

TWO ETERNALLY WOEFUL FALLACIES

I. Philippians 3:1-16

A. I'm around a lot of elderly folks. While oft heard sayings can be errant, when one says, *'We don't know how much time we have,'* that's quite true. But that's true for the young as well as the old. The truth is, a centenarian may have more time than a child or young adult, depending on what God holds for them. Each day truly is a gift. And eternal life is a far far better gift! Hebrews 9:27 (CEB) is good bulletin board material: *27 People are destined to die once and then face judgment.*

B. When a person, young or old, considers the inevitability of their time of passing, they'll often trumpet one of two great fallacies: (1) *'I'm good enough! My good deeds outweigh my bad deeds therefore eternal life in heaven will be mine.'* OR (2) *'I've led such a terrible life, wasted most of it on selfish, destructive, and sinful living, there's no way God could ever grant eternal life to me.'* Both fallacies lack the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Today we seek to obliterate both fallacies...

C. Philippians 3:1-16 (ESV) is written by Paul who is in prison for the Gospel. Had he remained a good upstanding Pharisee and not proclaimed the Good News of Jesus, he'd be free and putting others in prison for their faith in Christ. Paul will tell us of a better righteousness than his own...

1) **V1-2:** *1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. 2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. (Dogs were what Jews called the Gentiles. But Paul flips the term to apply to Jews whose faith was in their own righteousness. When people bank on rites & rituals & works, bereft of Christ [Whom the rites & rituals point to] they're steeped in the fallacy of self-righteousness.)*

2) **V3-4:** *3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh-- 4 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: (i.e. 'If anyone has reason to boast in a stellar law-keeping, self-righteous pedigree, it's me!')*

3) **V5-7:** *5 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; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, (i.e. **Despite my religious pedigree**) I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (i.e. **'The record Christ achieved for me is far superior!')***

4) **V8-12:** *8 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 9 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-- 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained*

this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. **(Has Christ Jesus made you His own?!)**

5) V13-16: 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind **(The cross settles our past!)** and straining forward to what lies ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **15** Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. **16** Only let us hold true to what we have attained. **(If that doesn't nail the coffin shut on fallacy one, what will?!)**

D. But listen to Martin Luther, who launched the Reformation, who knew his way around a hammer and nails: "The most damnable and pernicious heresy that has ever plagued the mind of men was the idea that somehow he could make himself good enough to deserve to live with an all holy God."

E. Next hear the Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon echo Luther: "The greatest enemy to human souls is the self-righteous spirit which makes men look to themselves for salvation." **(Only the righteousness of Christ is adequate to save!)**

F. Now fallacy two: On the day of Jesus' crucifixion, He wasn't alone. Two criminals were crucified with Him. Because they were suffering capital punishment, they're more than mere thieves. Their crimes may have included murder or treasonous insurrection. To the Romans they were merely two scumbags. They began their day mocking Jesus like the Jews and Romans below. All four Gospels mention the two criminals, but listen to **Matthew 27:38-44** (ESV): **38** Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. **39** And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads **40** and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." **41** So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him, saying, **42** "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. **43** He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" **44** And the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way. **(So the self-righteous Jews and pompous Romans are joined by two scumbags in mocking the Son of God who's being punished for their sins!)**

G. But the crucifixion that day had only begun. The sky drew dark. The earth quaked. Rocks split open. Silent to the mockers, Jesus cried out to His Father as our sin was imputed upon Him. "Father forgive them..." He forgave us too! While the self-righteous were unmoved, a hardened centurion was deeply moved. And likewise one of the two scumbags. It happened like this: Luke 23:39-44 (ESV) **39** One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41** And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." **42** And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." **(He recognizes Jesus as King!)** **43** And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." **(A blasphemous scumbag who may have thought he was beyond saving and unfit for heaven turns to Jesus!)**

H. Rope illustration: Picture the white rope winding around this room and out the door as eternal life. It never ends. The few inches of red tape on this end piece represents our life here and now. What happens in the red has eternal ramifications. A person may turn to Christ at the quarter inch mark, or the half inch mark, or the final sixteenth inch mark, but the most important thing is that they turn to Christ. That they receive by faith the righteousness found in Christ alone. Eternity is at stake...

I. Who do you know who needs to hear this? Who do you know living under one of these two horrible fallacies? Who do you love enough to tell? Will you tell them? Let them know of this Better Righteousness, far superior than their own. Let them know it's not too late to repent and believe in the One who died for their sin on the cross and rose from the dead. Let them know He became sin for us so we might be made right with God! Or as **Athanasius said, "He became what we were that we might become who He is!" Or as **John Piper** puts it: "God lays our sins on Christ and punishes them in Him. And in Christ's obedient death, God fulfills and vindicates His righteousness and imputes (credits) it to us. Our sin on Christ; His righteousness on us.**

J. As for the rest of us, were we not once steeped in one of these fallacies before Jesus changed our minds and hearts? What might we glean from this message? How about this: "One thing let's do: forget what lies behind, (Forget where we once were on the red tape; forget what is settled by the finished work of Christ.**) let's strain forward to what lies ahead, and let's press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Let's head for the white with faith and trust in Christ! Because of what Jesus has done, we will live in His blissful presence and worship Him forever and ever! Let's live like we believe that because we do believe that!**

*** Close with Prayer...**

*** Benediction Verse: Peter before the Jewish leaders declares of Jesus in Acts 4:12 (AMP)**
12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among people by which we must be saved [for God has provided the world no alternative for salvation].

[Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff](#)

[Philippians 3:1-16 \(ESV\)](#)

1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. **2** Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. **3** For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh-- **4** 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: **5** 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; **6** as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. **7** But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. **8** 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 **9** 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-- **10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, **11** that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. **12** Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. **13** Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **15** Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. **16** Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Matthew 27-38-44 (ESV)

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Luke 23:39-44 (ESV)

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41** And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." **42** And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." **43** And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise."

Quote by C.S. Lewis

"Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God: the proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous, are in that danger."

Quote by Martin Luther

"The most damnable and pernicious heresy that has ever plagued the mind of men was the idea that somehow he could make himself good enough to deserve to live with an all holy God."

Quote by Charles Spurgeon

"The greatest enemy to human souls is the self-righteous spirit which makes men look to themselves for salvation."

Quote by John Piper

"God lays our sins on Christ and punishes them in Him. And in Christ's obedient death, God fulfills and vindicates His righteousness and imputes (credits) it to us. Our sin on Christ; His righteousness on us.

Bonus Stuff

"Hallelujah, What A Savior" - Fox Hounds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6N6q4ijEyfs>

Dandelion Time Lapse - Flower to Seeds Blowing Away

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCh6j0fXWzU>

The Beauty of a Little Life - Samuel D. James

<https://letterandliturgy.com/2019/05/31/the-beauty-of-a-little-life/>

Hebrews 9:27-28 (ESV)

27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, **28** so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.

Galatians 5:1-8 (AMP)

1 It was for this freedom that Christ set us free [completely liberating us]; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery [which you once removed]. **2** Notice, it is I, Paul, who tells you that if you receive circumcision [as a supposed requirement of salvation], Christ will be of no benefit to you [for you will lack the faith in Christ that is necessary for salvation]. **3** Once more I solemnly affirm to every man who receives circumcision [as a supposed requirement of salvation], that he is under obligation and required to keep the whole Law. **4** You have been severed from Christ, if you seek to be justified [that is, declared free of the guilt of sin and its penalty, and placed in right standing with God] through the Law; you have fallen from grace [for you have lost your grasp on God's unmerited favor and blessing]. **5** For we [not relying on the Law but] through the [strength and power of the Holy] Spirit, by faith, are waiting [confidently] for the hope of righteousness [the completion of our salvation]. **6** For [if we are] in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but only faith activated and expressed and working through love. **7** You were running [the race] well; who has interfered and prevented you from obeying the truth? **8** This [deceptive] persuasion is not from Him who called you [to freedom in Christ].

Quote by Martin Luther

"Christ took our sins and the sins of the whole world as well as the Father's wrath on His shoulders, and He has drowned them both in Himself so that we are thereby reconciled to God and become completely righteous."

Quote by Jerry Bridges

"The same Christian activity can be either an expression of our own righteousness that we think earns favor with God, or it can be an expression of love and gratitude because we already have His favor through the righteousness of Christ."

Quote by Ralph Erskine

"Legal obedience hath the evil of blasphemy in it. It reproaches the righteousness of Christ, as if it were not sufficient, as if His atonement were not perfect, as if His satisfaction were not full, as if His obedience were not perfect, unless it be patched up with the rags of man's own righteousness."

Quote by Harry Ironside

"It is the glory of the Gospel that it reveals the heart of God going out after men in their sins, and it tells what He has done in order that man may obtain peace with God. It tells of Christ come from the bosom of the Father, from the glory that He had with the Father before the worlds were made, become in grace a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, and going to the cross, that dreadful cross, where He was made a curse for us in order that God and man might be brought together in perfect harmony, and we might be reconciled to God by His death. *"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."* And yet that wondrous life could not in itself settle the sin question or recover man to God. In order to do this He must die, and having died He has manifested the fact that there is no enmity on God's part toward man; all the enmity is on our side; and now He is beseeching us to be reconciled to God."

Quote by William Secker

"Many have passed the rocks of gross sins--who have suffered shipwreck upon the sands of self-righteousness."

Saved From the Bell by Henry Bosch

During the seventeenth century, Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, sentenced a soldier to be shot for his crimes. The execution was to take place at the ringing of the evening curfew bell. However, the bell did not sound. The soldier's fiancée had climbed into the belfry and clung to the great clapper of the bell to prevent it from striking. When she was summoned by Cromwell to account for her actions, she wept as she showed him her bruised and bleeding hands. Cromwell's heart was touched and he said, "Your lover shall live because of your sacrifice. Curfew shall not ring tonight!" Like that condemned man, we are all rebels against God under a sentence of death. But He loved us so much that He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, to intervene in our behalf. He has saved us at great cost to Himself. If skeptics had questioned Jesus after His resurrection, all He would have had to do is show them His hands—His bruised, nail-pierced hands. They are ample proof that He has given Himself for mankind.

Theological Note on Philippians 3:2

The ESV Study Bible

"Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh." - Philippians 3:2 (ESV)

3:2 Dogs was not only a general term of derision in the ancient world, it was particularly a word used by some Jews in reference to Gentiles, who were considered ritually unclean. With biting irony, Paul says that the Judaizers, not the Gentiles, deserve that label. Paul's irony continues as he labels those who extol good works of the law as **evildoers and those who mutilate the flesh**. This last phrase (*Gk. tēn katatomēn*) is a play on words with circumcision (*Gk. peritomē*). The Judaizers' supposed badge of pride turns out to be a sign of their destruction. On Jewish views of circumcision, see note on Acts 15:1.

- Theological Note on Philippians 3:2, *The ESV Study Bible*, Crossway, p. 2285.

Theological Note on Philippians 3:2

The NIV Study Bible

"Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh."

- Philippians 3:2 (NIV)

3:2 Dogs. A harsh word for Paul's opponents, showing their aggressive opposition to the gospel and the seriousness of their error and its destructive "devouring" results (cf. Gal 5:15). Their teaching was probably similar to what Paul had to oppose in the Galatian churches (see Introduction to Galatians: Occasion and Purpose). **Mutilators.** Again, a strong, painfully vivid term; the false teachers have so distorted the meaning of circumcision (cf. V3) that it has become nothing more than a useless cutting of the body.

- Theological Note on Philippians 3:2, *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, p. 1847.