

**AIM**

- To explain that we relate to God not by religion or “right living”, but by the righteousness that Christ gives us as a free gift

**EXPLORE**

- *What questions do you have over the Follow-Up from Session 4?*
- Read Philippians 2:19-30
  - *What plans for the future does Paul outline (compare vv. 19, 24, 25 with 1:21-24)?* To send Timothy to Philippi; to visit them himself; to send Epaphroditus back to them. Remember that Paul doesn’t know whether he’s going to live or die (1:21-24), but he still keeps on living for God, working out his salvation.
  - *What do we learn about Timothy and his priorities from these verses?* Timothy has a genuine interest in other people’s welfare. His character is proven; he is faithful. He has a close relationship with Paul. He is servant-hearted and works for the gospel.
  - *How does Paul describe Epaphroditus? What insights do we get into Epaphroditus’ attitude and motivation?* He is a “brother” (i.e., a Christian); “fellow-worker” (i.e., works with other Christians); “fellow-soldier” (i.e., contends for the gospel). He is selfless; even when facing extreme illness and at the point of death, Epaphroditus was more concerned about how others felt when they heard he was ill than about his own illness. He “almost died for the work of Christ”; he was willing even to risk his life for the sake of the gospel.
  - *Why do you think Paul mentions these two men at this point in his letter (2:4-5)?* Paul isn’t just telling the Philippians his future plans. He wants the Philippians to learn from these two men. Both are examples of Christlike service, the lesson Paul has been teaching in 2:1-18. Both put the interests of Christ—and therefore of others—before their own interests.
  - *Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus all demonstrated their genuine care for fellow believers. In what practical ways can we also do this?*

**LISTEN (DVD)**

*“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8).*

**Introduction**

Everyone at work was very impressed with John Henderson. He was always in the office early. He worked right through his lunch hour and stayed late. He never stopped working throughout the day – always on the phone, or madly typing into his computer.

So it was a shock when he was eventually fired. It seems that he had been doing none of the work that the company had allocated to him. He had simply been running his own business from his desk in the office.

How can anyone be good enough for God—actually good enough for God, not just from our perspective, but from His? Or, as the Bible puts it, how can we be “righteous”?

For some people, the answer to that question lies in “doing good things”, whether it be giving to charity, going to church, treating others in the way they like to be treated themselves, and so on.

To the people Paul describes in verse 2, the answer lies in the practice of circumcision. They believed that God would only accept them if they had this physical mark of allegiance to him.

### **1. Our religion cannot make us righteous (vv. 1-3).**

Paul knew that these men would undermine the joy he talks about in verse 1, so he warns the Philippians about them again as “a safeguard”. In the original Greek, the phrase “watch out for” (v 2) is repeated three times for emphasis. There are “dogs” that try to bully us into thinking that Jesus’ righteousness doesn’t go far enough.

In verses 2 and 3, Paul deliberately turns the accusations of these men back on his accusers:

- The term “dogs” is particularly potent. Dogs were considered by the Jews to be unclean animals, so this term was sometimes applied to Gentiles and to lapsed Jews. In other words, “dogs” are those outside the covenant relationship with God. But, says Paul in verse 2, it is those who insist on circumcision who are the real “dogs”.
- “Men who do evil” is literally “evil workers”. These men were proud of their good “works”. You may be performing works, says Paul with biting irony, but they’re evil works, not good works.
- “Mutilators” refers to circumcision. But rather than using the proper Greek word *peritome*, Paul uses the Greek word *katatome*, which means “cutting”. This is a mutilation of the body which is specifically condemned as a pagan practice in the Old Testament (see Leviticus 21:5 and 1 Kings 18:28). Paul only uses the word *peritome* in verse 3, when he is speaking about Christians. His point is that any “mutilation” they are physically practicing to find favour with God is actually working against them.

Paul’s words are scathing and clear. These teachers are outside the covenant, are evil, and are no better than pagans in their religious practice.

**Application:** We can be tempted to put our trust in things which will do us no good. It may be our church attendance, the fact that our family has been Christian for generations, or our national heritage. God is interested in none of these things. In fact, quite the reverse. Some of those who are most distant from God are the ones who are most “religious”.

- *You may want to use an illustration here. For example, being born in a garage does not make you a car; it was the religious people who opposed and finally killed Jesus; even the devil believes the truth about God – but he remains God’s enemy.*

### **2. Our “goodness” cannot make us righteous (vv. 4-6).**

Paul argues his case by setting out his own “reasons to put confidence in the flesh” (v 4). His pedigree—his religious resume—is impeccable. If anyone had grounds for getting right with God on the basis of his religion, it was Paul. Then he adds another element: “As for legalistic righteousness, faultless”. In other words, if anyone could be justified by doing “good things”, Paul was the man.

Paul says all these religious credentials are “rubbish” (literally, “filthy muck”) compared with knowing Jesus and the righteousness that comes through faith in him (v 7-9). Now that He had seen Jesus, he knows what righteousness really looks like. He understands that he needs a righteousness that is not his own (that “righteousness” is useless and fit only to be thrown out), but comes from God (point #3).

Good deeds are good, but they become bad if you start to think they can make you righteous and remove your dependency from Jesus and His righteousness. We need to repent, not only of our sin, but also of our righteousness; we should “put no confidence in the flesh.” Such self-confidence produces only deceptive self-righteousness or desperate self-loathing.

**Application:** Are we putting our trust in our own goodness? We may be generous, kind and willing to help others, but these things cannot make us righteous. Do you think God would have sent his only Son to die if we could get right with him by doing good things?

### 3. Only Jesus can make us righteous (vv. 7-9).

So, how will we live? There are really only two choices:

- We can go the way of people who put “confidence in the flesh” (v 4). We can do what Paul used to do: we can try to summon up a righteousness of our own by being extremely religious, by doing as many good things as we possibly can in the hope that – at the end of the day – God will be impressed by what we’ve done.
- Or, like Paul, we can refuse to place any confidence in the things we’ve done. We can realize that we’ll never be “righteous” by our own effort. We can gladly accept the righteousness that God freely offers us in Christ, trusting in him to make us righteous. When he stood before God and turned in his resume, Paul wanted it to have one word: “Jesus.” When that’s the case, then “our righteousness is in heaven” (i.e., in Jesus), and we never have to fear God asking, “Where is your righteousness?” This righteousness comes from God and is by faith in Jesus Christ.

### Conclusion

Where are you placing your trust now? If God were to say to you: “Why should I let you into heaven?” what would you say?

How do you know where your confidence is placed? Ask yourself these three questions:

- On an occasion when you’ve disobeyed Christ in some way, do you think you’re less of a Christian than you were before?
- When someone ask you, “Are you a Christian?” do you answer, “Yes, but not a very good one”?
- In a week when you’ve read your Bible, been to church, and told someone about Christ, do you feel more acceptable to God?

If you answered “yes” to any of those questions, then you haven’t understood that your righteousness depends entirely on Christ’s righteousness.

### DISCUSS

- *Was there something in particular that stood out or struck you from the DVD?*
- *Paul lists his impressive religious credentials in Philippians 3:5-6. What similar things do people today think will make them right with God?*
- *How had Paul’s attitude changed and why (vv. 7-8)?*
- *What does it mean for us as Christians to “consider everything a loss”?*
- *Verse 9 explains what “knowing” or “gaining” Christ means. How would you paraphrase verse 9 to explain it to a non-Christian friend?*
- *If we rely on ourselves, what does that show about our view of Jesus Christ?*

### FOLLOW-UP

See the document entitled “Session 5 Follow-Up.” Please note that these follow-up questions differ from the ones in the *Discipleship Explored Handbook*.