TALKING POINTS

Uniting Heaven and Earth:
Christ in Philippians & Colossians
Q1L6: "Confidence Only in Christ"

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MEMORY VERSE: "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." Philippians 3:10, 11 NKJV

LESSON STUDY INTRO

This week's lesson explores "the role of faith and works in the experience of a follower of Christ." Qtly, Sab, last par

1. Legalism always aims for the "low bar" (Sun-Tue)

- In Philippians 3, Paul encourages the believers to rejoice in their present experience with Christ, and not to be shaken by the Judaizing teachers urging circumcision (see Phil. 3:1-3).
    - The lesson appropriately points out the contrast between "uncircumcised believers who rely full on Christ for their salvation and put no confidence in mere human works such as circumcision." Qtly, Mon, par 2
        - "Though circumcision might not be an issue today, the principle it deals with certainly is." Qtly, Sab, par 2
- Legalism, while often characterized as strict obedience to God, is actually a disguised avoidance of the commandments of God.
    - Legalism always aims at the "low bar" – it never asks how much it can do for Christ, but how little it can do and still be saved (see Mt. 23:23). This is because as long as the heart remains unchanged, the requirements of the Christian life are a heavy burden (see Gal. 2:14; Ac. 15:8-11; Col. 2:23).
        - Perfection is never the goal of the legalist (see SC 44.2).

When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. COL 97.3

- The reason the "gospel of circumcision" was so appealing was because it acted as a substitute for true surrender (see Gal. 5:11). Legalism, therefore, actually guards the heart against conversion.

It is more palatable to human nature to do penance than to renounce sin; it is easier to mortify the flesh by sackcloth and nettles and galling chains than to crucify fleshly lusts. Heavy is the yoke which the carnal heart is willing to bear rather than bow to the yoke of Christ. GC 567.

2. We receive the righteousness of Christ by receiving Christ (Wed)

- Paul came to the point where he realized that he didn't just need a *behavior change*, but a *heart change*. (Phil. 3:3-11).
    - This is accomplished through a "knowledge of Christ," gaining Christ, and being "found in Him." The apostle explains clearly what it means to be "found in [Christ] – and that is to have His righteousness, and not our own (Phil. 3:9).
        - "Only His faith has obeyed fully and can obey…. So, if we are in Christ and He lives in us (Gal. 2:20), then we live by His faith through our faith in Him." Qtly, Wed, last par

[T]hrough faith, [Christ's] life has become ours…. It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal. DA 388.1 (see also MB 18.1)

3. Christ's goal for every believer is perfection (Thu)

- Contrasting the "low bar" standard of legalism, Paul now declares his #1 priority goal to be "pressing on" toward the goal of the "upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (v. 14).
    - He describes this goal as Christian perfection, the very purpose Christ laid hold of him for (v. 12; see Heb. 6:1). The prize of eternal life is first a *quality* of life before it's a *quantity* of life.
        - "By knowing Him and inviting His presence into our lives every day, we press on toward the goal of being like Jesus in every way possible now." Qtly, Thu, last par
- Paul recognizes that his strength is not in himself, but in Christ and the "power of His resurrection" (v. 10; Eph. 1:18-20).
- Finally, using the metaphor of running a race (see also 1 Cor. 9:24-27), the apostle urges his readers
    - not to get discouraged about where they are (or aren't),
    - not to get diverted from their course, but, following his example,
    - to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, trusting that He will carry them across the finish line (see Phil. 1:6; Heb. 12:2).

CONCLUSION

He who would build up a strong, symmetrical character,… must [daily] learn the meaning of self-surrender. He must study the word of God, learning its meaning and obeying its precepts. Thus he may reach the standard of Christian excellence. Day by day God works with him, perfecting the character that is to stand in the time of final test. And day by day the believer is working out before men and angels a sublime experiment, showing what the gospel can do for fallen human beings. AA 483.1 (Qtly, Fri, par 1)