

## STUDY GUIDE

### LETTERS FROM PRISON: PHILIPPIANS (Week 7-8)

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH

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### Philippians 3:1-9

*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 (legalistic) 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 (excrement), 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*

#### Background

The Apostle Paul, the writer of Philippians, was a scholar and very nuanced, calculated person. He is a run-on sentence waiting to happen. That is what makes a line in this passage so striking. With all of his credentials and all of his educated polish, Paul bluntly declares that he considers all of it, “rubbish,” which means

“excrement” in English. Here’s the equivalent of a Harvard Ph.D. saying that all of his accomplishments are CRAP compared to being found righteous in Christ! That is quite a claim and worth investigating.

### Righteousness: a fundamental need.

Righteousness simply means having “right standing” with God, and interestingly enough, with other people. If anyone had a reason to be “right” with the world, it was Paul. His resume was impressive:

*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.*

Paul was a pure Jew, from one of 2 tribes of Israel true to the house of David, superbly educated and he backed it all up by persecuting those in opposition to his religion. He had it all, by the world standards. After Paul encountered Christ, he lets us know that these things can’t make us righteous. It is interesting that we all know we need to be “made right.” We feel like we need to measure up...to make ourselves feel worthy. While we may not have Pharisees putting heavy burdens on us like in Paul’s day (see verse 2), our culture lays a rather massive “yoke” on our lives each day. We all typically feel the need to build our resumes so we can “get in.” Getting in, may be to the right college, the right job, the right friends or the right spouse. It seems we are always “auditioning” or “interviewing” for something.

### Questions for Reflection

1. Do you think your “resume” stacks up with others’?
2. Where do you tend to look for your righteousness? Here are some common ones: your job; looks; children; spouse; etc.

### Righteousness: a fundamental problem.

Righteousness, a problem? Yes, that is not a typo. Often OUR righteousness is a bigger stumbling block than our sin because we understand our sin is bad. We understand we need to repent and ask for forgiveness when we do wrong. However, often it is our righteous acts that make us proud and give us a sense of worth. If we are not careful, we can end up like the elder brother in the story of the Prodigal Son. The prodigal recognizes his sinful ways and returns to the father in repentance; the elder brother is indignant when his father welcomes the “bad” brother back into the family:

*...[the elder brother] was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,<sup>29</sup> but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.<sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' Luke 15:28-30*

Self-righteousness can leave us proud and bitter when someone else gets something we don't think they deserve or unnecessarily guilty and depressed when we don't perform like we think we should. It is dangerous.

### Questions for Reflection

3. Do you understand why righteousness that comes from “right behavior” is an issue?
4. If self-righteousness is not dealt with, what happens?
5. Look deeply at your life and repent of any self-righteousness inside of you.

### Righteousness: a great gift.

*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 (excrement), in order that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> 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*

When we receive righteousness as a gift, it is difficult to overstate its significance. By grace through faith we are given a free gift. The only way to be made righteous is to have Jesus, in effect, on our resume. He's righteous act is imputed to us.

### Questions for Reflection.

5. How can you receive righteousness in Christ? (see John 3:3; Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 10:9-10).
6. How do we see the righteousness of Christ in others? (see Galatians 5:22-16, Matt. 25:37-40).