he's "of the people of Israel." Paul was born into Israel; he wasn't a later convert to Judaism, he was born into God's chosen people. Paul had always been a member of the royal family.

Third, Paul highlights that he's "of the tribe of Benjamin." Of the 12 tribes of Israel, it was the tribe of Benjamin that gave Israel her first king, king Saul. Paul's

birth name was Saul. Paul was probably named after king Saul. And the holy city of Jerusalem and the holy temple of God sat within the borders of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul's got an impressive background.

Fourth, Paul calls himself a "Hebrew of Hebrews." The Philippian church was a mix of many different Gentile races and ethnicities. Very few Jews, very few Hebrews, were in this church. The point Paul's making is that he's as Hebrew as they come and yet this wasn't enough to put him into a right relationship with God so these Gentiles need to quit thinking that there's any salvation value in supplementing their faith with Hebrew laws.

These first four descriptions have covered things for which Paul made no contribution; he was simply born into these benefits. Paul talks about the part of his resumé that he worked for. And this is the area where many of us need to pause and think about whether we might be living under the illusion that the almighty God of the universe is somehow impressed with the tiny bullet points on our resumé.

Paul's fifth point about his past is that he was, "as to the law, a Pharisee." Of the several different sects of Judaism operating in Paul's day, the Pharisees were the group who were the most disciplined about keeping God's law. Not only did they keep the Old Testament law, they also created and kept a whole load of additional man made laws. Pharisees like Paul viewed themselves as righteous.

Paul's sixth point is that he was a zealous "persecutor of the church." Formerly, Paul persecuted a group of people who he viewed as unrighteous because he thought doing so would make himself more righteous.

Paul's seventh and final point from his past is that as to righteousness under the law, he was "blameless." According to other people's perceptions, Paul got an A+ on the righteousness report card.

Now here's the point of all this autobiography: Paul's religious resumé didn't impress God. It didn't fix his greatest problem, being rightly related to God. I know that as I look back on my past I have at least seven bullet points that I used to hold up to God, thinking that these religious achievements would impress God and provide a basis for me to have a relationship with him. Even now I can still find myself thinking that I've got to be good, or be the perfect husband, or preach a great sermon in order to experience God's favor.

How about you? What did you formerly think you needed to be and do in order to have a relationship with God? What are the behaviors that even now you fill your religious resumé with? Church

attendance? The consistency of your quiet times? Your upbringing? Your health or your wealth? Your obedience? Have you based your relationship with God on any of these things?

The people in Philippi couldn't put together a religious resumé more impressive than Paul's. And neither can we. You and me, the Philippians and Paul, all stand under God's words in Isaiah 64:6, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our *righteous* deeds are like a polluted garment." Before our white-hot righteous God, even our most righteous deeds, even our best deeds, appear like a polluted garment.

This has everything to do with what's missing from Paul's list. Do you notice what's missing from Paul's list, what's missing from his description of his past? Paul says nothing about his heart. Paul grew up on the Old Testament and the Old Testament is full of talk about the human heart. The Old Testament constantly sounds the call to love God with one's whole heart. Central to relating to God is having a heart warm towards God. Paul doesn't even mention his heart when talking about his past. Although he had the right background and did the right things, it was all like a polluted garment because what was driving it all was his polluted heart.

Paul needed a new heart. This was the ancient prayer of David in the Psalms. Remember, "Create in me a clean heart O God"? You can't have a successful relationship without a clean heart. Paul needed, we all need, a transformation, a transplant, to take place in our heart if we're to become righteous.

The word "righteous" is both a legal term and a relational term. To be declared righteous by God not only means that God has passed down the legal verdict that in his sight you are in the right. It also means that you've been made relationally right with God, your relationship has been repaired and made right. Such righteousness requires transformation.

### **III. Transformation (vv. 7-11)**

This is what we now turn to in vv.7-11. We've looked at Paul's warning, we've looked at Paul's past, now his autobiography comes to a climax with part three, his transformation. I said that this sermon would be practical, that it would be a "how to" sermon. I meant that. Paul's going to answer the how question, but first he tells the what and the why behind his transformation.

So, what happened to Paul? As Paul moves in his story from verse 6 to verse 7 we encounter a changed man. What happened?

The key word here is in verse 7, "counted." This word is in the past tense. This is an accounting term, a word used for assessing value. Bankers and merchants used this word. And what Paul tells us with this word is

that at a decisive moment in his life, he counted everything that he'd viewed as gain, everything that he'd talked about in verses 5 & 6, his whole religious resumé, as loss. Paul had a reversal of values. That's the essence of his transformation. Everything that Paul had valued as a "gain," he now views as a "loss." Everything that Paul had intended as deposits into the bank of righteousness, the bank of being a good person, he now sees that these were really withdrawals, losses. All of his show offs had really been turn offs. His religious savings account had been a harmful illusion—in reality he'd always been bankrupt before God.

Do you see why Jesus always reserved his harshest critique not for prostitutes and murderers but for people like Paul, for the religious types? Prodigal sons know that they're bankrupt, they understand that they have no credit to their account. But it's the elder brothers, the people that we'd describe here on the Peninsula as "good people," people who are not a part of Al Qaeda, people who pay their taxes, don't get DUI's while driving their SUV's, and give a little money to charity. It's this type of person who is blinded to their bankruptcy before God because such a person thinks their respectable resumé looks good enough to catch the attention of the man upstairs.

The "what" of Paul's transformation is that he counted what he thought was best about his life. He counted his gain as loss for the sake of Christ. This transformation ran so deep in Paul that in verse 8 he says he counts his former gain as "rubbish." Rubbish is a soft translation of the Greek word "skubala," which means "excrement." This is a strong, colorful word. I won't spell it out for you, but this is pretty near to what we'd consider a cuss word. Paul's heart was transformed to such a degree that he swears away his former gain as skubala, as excrement. The people in Philippi would've been struck by Paul's strong language. And so should we.

Have you experienced this transformation? Has your heart been so transformed that your former attempts to get right with God now appear to you as skubala, as religious rubbish, like the insides of a filthy toilet? Have you experienced this reversal of values? Have you, perhaps, experienced a transformation like this, but like some in Philippi, over time you've slowly returned to your rubbish and begun to view it again as gain? If so, you need to know the why and the how of getting right with God.

So, why did Paul experience such a radical transformation? Why did this reversal of values happen to him? Well, we have a "because" in our passage. You answer why questions with "because." In verse 8 Paul explains the why of his

transformation, “because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Why was Paul transformed and made right with God? Because he encountered a surpassing worth.

The word surpassing means surpassing, better than everything else. Our hearts are driven by what we think is of surpassing worth, by what we value the most, whether that’s being religious, or being wealthy, or being popular, or being powerful, or being comfortable, or being in a relationship, or whatever. Paul’s heart was driven by earning a righteous reputation before God and others. But then Paul changed, the priorities of his heart were restructured, because he encountered a surpassing worth. He encountered Jesus. He encountered the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus. The solar system of Paul’s life began to orbit around the Son of God because Paul’s eyes were opened to the surpassing, blazing worth of knowing this Son. That’s why Paul threw away his old resumé. Knowing Jesus is better.

Change, transformation of your heart, getting right with God, the reason why you want these things to happen is because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus. Jesus is the one who bridges the righteousness gap between God and us, and knowing this bridge-gapping Jesus surpasses everything else.

We’ve examined the “what” and the “why,” now we come to the “how” of Paul’s transformation, how he got right with God. Verse 9 is the central verse of this whole passage. Many have said that verse 9 is the Christian life summed up in one verse. Verse 9 gives us the “how to.” In verse 9 Paul speaks of being found in Christ, “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.” How do we become righteous so that we can get right with God? Like Paul, we need not a righteousness of our own, but a righteousness that comes from God. We need a righteousness that comes from outside of us.

All the religions of the world tell you that your problems lie outside of you and the solution to your problems lie inside of you. If you can drum up enough self effort or self esteem, or achieve enough enlightenment, or stack up enough good karma, your problems will be solved. Christianity tells us the opposite. The gospel tells us that the problem is inside and the solution is outside. The greatest problem in the world lies inside of us. We have dark, unrighteous hearts that have rebelled against God. Only an outside solution can fix this problem. Christianity is far more honest than any other religion about the nature of the human heart.

My favorite Bible verse tells of how outside help, how God, took the initiative to fix our righteousness problem and make us right with him. In 2 Corinthians 5:21

Paul says, “For our sake he made him who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Paul experienced a great exchange of values because on the cross God made a great exchange with us. With the cross God did something scandalous, he regarded his righteous Son as a sinner in order to regard sinners as righteous. On the cross, Christ’s loss became our gain. God fixed the problem. How God fixed the problem was by placing a cross on the back of his righteous Son. That’s how God bridged the gap between his glorious, bright-brilliant righteousness and our polluted, sinful hearts. The cross of Christ is the one ladder between heaven and earth, the only ladder between God and us.

We need to climb this ladder. And to climb this ladder we need faith. God had his “how to” and we also have our “how to.” How do we get right with God? Well, it depends on faith. Those are Paul’s words. He says in verse 9 that this righteousness from God, this righteousness exchange that took place on the cross, “depends on faith.” Getting right with God depends on faith placement. But you can’t just place your faith anywhere.

Paul formerly placed his faith in his flesh, in his own abilities, and that didn’t make him right with God. The man who commits suicide places his faith in the belief that ending his life will end his troubles. That kind of faith doesn’t make someone right with God. The religious pluralist who says that all paths lead to God places faith in the belief that there can be no exclusive path to God which, ironically, is in itself an exclusive belief. That kind of faith placement doesn’t make you right with God. The average person here on the Peninsula, the people we live next door to, most people here place their faith in being a “good person,” believing that if there is a God and if there is an afterlife, their goodness will be enough to get them a decent retirement plan beyond the grave.

So the key issue with faith isn’t whether you have it or not, but what you do with it. Where do you put it? In verse 9 Paul tells us that there’s only one place you can put your faith that will make you right with God. How you get right with God is by placing your faith in the Son of God. To climb the ladder that bridges the gap between God and us, we need to place our faith in the one who hung on this ladder. Jesus lived the righteous life we should’ve lived. Jesus died the unrighteous death that we should’ve died. And Jesus rose again from the dead so that by placing our faith in him, God could regard us as righteous and bring us into relationship with him.

## CONCLUSION

If you're a non-Christian this morning, you'll never be right with God until you place your faith in the Son of God. And if you're a Christian this morning you'll only enjoy God and you'll only continue to grow in Christ by continuing to place your faith in the Son of God. We are made right with God by faith. And we enjoy and grow in God also by faith. The Christian life is fueled from beginning to end by faith in Jesus.

And this whole passage ought to impact how we do evangelism. The three parts of this passage that Paul uses to correct the Philippians give us a great outline for sharing the gospel. First you've got the warning piece. You should probably avoid the name calling, but what you can do here as you begin to tell someone about God is first expose some of the false ways that people try to pursue a relationship with God. The average secular person here on the Peninsula has two or three quick draw arguments against Christianity, which really aren't arguments against Christianity, but arguments against what's been falsely passed off as Christianity, what's been falsely passed off as the gospel.

So, after you clear some of the weeds with this warning piece you can then turn to your autobiography. You can tell your story. This is one of the most powerful ways to share the gospel in our culture. People love stories. So you can use what Paul does here and tell the story of your own past, of the religious resumé in which you used to place your faith. And then you can tell them the best piece, the transformation piece. This is where you get to talk about Jesus. This piece should be a little bit about you and a lot about Jesus. What you say about you is only to highlight Jesus and how knowing him has transformed you. Above all, what you want to do here is turn the spotlights on Jesus, show that he's of all-surpassing worth.

And then, and only then, after you've given them the gospel, only after you've told them all about Jesus, you tell them how. You tell them how they can get this Jesus and get right with God. You tell them that at some point they need to respond to this message. You tell them, like Paul does, that to get right with God they must place their faith in Jesus. I think that's the best way to present the "how" piece, the response piece, of the gospel. I'll tell you why.

It's become somewhat common for people to talk about "asking or inviting Jesus into your heart." Now I understand where this comes from because there are one or two places in the Bible that use similar language, that speak about Jesus dwelling in us. But overwhelmingly, 9 1/2 times out of 10, the language of the Bible talks not

about Christ being in us, but about us being in Christ. That little phrase "in Christ" dominates our New Testament. The repeated call of the Bible is for people, upon hearing the gospel, to place their faith in Christ. While he walked this earth, Jesus didn't ask people to invite him into their hearts, he told people to believe in him.

There's a reason that the Bible uses this kind of language. Here's what I think that reason is. I think that what can often happen if we share the gospel and then ask people to invite Jesus into their heart, is that people can get a smaller impression of Jesus. What many people visualize is an image of a little man in sandals who can fit inside their chest. But when you share the gospel, when you tell people who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, and then you tell them to place their faith in this Jesus, then people tend to develop a larger image of who Jesus is. People envision a huge Jesus who sits on his throne in heaven and can hold the faith of millions, rather than a small Jesus that fits inside individual hearts.

This is why in verse 9 Paul talks about being "found in" Jesus, rather than about Jesus being found in him. Paul wants the Philippians and I want us to see the bigness of the one who solved our biggest problem. Our greatest problem is big, but Jesus is even bigger. People from every tongue, tribe, and language can be found in this Jesus who, the Scriptures tell us, is right now physically present in heaven, reigning over the universe from his unshakable throne. The Holy Spirit rests in our hearts, but our Jesus reigns on his throne.

If you've placed your faith in Jesus, your biggest problem has been solved. You've been made right with God. One day, you will behold the face of this God. One day, you will see Jesus on his throne. And when you find this out, that your biggest problem has been solved, the only fitting response is to rejoice. So now, finally, we can obey Paul's command in verse 1: "Finally, my brothers [and sisters] rejoice in the Lord."

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