

A Gospel Driven Righteousness

1. Intro & Context

- Paul established the church in Philippi some 10 years previously
- Continued on his missionary journeys preaching about Jesus and planting churches
- He's no longer there to pastor and shepherd them
 - Now in jail for preaching about Jesus
 - Ppl from Philippi have come to visit him and bring him supplies, take care of him
 - They fill him in on what's been happening amongst the Christians in Philippi > pretty good! > their a growing healthy church
- So he's writing this letter to them encourage them to keep proclaiming good news of Jesus, standing strong in their faith and keep living lives worthy of the gospel

[SLIDE]

2. Righteousness is our greatest need

- And in these verses he wants to spell out to them what it means to have a gospel centered righteousness
 - Ppl think righteousness means being a good person, living a good life
 - Not what Bible says righteousness is
 - Righteousness = means having a right standing before God
 - You can stand before him and be accepted
- Paul warning the Philippians about some ppl who were going about their righteousness in the completely wrong way
- *Philippians 3:2* ² *Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.*
- These guys were probably Jewish Christians who were forcing Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians to be circumcised

- Known as Judaisers > trying to Judaize Christianity > blend Christianity with Judaism
- Go around saying
 - "You want to be a real Christian ... yeah you need to believe in Jesus ... but you also need to keep the OT Law ... and sorry to say buddy, that includes circumcision"
- Paul says ... watch out of these guys
 - They're dogs¹
 - They're doing evil²
 - They're mutilators of flesh³
- Basically these guys thought they were being more religious, more spiritual, more obedient, more worthy of God's favour
 - Ironically what they were doing was evil and made them more like unclean Gentiles
- What this highlights is the a basic need humans have amongst themselves to be righteous
 - This is what the Judaisers are trying to do
 - They're trying to do things that make themselves right before God
 - Yes they knew about Jesus, but for them that wasn't enough ... they needed to add to that keeping the Law and being circumcised
 - Unless you do that ... then you're not a real Christian
- Saying
 - You need to do this to be right with God
 - You need to do that to be right with God

¹ not talking cute pet dogs > wild dogs > scavengers = unclean. Because they were unclean, dogs was a word used to describe Gentiles (non-Jews)

² These guys think that by keeping OT Law they're being righteous, but in actual fact what they were doing was evil

³ Same word for mutilation is used in OT (1 Kings 18:28) to describe the self mutilation of the pagan prophets of Baal. Thus circumcision which these Jewish Christians thought was a badge that made them right with God ... Paul likens to pagan mutilation

- In one sense ... they're right!
 - We do need to be right with God
 - It's just they were going the wrong way about it
 - They were putting their confidence in what Paul describes as works of the flesh ... their religious practices and rituals

- Before Paul became a Christian ... he was the same
 - v4-6 he lists out the confidence in the flesh he had from outward obedience and religious observance
- He says ...
 - "If anyone has confidence in the flesh it's me"
 - If anyone can boast in being religious, moral and good its him
 - "No matter how righteous you think you are Paul says I'm better" ...
- And he lays out his credentials
- Four inherited privileges
 - ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day,
 - of the people of Israel
 - of the tribe of Benjamin
 - a Hebrew of Hebrews
- What he's saying here is ...
 - he wasn't a Gentile converted later in life
 - Born as a Jew, raised as Jew
 - He was as pure-blood as Jews get
 - A true-insider
- Add to his inherited privileges ... all his personal achievements
 - in regard to the law, a Pharisee
 - as for zeal, persecuting the church;
 - as for legalistic righteousness, faultless
- He was
 - One of the most devout, law fulfilling, leaders of Judaism in his day

- He had a seriously impressive set of credentials
- From a human perspective ... if there was anyone who was going to qualify through their own works of the flesh to have confidence before God... it was him

- To these Judaizers he saying ...
 - You think you guys are devout & religious ... you've got nothing on me
 - Be like me boasting of my cycling prowess to Cadel Evans!

- **Application**
- What these Jewish Christians were doing ... and what Paul did before he became a Christians ... was trying to stack up a list of credentials with God to be right with him
 - The Bible tells us we inherently know God is there and we're built to worship him
 - Irreligious people reject God and that truth
 - But religious people recognise that God is real and we need to be right with him
 - They know righteousness before God is their greatest need ... so they try to build a big list of credentials to ensure they will be okay with him
- "Look God I
 - Go to church
 - Give money
 - Serve on the roster
 - Lead a growth group
 - Support a Compassion child
 - I read the Bible
 - I pray
 - See God how I do all this stuff for you"
- And they put confidence in their right standing before God because of their credentials

- This is not just something the religious person does
- It's something we all do
- Many times I've asked a person –
 - "if you were to die tonight and stand before God and he asked you "Why should I let you into my good and perfect heaven?" what would you say?"
- Nearly everyone I have that conversation with says
- Because
 - "I'm a good person
 - "Tried to do good to people
 - "I know I'm not perfect ... but I tried to be a good husband, wife, father, mother
 - "Try to help people
- You see what the non-religious person is doing?
 - Rather than building a list of religious credentials
 - They build a list of **moral** credentials
 - They think they can be right with God based on their moral goodness
- So we all do it
 - Religious and irreligious alike ... by nature we try and meet our great need to be right with God by what we do

3. Righteousness is our greatest problem [SLIDE]

- Here's the problem with all of that
- Our righteousness / our right standing before God CANNOT come from building a list of credentials to present to God
- In fact ... trying to be right with God on our own terms ... only pushes us **further away** from God
- Righteousness that we think earns favour with God ends up alienating us from God and putting us in a worse position with him
- When Paul became a Christian ... this is the thing he realised

- It's not that all of a sudden he realised he was a sinner who needed to repent
- He always knew he was a sinner
- When he sinned he repented

- He realised that to be a true Christian means not only to
 - worship by the Spirit
 - glory in Christ Jesus,
 - But most significantly in this context ... put no confidence in the flesh
- That is
 - Put no confidence in his own righteousness before God
 - Not to seek to be right before God because of his ...
 - inherited privileges
 - religious observances
 - obedience to the commandments
 - **anything** that's outside of **Christ**
- He realised ... if your confidence is in Christ, it cannot be in yourself

- So we see in v7-9 Paul says
 - ⁷ *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.* ⁸ *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.*
- Even after he added up ALL those impressive credentials of his inherited privileges and religious observance ... he says they are **nothing** compared to knowing Jesus Christ
 - "I gave up all those things
 - "I gave up my
 - Self-importance
 - Status
 - Friendships

- Wealth
- Position in Jewish society
- "I willingly gave all that up for knowing Chris"
- Paul says even when you weigh up this seriously impressive stuff they mean nothing when it comes to knowing Christ Jesus as my Lord
- Those things are rubbish!
 - NIV tries to be too polite here
 - Rubbish = dung / excrement!
 - All my impressive list of credentials > all my achievements > dung / crap!
- See the power of what he's saying ...
 - You know my PhD from Oxford
 - You know my 3 Olympic gold medals
 - You know my Australian of the Year award ... all dung!
- **Illustration – James Packer [SLIDE]**
- Like James Packer spending his whole life being groomed to take over Kerry Packer's TV & Publishing empire
 - Born in right family
 - Raised in Bellvue Hill
 - Went to Cranbrook School
 - Trained up by his dad running various subsidiaries of the empire
- Then in an instant he gives all that up to run the corner shop Lakemba
 - I consider all that I had before as dung compared to what I have now
- What would cause Paul to let go of all that
 - What would cause Paul to want to consider his vast earthly credentials and achievements as rubbish?

- He realised that to seek your own righteousness and standing before God is ultimately a rejection of God

[SLIDE OFF]

- Most people think there are two ways to respond to God
 - Follow him or reject him
- But there are actually two ways to reject God
 - Can reject Jesus and live in opposition to him – irreligion
 - Can reject Jesus by trying to be moral and good and follow the law – religion
- Irreligion is rejecting Jesus altogether
 - “Who knows if there is a God > if the Bible’s true > how can we know > so I’m going to go live my own life”
 - That’s irreligion
- Religion or moralism is rejecting Jesus as Lord and Saviour by trying to develop a righteousness of your own and presenting it to God
- The religious person says
 - “I’m going to follow the rules
 - “I’m going to be better than other ppl
 - “I’m going to be very religious
 - “I’m going to go to church, give money, etc
- Then you feel good within yourself
 - Sense of self-righteousness
 - You end up thinking - I’ve been good therefore God owes me ... why wouldn’t he accept me?
- This is what Paul was trying to do as a Jewish Pharisee
 - This is what the Judaisers were trying to do in Philippi
- The religious person treats God like the Prime Minister
 - I pay my taxes ... you owe me

- I pay my taxes why aren't the roads in better condition, I deserve better health care
- Religious person treats God like this ... I live a good life ... there therefore he owes me

- But true Christianity is different from both irreligion and religion
- What makes a person a Christian is not that they move from being irreligious to being religious
 - Lots of ppl think that the Christian message is
 - Stop
 - being irreligious and start coming to church
 - not praying and start praying
 - breaking the 10 commandments and start obeying the 10 commandments
 - They think that's the Christian message > get religious

- Here's the problem with trying to be religious and create a righteousness that's based on what we do
 - It never works!
 - It never works

- Want to know why?
- Because
 - as hard as you try
 - as much as you give your money
 - as much as you go to church
 - regardless of how much or how regular you read the Bible
 - irrespective of how morally good you are
- On your own you can never be righteous on your own
 - You will always mess up
 - At some point you will fail

- You will sin
- And the moment do you do that ... you're no longer righteous in God's sight
 - You're track record is blemished
- That's why Paul says in Romans 3:10 – "no one is righteous not even one"

- You know the other reason working for our own righteousness doesn't work?
 - Because either it will lead us into pride
 - Or it will lead us into despair
- Working for your own righteousness fluctuates depending on your religious performance
 - If you're
 - Reading your Bible regularly
 - Restraining yourself from conscious sin
 - Having a good run in being at godly spouse or parent
 - You think ... I'm doing okay > I'm being a good Christian
 - It leads you into pride
 - On the other hand ... if you're
 - Struggling with sin
 - Being a lousy parent or spouse
 - Haven't read the Bible or prayed for ages
 - You think you're a lousy Christian > you doubt your faith and you despair

- So what do you do
 - Try harder!
 - Succeed > proud
 - Fail > despair ... eventually you give up because it's all too hard
- You're like a rat on a wheel ... running hard, but going now where and just getting exhausted by your religious performance

- Summary
 - Righteousness is our greatest need
 - When we seek to achieve it ourselves - Righteousness is our greatest problem - because it fails
- Good news of Christianity
 - Righteousness is our greatest gift

4. Righteousness is our greatest gift [SLIDE]

- True Christianity is not about us developing a righteousness of your own and then presenting it to God and saying now you owe me
 - True Christianity is about God developing HIS OWN righteousness through Jesus Christ and then giving it to us
- Which is why Paul says this in v8
 - *Philippians 3:8-9* *I consider them rubbish, 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 is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that **comes from God and is by faith.***
- Paul realised that the righteousness he was seeking by trying to keep the law was useless
- But in Christ ... there's a righteousness that comes ...
 - not through his own good doing
 - that didn't depend on
 - how good he was or
 - religious he was
 - moral he was
 - devout he was
 - All of which was set to fail ...
- It was a righteousness that is a GIFT
 - It's given to him BY GOD

- Paul doesn't have to earn it
- He doesn't have to flog himself to try and live up to God's perfect standards

- In meeting the risen Lord Jesus and becoming a Christian ... Paul has a right standing before God that is given to him by God himself

- That's why he's happy to count all his achievements and credentials as loss
 - That's why he says all that other stuff ... that's dung / that's rubbish
 - I had to let go of
 - all my achievements
 - all my credentials
 - all the things that I thought gave me credibility with God
 - So that I may gain Christ and be found in him

- **Application**
- When you become a Christian you realise the only thing that you can base your righteousness on is not
 - Your achievements
 - Your credentials
 - Your status
 - Your religiosity
 - But only what God has done for you through Jesus death on the cross
- It's a righteousness that comes from GOD ... it's a GIFT and we receive it by faith
- God owes you nothing ... but in Christ he gives you everything

- When you become a Christian it means having to abandon anything that you think earns your righteousness and you would credit to yourself ... and rely on Christ alone instead

- And when you understand that ... it transforms your Christian experience
 - Not only does it lift the burden from your heart to develop your own righteousness
 - But it transforms the motive in which you go about living the Christian life

- Here's how ...
 - The basic operating principle of religion is - I obey therefore I am accepted by God
 - The basic operating principle of gospel is - I am accepted by God (righteous) therefore I obey

- The religious person is seeking to obey to be accepted
 - Problem with that is it forces you to focus on external > not the heart
 - It's all about the outward action

- But the thing that's driving that behaviour is
 - Fear or pride
 - Fear of getting into trouble or being punished by God
 - Pride that motivates me not be like one of liars, adulterers, racists

- While being religious / being moralistic might change your behaviour for a while ... it won't change your heart
 - Only when the heart is changed ... that true transformation can happen in a person

- The problem with moralism is that it bends a person into a different pattern of behaviour through fear of consequences and pride ... rather than melting the heart into a new shape of joy, love and gratitude
 - Try and bend a piece of metal without heat's softening effect ... the metal tends to snap back to its original position

- This is why people who are trying to change through moralistic behaviour find themselves lapsing back into sin
- Similarly, if you put too much pressure on metal without heat's softening effect you will break it
- Many ppl after years of moralistic behaviour abandon their faith altogether – they just give up, their exhausted, they can't keep up the effort of being good and moral
- The behaviour may change for a while by putting pressure on the will, but the heart's basic desire of selfishness isn't dealt with apart from the gospel
- But when you realise you don't have to earn your right standing before God ... but its been given to you by him as a gift of grace ...
 - it melts your heart and
 - it transforms your motivation for godly living
- **Example**
- The Bible's solution to stinginess is not to command you to give 10% of your income > drive you to religiosity and moralism
 - It's is a reorientation to the gospel and the generosity of Christ, who became poor so that you would be spiritually rich (2 Cor 8:9)
 - Gospel reminds you don't have to worry about money, because the cross proves God's care for you and gives you security
 - You don't have to envy anyone else ... because your God given righteousness has give you a wonderful status that nothing else can provide
 - There's a heart motivation that comes from knowing God has given you the amazing gift of righteousness in Christ
- The Bible's solution to a bad marriage or porn addiction is not merely to say "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14)

- It points us to the radical, spouse-like love of Christ in the gospel
 - Only when you know this sacrificial, love of Christ will you have real motivation against lust
 - His love is totally fulfilling, so it keeps you from looking to sexual fulfilment in other places to give you what only Jesus can
- Do you see the point?
 - What makes you a sexually faithful spouse or a generous person or a good parent or a good church member ... is not just doubling your effort and trying harder
 - Rather, it is deepening your understanding of the righteousness of Christ that's graciously given to you by God ... and living out the changes that understanding makes in your heart

5. Conclusion

- We all have a deep need to be right with God
 - Sadly many will try and develop a righteousness before God on their own based on moralism and religiosity
 - That type of righteousness is doomed to fail
 - It will never be able to fulfill a righteous standing before God on your own merits
 - Further it will only lead you further away from God as pushes you towards pride or despair
 - It won't actually bring any real change in behaviour or heart
- But the great news of the gospel is God has made a righteousness available to us through the cross of Christ
 - And it's a gracious, amazing, liberating, totally undeserved gift
- As we grasp the amazing grace of God to us in Christ and the righteousness he's bestowed upon us ... it melts our hearts

- It motivates us to live a life worthy of the gospel
 - Not because I'm trying to earn God's favour
 - Not because I'm fearful of his rejection
 - Not in order to be accepted
- But because Christ was rejected for me
- Because in Christ I know I am already accepted and righteous in his sight
- All you and I need to do is receive it by faith

PRAY