

Getting your dream job can be difficult. And so some prospective employees have tried a variety of things to get themselves noticed. Things like:

- Washing cars in the company car park where they're looking for a job.
- Handing out coffee cups with their name on it.
- Sending a cake with a business card represented in the icing.

Others just try to impress by making their application stand out from other's. Maybe by writing their CV to make it sound as impressive as possible. Or even simply by lying on it about things like the jobs they worked in, the responsibilities they had or the number of people they managed.

According to a survey from last year,

- 70% of workers confessed to lying on the resumes.
- And an incredible 80% lied during a job interview.

So that's the kinds of things that people have tried in order to get a job in a company. But what about when it comes to working for God?

- What do we need to qualify as a servant of Christ?
- How do we become part of God's kingdom?
- Do we need to do lots of things to get noticed by him?
- Do we need to try to impress him with our abilities and achievements?

Well our next section of Paul's letter to the Philippians tells us what does not and what does qualify us for service! Read Philippians 3:1-11: "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put 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; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

1. No Confidence In Ourselves

There's some debate about the details but it seems that in the 1950s sales of instant cake mix had started to decline. Research was done into why housewives in particular had been moving away from this easy and convenient way to bake homemade cakes.

The results were surprising. It appeared that some people felt guilty because it was too easy. They didn't like the fact that all they had to do was add water, mix and cook.

To fix this problem, the company took out the dried egg from the cake mix so that the home baker would have to add fresh eggs to the mix. People felt like they were doing more and so felt less guilty. The story goes that cake mix sales rose rapidly afterwards.

Whether that story is completely true, people certainly have tried to do this with the gospel. It seems too easy to just trust in Jesus. They want to do more to contribute to their salvation. And so a message of 'Faith in Jesus plus...' is often preached.

In Paul's day, the Judaizing teachers preached 'Jesus + circumcision'. They'd infiltrated into churches and taught that faith in Jesus wasn't enough to make you acceptable to God. They said: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." Acts 15:1

But if anyone could have trusted in themselves to make them right with God, then Paul could have. He had an impressive list of religious advantages and achievements.

a) Not in our Advantages

He was, “Circumcised on the eighth day.” Philippians 3:5 and so right at the start of his life he received this sign of his membership of God’s covenant people, “The people of Israel.” Philippians 3:5.

His family line was, “Of the tribe of Benjamin.” Philippians 3:5, the tribe that gave Israel its first king and remained loyal to the royal line of David, when the 10 other tribes left.

Even closer to home, he was “A Hebrew of Hebrews,” Philippians 3:5. The child of godly, convinced and deeply religious parents.

Paul was born into an extremely privileged situation. But did any of these privileges make him right with God?

Som of us were also born into a privileged situation. Some of us had the immense privilege of having parents who were committed followers of Christ, or who at least took us to church, expressed God’s love to us, taught us to respect God’s law.

And we should be grateful for whatever advantages we received. But does any of this make us right with God?

b) Not in our Achievements

Paul was also a high religious achiever. He lived, “In regard to the law, a Pharisee.” Philippians 3:5. He diligently and meticulously kept the hundreds of laws to qualify as a member of this strictest party of Judaism.

And he was so zealous in what he thought was service for God that he gave himself to “Persecuting the church.” Philippians 3:6 He thought it was a rejection of the true faith.

He could even honestly say, “As for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” Philippians 3:6 If anyone could be declared right with God through good living, religious activity, sincerity or commitment, then surely Paul would qualify!

And today, there are many good people around us. People who are sincere in their religion, active in their good works, faithful in trying to live a good life – whose goodness and commitment often challenges us! And yet, the question is, does this in any way qualify us before God?

c) Not in Anything of Ourselves

Well Paul’s clear answer is no! He used to reckon that his advantages and achievements put him in credit before God. But when he met Christ he realised that “Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” Philippians 3:7

He learned that none of the advantages of his birth or upbringing, nor his achievements or activity had made him right with God. And so he transferred all of that into his loss column. He gave up all trust or reliance on them and instead came empty-handed before God.

And we need to do the same. For us to qualify for service, we need to reject any idea that we and God are partners in producing our righteousness. Instead those who are the covenant people of God, are the ones, “Who put no confidence in the flesh.” Philippians 3:3

The flesh is everything we are apart from the grace of Christ – it is humanity at our worst and our best. And we need to accept that there is nothing that we are or can do to make us right with God.

We must put no confidence in our family background, our baptism, confirmation, good living, charity giving, Bible knowledge or religious devotion. As Paul says: “No-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.” Romans 3:20

Righteousness doesn’t come as the end result of our efforts, but only when we let go of our efforts to make us right with God and accept that, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

2. A Complete Trust in Christ

So instead of confidence in ourselves, we need to completely trust in Christ!

a) In Christ Alone

Paul wrote: “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Philippians 3:8 He rejected every other foundation for confidence before God in his life so that his only foundation was Jesus.

Jesus is the only way we can be right with God. Those who are the true circumcision, those who are truly God's people are those "Who glory in Christ." Philippians 3:3

Religion, doesn't save. Good living, sincerity and commitment cannot change our standing before God. There is no other way. No back-door. No alternative route. Salvation is found only in Christ!

b) By Grace alone

And this salvation is not a Do It Yourself righteousness, that we have achieved. "Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law." Philippians 3:9 It has nothing to do with who we are or what we've done.

Instead it's, "The righteousness that comes from God." Philippians 3:9 It comes to us only as a gift of God's grace.

On the cross, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21 When Jesus died, he took upon himself our sin, and paid our death sentence in full – so that our sin-debt could be completely forgiven and we could be credited with the righteousness of Christ!

c) Through Faith Alone

And we receive this mind-blowing gift, "Through faith in Christ." Philippians 3:9. This means we have abandoned any trust in ourselves and our efforts. We've stopped trying to save ourselves. Instead we rely completely on Christ. We put our life in his hands and depend on him as our Saviour and Lord.

d) The Gospel Alone

This is the gospel. That whoever we are, whatever we've done or not done in our lives, we can be saved in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. To add anything to this good news, or take anything away from it, would be to destroy it completely.

That's why Paul completely abandoned his trust in his privileged upbringing and his impressive achievements. He says, "I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." Philippians 3:8

If Paul had held onto any of that, he would not have received this righteousness from God. So he knew that what he lost was nothing in comparison to what he gained when he gained Christ!

And this is also why Paul was so severe in his condemnation of those Judaizing teachers who added to the gospel. "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh." Philippians 3:2 He spoke this way because he knew how dangerous this group were.

He knew their teaching dishonoured Christ. And he knew that it hindered people coming to Christ to receive salvation. He told the Galatian church that their teaching "Is really no gospel at all." Galatians 1:7.

But he also knew that their false teaching enslaved Christians. He wrote to the Galatians: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

God wants us to live in freedom. Freedom from guilt. Freedom from fear. Freedom from legalism. He wants us to know the peace that comes from knowing we're forgiven, the confidence of knowing we're accepted by God.

He wants us to be able to "Rejoice in the Lord." Philippians 3:1. To experience the joy of knowing Christ as our Lord and Saviour, and be sure that nothing and no-one can ever separate us from his love.

3. A Craving for Christ

So we need to remove all confidence in ourselves, and instead completely trust in Christ, and in him alone.

But although our salvation doesn't depend on us or how we live. But it should change us and how we live.

This is what Paul went on to write - about his craving to continue to see his life changed by Christ in terms of what he wanted to know, to be and to achieve.

a) To know Christ

Many people's ambitions are connected with more knowledge. Universities are full of people seeking after knowledge about a whole range of subjects. But Paul's desire for knowledge was different. "I want to know Christ." Philippians 3:10.

i) Intimacy

Of course by this time, Paul had known Christ for many years. He'd already talked about the "Surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Philippians 3:8. He'd followed Jesus, learned from him, served him, loved him.

But love is ambitious. It always wants to spend more time with the one we love. To grow in our relationship with them. To deepen in our intimacy.

So our love for Christ should lead us to want to know him more, to go deeper in our understanding, closer in our relationship. And this is what life ultimately is all about. "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." John 17:3

This is what our hearts long for – that intimate connection with God as our Father, Friend, Counsellor, Saviour and Lord!

ii) Power

Paul also wanted to know, "The power of his resurrection." Philippians 3:10. This is the power of the risen Christ living in us by the Spirit that enables us to live a completely different life – to free us from sin, empower us for service and make us more like Jesus.

But this power is often not seen in our lives as we might expect. It is often revealed in our weakness. As the Lord said to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9

iii) Fellowship

Alongside intimacy and power, Paul wanted to know "The fellowship of sharing in his sufferings." Philippians 3:10. Following Christ and suffering go hand in hand.

Believers are called to endure rejection, ridicule, hatred, sacrifice, persecution. Even in Ireland, it is costly to truly follow Christ!

But Paul wasn't hesitant about this. He was eager for this, because he knew that there was a deeper fellowship with Jesus in those times. He doesn't leave us to suffer on our own – but instead comes alongside us, stands with us, supports and encourages us.

So this is what Paul was ambitious to know: Intimacy with Christ, the power of Christ and fellowship with Christ!

b) To be like Christ

People are also ambitious about what they want to be - the manager of the business where they work, the best in their field, to be famous, to be at the top! But Paul's ambition was very different. "Becoming like him in his death." Philippians 3:10

As we saw a while ago, Paul highlighted the cross as the supreme example of Jesus' servant nature. "He humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" Philippians 2:8.

This is who Paul wants to be more like. He wants to be more like Christ in his servant attitude, in his dying to self and giving up everything for others.

And this is God's purpose in our lives. "To be conformed to the likeness of his Son." Romans 8:29 God is working for us to become more like Christ to obey him completely and serve others sacrificially.

c) To be with Christ

Finally, Paul had an ambition to achieve something. But it wasn't about wealth, property or earthly success. It was to, "Somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead." Philippians 3:11

Why did he say somehow? Well it wasn't because he was unsure of his resurrection. That was his sure and certain hope. But rather, he was unsure of the events that would lead to his resurrection. He didn't know how or when he would die, what he would go through.

And we don't know those things either. But we can know that at the end there will be the glory of meeting Christ face to face! And that will make everything worthwhile! As Paul said, "Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." 2 Corinthians 4:17.

Conclusion

So there's a balance here.

- We don't need to be like those job applicants we talked about at the start. We don't need to try and impress God to convince him that we're good enough for his kingdom and service. Instead we need to reject all confidence in ourselves, because our advantages and achievements can never make us right with God.
- Instead we need to completely trust in Christ alone, and in his death and resurrection.
- But if we have trusted in Jesus then God wants us to be ambitious in our Christian lives. Not in a self-centred way. But in a way that will bring honour to him, as we crave to know Christ, be like him and be with him.

The Christian life is all about Jesus. He is the way we come to God, and he should be our focus as we live for God. As Paul said earlier in this letter, ["For to me, to live is Christ."](#) Philippians 1:21

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