

7. Learning from the Example of Paul

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how God works through the lives of others. As they hear about the way that the Lord works through the lives of others, they realize that the Lord can work through their lives also. Younger Christians need to be regularly reminded that the Lord wants to work through their lives just as he is working through the lives of others. In our topic today, we are going to see that we can also help our children to learn many lessons for their own lives from the example of Paul.

In Philippians 3:1-2 we read, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you *is* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!” As Paul moved on to a new topic in his letter, he reminded the Philippians again to rejoice in the Lord. In Philippians 1:28, Paul had written to warn the Philippians about those who opposed them. That verse says, “And not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.” Here, we see that Paul wanted to remind them one more time about false teachers.

Paul was warning about false teachers that were trying to get the Christians to follow them. Paul described these false teachers (Judaizers) in three ways. The word translated “beware” means *to see and understand*. First, the Philippians were to understand that these false teachers were like “dogs”. In the time of Paul, dogs often went in packs and were almost like wild animals. The Jews would even call the Gentiles dogs because of their sinful and impure lives. Here, Paul is saying that the Jewish false teachers were the ones who were like dogs. Revelation 22:15 says, “But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.” This verse talks about those who will not have eternal life.

Second, Paul called these false teachers “evil workers”. These false teachers thought that they were righteous because they were trying to get the Christians to follow the Jewish law. Paul said they were evil workers because they were depending on works instead of coming to Christ by faith. Third, Paul said these false teachers practiced “mutilation”. Jews used the word “circumcision” which means *to cut around*. Here, Paul used the word that means *to cut off* instead, because they were trying to cut off the Gentiles from God.

Philippians 3:3-6 goes on to say, “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” Paul said that the true worshipers of God are those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in their lives. They have placed their faith in Christ and they do not depend on physical circumcision to try to work their way to God. These are the people who are the true circumcision.

Paul understood these false teachers because at one time he had tried to depend on circumcision

and keeping the law to be right with God. He went on to give several reasons why he had tried to depend on the flesh before the Lord stopped him on the road to Damascus. Paul had been circumcised on the eighth day. He was from the nation of Israel. He was from the tribe of Benjamin. Paul had been born to Hebrew parents and continued to maintain the Hebrew traditions even though his family lived in Tarsus. Paul was a Pharisee who tried to keep the law. He was a man with a great zeal and showed it by persecuting the church because he thought that the Christians were wrong. Paul really worked to keep the law and so others saw him as blameless. Here, we see that the reason Paul understood the false teachers was due to the fact that he had been one of them.

However, Philippians 3:7-9 goes on to say, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.” Here, we see that Paul uses two accounting terms to explain what happened in his life. He was trying to make a profit through his own self efforts. Instead, when Christ changed his life he realized that all of those things were actually a loss and meant nothing.

Once Christ got the attention of Paul, he wanted to get to really know Christ as we will see in verse ten. The word that is translated “know” in that verse is the same word that Christ used in John 10:27 which says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Paul wanted to know Christ in the same way that Christ knew him. As a result, Paul counted all of his self-effort as loss because he wanted that full relationship that comes from sharing our lives with Christ and not just knowing about Him. In 1 John 1:3-4 we read, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” John wanted Christians to share their lives with Christ. That was also the goal of Paul.

The word that is translated “excellence” means *that which surpasses or is superior*. Paul knew that the knowledge of Christ (the shared life with Christ) was far superior to any of his previous efforts to try and keep the law. Paul used this same word in Philippians 4:7 where we read, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” The peace of God was beyond all understanding. In contrast, all of his efforts had been only loss. In fact, he said that his efforts were like manure or garbage. The thing that Paul wanted to gain was the approval of Christ and to enjoy fellowship with Him.

Paul knew that He was in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Paul understood the reason why he was in Christ. He was not in Christ because of his own efforts to try and be righteous. That was what he had tried to accomplish when he tried to follow the law. Instead, Paul fully understood that the righteousness that he had was due to his faith in Christ. That righteousness is given to each one of us by God at the time we place our faith in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might

become the righteousness of God in Him.” Here, we see that God placed our sin on Christ and made Him sin for us. Then at the moment that we place our faith in Christ, the Father places the righteousness of Christ on us. That is why no one can gain righteousness through their own efforts.

Paul went on to write in Philippians 3:10-11, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Although Paul had followed Christ and known Him for many years, Paul wanted to get to know Christ even better. That should also be our desire and the desire for our children. We saw in verse eight that Paul wanted to get to know Christ in the same way that Christ knew him. We saw that Christ said in John 10:27 that He knows His sheep. Christ knows everything about us and still He loves us with an infinite and immeasurable love.

Paul wanted to know and understand the power of the resurrection of Christ. Christ demonstrated His power by raising Himself from the dead. Romans 1:3-4 says, “Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” The resurrection demonstrated that power in a way that nothing else could demonstrate it.

In order to know Christ as He knows us, Paul said that he wanted to understand the fellowship of His sufferings. We only really begin to understand the love of Christ as we have the opportunity to share in his sufferings. That had happened to Paul and Silas when they were in Philippi. In Acts 16, they were falsely accused and beaten with many stripes with rods by the Romans. Then they were placed in stocks in the prison. Acts 16:25 says, “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God: and the prisoners were listening to them.” Paul certainly understood some of the sufferings of Christ.

Paul also said that he wanted his life to be conformed to the death of Christ. Here, we see that Paul was very willing to give his own life for the same purpose as Christ. He was willing to die to take the message of the Gospel to others. That is why Paul said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.” Paul had as his goal to live for Christ as long as he lived and he was ready to die for Christ when that time came in his life. In fact, Paul did not really care how he died. Instead, the thing that he looked forward to was the fact that he would be raised from the dead by Christ.

Paul gives us a tremendous example for our own lives. We want to show our physical and spiritual children that same attitude by our example. As they see that we are willing to suffer and even die for Christ if that is what the Lord chooses, they will grow in their understanding of what it means to follow the example of Christ and Paul. That will also help them to want Christ to use their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn important lessons from the example of Paul.