

Pentecost 16
Philippians 3:4b-11
September 12, 2010

I doubt that there is a single thing the Bible teaches that has not been fought over. Is what the Word of God says worth all the fighting? Does not that question answer itself? The Bible is what God says! It's God's Word!

That God would talk to us is astounding. That He would tell us He loves us and wants us to have everlasting and glorious, joyous life with Him is still more astounding. And our salvation from soul-destroying sin and death is The point of the whole Bible.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the teaching of the Bible, God's own Word, that is most denied and attacked is that very teaching that God, specifically our Lord Jesus Christ, came here from heaven, in the flesh, and accomplished our rescue from sin, death, hell and the devil's enslavement of us sinners.

Furthermore, because all of us are sinners, natural-born sinners, sinful from the inside out, this battle for and against God's Word constantly goes on in our own hearts and minds. And this situation isn't made any easier by the chaos of daily living. This is the battle the Apostle is, again, dealing with here in Philippians. To help us be victorious in our daily battle, the Apostle reminds us that

Jesus and His Righteousness Are Worth More than
Everything Else.

The one thing that the Apostle Paul really emphasizes in these verses is that Jesus' righteousness is of far greater worth than Paul's righteousness or yours or mine.

The Apostle earlier in his life had rated his own righteousness much more highly. He quickly ticks off quite a list, most of which sounds quite religious actually – circumcised on the eighth day, just as God had commanded, and Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin. He calls himself a “Hebrew of the Hebrews.” He had taken God's laws very seriously, following the religion of the Pharisees. He dares to say that outwardly considered, according to “the rules” view of things, his was a flawless righteousness.

Now, the Apostle calls his righteousness a bunch of smelly garbage. In fact, St. Paul named that whole test of rather religious things, garbage, good for nothing.

How is that possible? Had not God commanded the descendants of Abraham to circumcise their sons on the eighth day? And how could Paul so disparage being a child of Abraham and of Israel?

Well, St. Paul once turned it all into a matter of his accomplishment or a matter of a right, which he deserved from God.

That is simply false! Nothing Paul did won God's favor. No outward circumstance of birth won any points with God. In fact, to think that religious practice, a religious deed earns anything toward eternal life with God is a falsehood, a lie, a delusion, all the more dangerous because it is dressed up to look religious/spiritual.

Jesus is worth more than our righteousness.

Jesus is worth more than all of our efforts. His efforts on our behalf are perfect. His coming here from heaven, in the flesh, His whole life, His suffering, death and resurrection, all of it perfect, all for us for all sinners is the best. His efforts are far better than ours. St. Paul names his efforts garbage. Isaiah calls our righteous acts filthy rags.

Even our moral triumphs, Paul calls it legalistic righteousness, are worth nothing when compared to the triumphs of the Lord Jesus. In fact, without Jesus, there is no triumph over sin and satan at all. Without Jesus, our triumphs are all lies, deceptions. Any real triumph over sin comes by faith in Jesus. It was Jesus who laid down His life for us. It was Jesus who gave life back to Himself. It was our sin He died for, not His sin. It was His righteousness not ours that made death fall in defeat.

Not one thing we could or can or do accomplish has any positive effect on our eternal future. In fact, the only thing our doings accomplish is guilt and punishment and death. But Jesus rose from the dead. And when He did that, it was our sin and guilt and punishment and death that was forgiven. It was our guilt to His credit when He died. It is His righteousness to our credit when He rose to life.

Paul mentions his being an Israelite, a Benjamite, a Hebrew of Hebrews. Physically, all this was true. But it guaranteed nothing for Paul's salvation. No earthly relationship, connection or membership influences anything in heaven. Who my ancestors were, what church I'm outwardly a member of, what my nationality is, none of this guarantees my eternity. Only my connection to Jesus by faith in Him guarantees eternal life.

Jesus is worth the loss of all things and all others. If it is ever a matter of Jesus or somebody, anybody else, or Jesus and anything, even if that person is father, mother, son, daughter, even if that thing is my earthly life, let alone things like money, possessions, job, education, power or the like, let Jesus always be preferred. While all these persons and all these things might turn me away from eternal salvation, only Jesus can give newness and life to me.

On this Sunday when I again ask all of you to rededicate yourself to Jesus, to His Word to His Church, to His promises, to, therefore, gather around His Word, the Holy Bible, to see to it that your children hear and learn Jesus' Word, I ask you, does your rating of Jesus and His Word on Sunday morning for yourself and your children reflect that Jesus is your most precious Treasure above everybody and everything else? If not, repent and change.

Rev. Dale R. Schulz
www.stjohnsde.org

St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church
Newark, DE

Jesus is our righteousness. Jesus is our forgiveness. Jesus is our resurrection from the dead. Jesus is our life, our new life from the death of sin and our eternal life. Jesus is God. All of this, then, is from God, a gift from Him. All of it is ours by faith in Jesus. The Gospel alone creates and maintains this faith, this trust in our Savior. Keep yourself close to that Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Keep your children close to it, while you still have the influence over them.

Jesus and His Righteousness Are Worth More, Far More, than Everything Else. He also is our eternal life. Amen.