

UNITE!

WEEK 5

A STUDY OF THE PRISON EPISTLES

OUTWORK

Golf legend, Ben Hogan, said, "If you can't outplay them, outwork them."

Great players show up early and stay late. They're prepared and attentive in team meetings, and they don't make excuses.

If your team were just like you, would they be great? If they *worked* like you, *practiced* like you, *studied tape* like you, would your team be better than it is? Hopefully, the answer is "Yes." If not, you're getting outworked, and holding your team back.

Guess what, the same thing is true spiritually. You can *elevate* your team or *drag* it down. You'll never "outplay" the sin around you, but you can "outwork" it. Be what you want to see in others. Follow Paul's example by saying, "***Be imitators of me, and watch carefully those who are living this way, just as you have us as an example.***"

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-17

⁷But these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!—that I may gain Christ, ⁹and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness—a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ's faithfulness. ¹⁰My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected—but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, ¹⁴with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Therefore let those of us who are "perfect" embrace this point of view. If you think otherwise, God will reveal to you the error of your ways. ¹⁶Nevertheless, let us live up to the standard that we have already attained.

¹⁷Be imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and watch carefully those who are living this way, just as you have us as an example.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

How do we live "by grace through faith?" We struggle with performance and acceptance because sin tells us that neither God, nor people, will accept us *as we are*.

The truth of grace and hope in eternity brings freedom. Scan the QR code and listen to this song based on 2nd Corinthians 3:17—"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is freedom." Take a moment and worship with this song thanking God for freedom.



DISCUSSION

Describe something that turned out not to be as good as you thought it would be before you had it.

1. How did Paul view his former "gains" of righteousness? (7-8)

2. What has Paul not achieved? What does he pursue and why? (12)

3. What did Paul invite his brothers to do? (17)

4. Why would Paul use a coarse word like "dung" to describe his accomplishments? (8)

5. Describe your own spiritual progress. How has God changed your perspective on how to measure it?

6. Is there anything you need to start or stop doing to elevate your team as a result of this study?

To paraphrase Paul, "Everything apart from Christ is crap." If you've experienced the disappointment of getting exactly what you want, but still feel empty, talk to your coach today.

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

STUDY NOTES

IMITATORS

Legendary Hall of Fame coach, John Wooden, could be quoted every Week in this study for the wisdom and practical advice he supplied during his long and successful career. He offers one such quote, “*The four laws of learning are explanation, demonstration, imitation, and repetition. The goal is to create a correct habit that can be produced instinctively under great pressure. To make sure this goal was achieved, I created eight laws of learning—namely explanation, demonstration, imitation, repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition.*”

Coach Wooden taught basketball, but how does this advice relate to what we see today from the Apostle Paul? First, in the first verse of Philippians 3, Paul wrote, “*To write this again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you*” (a.k.a. repetition). Likewise, in Philippians 4:8, he encourages believers to think about godly things—much of which he’s discussing here.

Preceding today’s passage Paul explained the challenge of false teachers looking to external religion. Paul demonstrated that whatever externals they might use, he was better. In his success, however, he knew that externals won’t save anybody. Instead, we must imitate his example and repeat, repeat, repeat, the gospel of grace through faith to ourselves daily.

RIGHTEOUSNESS STRENGTHENS UNITY

I would encourage you to read all of Philippians 3 because our passage jumps directly into Paul’s argument. Paul combated the false teachers who taught that you had to follow certain rules and practices to have salvation. Paul then listed out all the things he had going for him—his competitive advantage. He even had qualities that were outside of his control like being circumcised on the 8th day of his life (3:5). Paul stated very clearly that his resume greatly surpassed these false teachers, but he concluded that none of that truly mattered.

All these advantages, **these assets**, Paul said, “*I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ.*” Sorry about the financial language here, but assets and liabilities refer to what you own vs. your debt obligations. If you’ve heard of Dave Ramsey, you know “Debt is dumb.” He often quotes Proverbs 22:7, “the borrower is slave to the lender.” Any salvation we try to earn on our own apart from the grace of Christ, Paul regards as slavery to sin (Galatians 5:1).

As a pharisee, Paul was enslaved to performance and religiosity. And, he was *really good* at performance and religiosity. However, adding to his previous conclusion, “**all things are liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.**” Knowing Christ is greater than *everything*—because *everything else* is **dung**. Actually, “dung” is a rather polite translation of the Greek word here. I’ll leave the cruder translations to your imagination.

Nothing matters except **righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ’s faithfulness**. It is only through faith in Christ that we may **know him, experience the power of his resurrection, share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, and, somehow, attain the resurrection from the dead.**

Because salvation is exclusively through Christ, there is no ego on his team. There are no all-stars, or glory hogs. Also, there is no conflict that cannot be overcome. When the gospel truth is a team’s foundation, unity is the result. Righteousness strengthens unity—and team unity often leads to team victory.

TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS LOVES FOR ETERNITY

Although our faith rests on the grace of God, and not in performance, we must constantly fight to live free. Paul wasn’t perfect, although we often assume he was. Paul models the fight, “**I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**” This fight isn’t to please God, we can’t please him anymore than we already do completely through Christ. Our fight against sin is in response to salvation, not to earn it or pay it back. Perfection for eternity awaits us. To which Paul says, “**let us live up to the standard that we have already attained.**”

Some of you have received rewards for what you do well: sports, grades, money. It’s easy to find our identity in the rewards and through the approval of those we admire or desire. The achievement and approval matter little if they don’t last for eternity. Nobody will check your GPA, class ring, or letterman jacket at the gates of heaven. Only one thing matters, do you know Jesus?

Now imagine passing by all the people you knew in this life who don’t know Jesus as they march the other direction to the “other place.” Imagine the fear and frustration in their eyes as they realize you knew the truth and didn’t tell them. This probably isn’t an accurate picture of our entry into eternity, but it’s true enough. People looking for life apart from Christ will find only temporary distractions. You cannot *convince* anybody into a relationship with Christ, but you *can* introduce them to him.