

I Got Credentials

A study of Philippians: Philippians 3:1-11

We relate our worth with our credentials.

You may not think so, but take some time to listen. When we introduce ourselves, we will most often tell what we do for a living and how far up the ladder we have come. We may share that we have been with a company for awhile and started off in the mail room.

When it comes to kids, we say how much our children are doing and what the latest accomplishment is. We attach our worth to what we have accomplished. It is a common practice, but common does not always mean good.

What are some of your “credentials” that you tend to share with others?

Why do we find our worth in what we have accomplished?

Paul comes to a point in the letter where he is able to say the rest of what he wants to say. He has just expressed the need for unity through humility. Now he comes to a point of talking about some other issues that have to do with credentials.

First, he opens with a command to rejoice in the Lord. This is almost a break in the seriousness of what has just taken place. I can see the church becoming more and more serious as they listen to what Paul is saying, and then Paul breaks the seriousness and proclaims “Rejoice in the Lord!” In other words, don’t get bogged down by all this. Our focus is on God and here is where it should stay.

Why is it so important for the believer to keep “Rejoice in the Lord” in the forefront of his mind?

When we try to “rejoice in the Lord” our attention is towards heaven rather than towards our issues. This perspective keeps us looking at the God who strengthens and provides rather than the problems. It is reminding us that God is bigger.

There is another thing, because this is a book on unity, it does not surprise us to see that Paul’s command to rejoice is to the group of believers.

How is corporate worship beneficial?

Corporate worship can be very encouraging and uplifting to the believer. It can also help the church as a whole to center them on Christ. This idea of rejoicing is a key theme in not only Paul’s writings, but in the Christian life as a whole.

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.”
Philippians 3:1

*“Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.”
Deuteronomy 17:18*

Now Paul seems to be apologizing for his letter. He desires to share some things with the church that will be a repeat, but repetition is a good thing. He says it is not a problem to write it again.

Why is repetition important in matters such as this?

Paul says it will be a safeguard to them. A safeguard is an anchor that will hold firm in the storms. It is being firm, steady, sure, and immovable. Life can be rocky at times and the storms of life can really shake us up. Paul is about to remind them how to stay firm and immovable.

In Deuteronomy 17, God gives specific rules regarding the king. Beginning in verse eighteen, the king is instructed to write a copy of the law for himself. This seems redundant because he can just use what has already been written. The king is also instructed to continually read through it all the days of his life. Again, it seems redundant, but Moses explains why. The king, by doing this, will learn to fear God, obey God, and remember who is in charge. By doing this, the king is being reminded often of the standard for living.

How often do you read your Bible? How often do you pull it out when making decisions?

The king was required to do it all the time. This idea puts new meaning into reading your Bible. You might just want to have it as handy as you can throughout your day.

The Bible is our anchor to life; your credentials, even “good” ones, do not make up for a lack of reading your Bible.

The Bible will be that safeguard against those who would try to confuse the truth. Paul warns them to stay away from the Judaizers who were seeking to make Gentiles into Jews through practice of the law rather than through Jesus. It is not about following guidelines, but about following the Guide – Jesus Christ. Paul warns them and then shares how he was one of them, how he has credentials.

Here were Paul’s credentials:

- Was circumcised on the eighth day – this was common Jewish custom
- A true Jew of the nation of Israel
- He has a genealogy from the tribe of Benjamin
- He is not a Hebrew by admission, but by birth
- He was a Pharisee and knew the law
- He was not just an average Pharisee, but one that was zealous to persecute
- He followed the law completely and practiced the customs

Paul could say that he was the best of the best. He had achieved the highest point of religious work and was at the top. He had the credentials.

Look back to why we find worth in our accomplishments or credentials. Credentials are not equal to maturity. There are many people who have studied the

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Philippians 3:8-11

Word of God and spent hours writing books and speaking to people, but have never allowed the Word of God to impact their lives. They assume that their study for a sermon can substitute for their personal study. It is a myth to think that credentials can take the place of getting into the Word.

It is easy for us to accumulate credentials for the sake of God. What are some of the things that we do in the name of Christ to build our credentials?

We may at times be tempted to serve in ministries and do volunteer work “as a Christian”, but all the while wanting to shine the spot light on us rather than God. Paul sees that the only thing that is a worthy pursuit is to know Christ. Everything else comes in second or in his terminology - losses.

Paul confesses a complete paradox.

“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” (Philippians 3:7)

This phrase is the definition of surrender. Surrender is one of the hardest things that we are called to do. The believer cannot get away from this word. Paul could have essentially had any salary and job he wanted, but it meant nothing in light of knowing Jesus. Not only did they mean nothing, but they were a loss in regards to Christ. His credentials were in the red while his relationship with God was in the black.

Righteousness and surrender go hand in hand. We surrender ourselves and do not seek to build our own righteousness, but realize that our being is wrapped up in Christ and therefore our righteousness is through him.

We surrender ourselves and then identify with Christ through the power of His resurrection, but also the fellowship of His suffering. That’s the part nobody likes, but let’s again remember where Paul is as he writes this letter. He is a prisoner; therefore the fellowship of Christ’s suffering is very real to Paul. But it comes down, again, to perspective. Paul knows that everything is loss for Christ because in losing everything Paul gains life and resurrection from the dead.

My credentials may get me someplace here on this world, but in the end my credentials will not help me.

It is faith in Christ that will outlast my credentials. No matter what I have done, it all comes down to a personal relationship with Christ. Paul knows this and claims it.

Do you?

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?
