

Philippians 3:1-11

Intro A Reliable Résumé July 29, 2007

Résumé – from the French – to summarize, a brief written account of personal, educational, and professional qualifications and experience, as that prepared by an applicant for a job. A résumé is your ticket into a position or place to which you previously did not have access. It is an argument, a case made for your acceptance. Unfortunately, some people aren't firing on all cylinders when it comes to this important piece of paper. The following come from actual résumés...

- I am extremely loyal to my present firm, so please don't let them know of my immediate availability.
- "I intentionally omitted my salary history. I've made money and lost money. I've been rich and I've been poor. I prefer being rich."
- "Note: Please don't misconstrue my 14 jobs as 'job-hopping'. I have never quit a job."
- "Please call me after 5:30 because I am self-employed and my employer does not know I am looking for another job."
- "My goal is to be a meteorologist. But since I have no training in meteorology, I suppose I should try being a stock broker."
- "I procrastinate - especially when the task is unpleasant."

When giving the reasons for leaving your last your, be careful

- "Responsibility makes me nervous."
- "They insisted employees get to work by 8:45 every morning. I couldn't work under those conditions."
- "I was working for my mom until she decided to move."
- "The company made me a scapegoat - just like my three previous employers."

Making a list of our merits is something we do at every level. Our entire society and culture demands a résumé, not just for jobs or college entrance.

We use résumés for friendships - how should I look, how should I act? People size you up, determining whether to let you into their group. It gets more complicated in romance - you consider their appearance, their income generating possibilities, what they will be like in the future. How you get in - waive a résumé - look how smart I am, how witty, how pretty, what a great personality.

A résumé is just another way of selling yourself, of trying to make yourself a better person. By it you may improve your image or bolster your ego. And that is a problem. It is an issue Paul combated in Philippians 3. But it is a problem we don't often consider. We know God is never pleased with our sins, but what should we think when we go about trying to improve ourselves, try to boost our résumés? What should we think about our positive qualities when it comes to our standing before God? READ Philippians 3:1-11. Paul, writing from prison, considers where his qualities should be based. Rather than looking to one's successes and failures, he points us to another place where we can build a solid, reliable résumé.

There is another term for "résumé", a term full of theological content, laden with biblical concepts: righteousness. Just as the résumé lists your qualifications, you and I write spiritual résumés, trying to convince ourselves, our family, our friends, our world, that we really are good people. That résumé, that list of our righteousness, is a deep need you and I have. We need to know if we are acceptable. Paul understood this when he gave his résumé in 3:4-6

OUR RÉSUMÉ (i.e. RIGHTEOUSNESS) IS OUR GREATEST NEED

Paul outlines an impressive list of qualifications. He gives a drop-dead résumé. He lists his advantages at birth and those acquired in later life.

- He was not a convert, but was born a Jew.
- In order to show his real Jewishness, Paul alludes to his membership of a special tribe. Benjamin was, with his brother Joseph, the son of Jacob by Rachel and the only son born in the land of promise. The first King, Saul, belonged to this tribe and the future apostle shared his name before his own name was changed. Benjamin's tribe was the only clan who remained loyal to David's line, who kept the covenant. The Holy City Jerusalem was located in the borders of their land.
- He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a badge of untainted bloodline as well as untainted by Greek culture. Many Jews in the first century were thoroughly Hellenized, affected by the culture. Paul's ancestry, his upbringing, his speech all pointed to that wonderful heritage.
- Paul chose to be a Pharisee whose reputation was for careful observance of the Mosaic Law and its tradition. Zeal was a well-known characteristic of the Pharisees who in part traced back their line to

the Maccabees, noted for their ardor for Israel's covenant. In striving to show his earnestness and devotion he opposed fiercely the followers of Jesus in a hatred of Christians.

- Paul acted in good conscience, so he was considered to be blameless. He had no blemishes on his record - he scrupulously adhered to the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law, with its finely honed regulations of Sabbath observance, food, and ritual cleanliness.

There is no fat on this résumé. He lays out a good case to feel good about himself. He demonstrates that quest we all have to justify ourselves, to make ourselves look good.

What's on your résumé?

Life is full of all sorts of résumés, pointing to our friendships, status, home, reputation, moral stature. A good résumé will be short on criminality, long on kudos from others. Our résumé will list a stable home, a good upbringing, a quality education, a fine job. Our résumé will certainly include time spent reading God's Word, telling others about Christ. It will list all the moral qualities we have been taught that is right and proper.

- Mothers have résumés that include well-behaved children, clean house, and happy husband. Is there anything inherently evil about those things? Of course not.
- Men's résumés will point to their well paying job with responsibility, advancement. That they spend time with their kids; don't cheat on their wives and can still bench their weight.
- Pastors' résumés list the hours they spend studying God's Word, counseling people, lives changed, and a growing church.
- The student's résumé certainly lists the GPA, the institution they attend, the course load they carry, and the job they juggle to pay the bills, your summer internship.

This is the most profound need, we all want a good résumé, and we all need righteousness. We are all trying to live up to something. Our résumés all say the same thing, "You should accept me, because..." "I am a good person because..."

But notice what Paul does. He trashes his résumé. What everyone sees as gain, as profit, as beneficial - he says is loss (8). He is so intent on dumping his résumé, on rejecting this wonderful pedigree that he calls it "rubbish." Now the translators are more polite than the apostle, than God himself. These attributes are nothing but excrement.

Why does Paul trash such an impressive résumé? Because he knows that this résumé, his listing of his good qualities are his greatest problem.

OUR RÉSUMÉ (i.e. RIGHTEOUSNESS) IS OUR GREATEST PROBLEM

Paul warns us about good people

In verse 2 Paul issues a threefold warning: "Watch out for dogs! Watch out for evil workers! Watch out for mutilators of the flesh!"

When we read this we easily envision some nasty, dastardly depraved, pernicious people. Paul's invectives are stunning as he launches in a tirade, dropping all sense of decorum, civility is out the window. He'd make Harold Stern blush.

To call someone a dog was a biting metaphor since K9s were the zoological lowlifes of the first century. Paul's not referring to the cuddly lap dog, but the vicious scavengers that all ancient people considered unclean. Next he calls them evil doers which normally was used of those who broke God's Law. But then the final cutting remark designates these people as: "mutilators of the flesh."

Paul's terms will not win him the Miss Manners award for polite language. With a play on words Paul makes reference to these infiltrators as those who *kata tome* - mutilate. This is juxtaposed in v3 where Paul refers to himself and the Philippians as the *peritome* - those who cut around (circumcise).

The Philippians are to be on their guard against these evil people for the simple reason that they are calling for believers to be circumcised. A minor issue, you say? The agenda in circumcision is obedience to the Law as a means of filling out your spiritual résumé. But the possession of the sign of the covenant in circumcision does not equate with the reality of being adopted by God. The presence of morality is not the same as presence of Christ.

If you walk down a street in Manhattan, LA, or Chicago, you may see street vendors selling what appears to be a Gucci, Prada, or Kate Spade bag. But rather than the four digit figures one expects, these go for \$50. They are, of course, knock-offs, the bane of the fashion industry – but loved by the fashion wannabes in all of us (not that your pastor wears Prada!). We want the same with our lives, since righteousness is

out of our reach, we settle for acceptable knock-off goodness. Paul's opinion is straightforward – this short-circuits what God has for us.

Paul says that those who are demanding you obey God's Law, who say that faith in Christ plus obedience to the Law of God, are mutilators. They are evil because they demand you work for God's favor. They are dogs because they scavenge to create a good résumé. Doing good to make oneself pleasing to God makes one an evildoer.

But that doesn't seem so wrong! The problem is the diversion from God to their résumés. This is a warning against moral people. It is hard to attack good people; but is necessary when goodness replaces God, when morality replaces the cross.

Paul's adversaries are not immoral - and that is a huge problem.

What is most dangerous to our relationship with God as well as with others is not our sin, but our morality. There is nothing so deadening than to think we are good. Repenting of righteousness, ripping up your résumé and ceasing to present yourself as good is critical to being a Christian. But there is nothing that stands in our way more than those résumés. There is nothing more deadly than that list of good attributes you possess which you hold up to others, to yourself and to God. This is what is so surprising in this passage. Paul's concern for the Philippians is not their sin, but their righteousness. He worries not about their criminal record, but their performance.

Sin is not the main problem that screws us up. It is not what keeps us from God. Sin is not the main reason we struggle with the Gospel. *It is your righteousness!* It is not your attitude toward your sins that fouls you up, that messes your emotions, that psychologically undermines you, it is your attitude toward your own goodness.

Most of us know we fail, that we sin, but that knowledge is not enough. That's why Paul was a Pharisee, why so many of us are religious. But Paul had to reorient the way he looked at his good deeds, his accomplishments. That is the moment he turned to Christ.

The Bible tells us that the gospel is so radical that what makes a person a Christian is not that they move from being irreligious to religious. There are a tremendous number of people who think that being a Christian means "Stop being irreligious and come to church. Stop ignoring God and start praying. Stop breaking the 10 Commandments and start obeying them."

The English writer Dorothy Sayers told the story about a misguided, pharisaic missionary who tried to get a tribal chief to become a Christian. The chief wanted to clarify what it meant to be a Christian. He said: "Let me get this straight, if I become a Christian I can't kill my neighbor, cut off his head and shrink it?" "Yes, that is right." "I can't kidnap another tribe's wives and take them as my own and use them as my wives?" Yes "I can't loot their villages?" "Well, I'm 70 years old, I can't do those things anything, so I guess I'm already a Christian."

Here is the gospel - you come to realize that those who are irreligious as well as those who are religious are to control their lives and to be their own saviors. They are all trying to write their own résumés. We all want to keep control of our lives. We don't want to give God control.

What makes you a Christian is to repent of your righteousness. You now see that even and especially when you are religious you are trying to be your own savior. I use Jesus as an example, a model, a hero - but I was my own savior. I thought I was doing enough; my life was my résumé to open the door for me.

A Christian is the one who says, "I used to repent of my sins, but now I repent of my righteousness as well." This is what it means to be a Christian. It is not "I'm a bad person and need to live a better life." But to say, "I see that I am good, but that goodness is useless."

OUR RÉSUMÉ (i.e. RIGHTEOUSNESS) IS OUR GREATEST GIFT

Why does Paul trash his résumé? Why does he call moral people who desire to obey God's Word "dogs, evil, mutilators? Because there is good news. Instead of trying to constantly update our résumés, rather than always applying duct tape to our sinful heats, and covering the holes in our souls with spackle - there is a résumé that is offered to us, that is a gift.

This is why Paul begins with the command to rejoice...in the Lord.

That is where your joy must be found! The chapter opens with a call to rejoice, to have joy, but the place of that joy is critical. He is not just telling the Philippians to be happy, but points them to the place where real satisfaction can be found. It is not found in trying to make oneself presentable, but is found in Christ alone. Paul finds it necessary to repeat this truth again and again because we forget it again and again.

Paul elaborates on this in 3:8—9. As Paul looks at his résumé, he throws out the tattered shambles written by his own good works for another one - the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus.

When the sun comes out the glorious stars can't be seen any more. The things that in our eyes: accomplishments, money, influence, power, morality, stability, goodness - those things which shine so brightly in our eyes, Paul says that something has come out that is so brilliant that he can no longer see the accomplishments any more. What was so important in the past have be surpassed by something far superior.

This is an all or nothing proposition. Paul does not think of Christ as the ultimate prize after a series of other achievements. The gift of righteousness comes not to those who strive to do their best and then look to God for grace, but for those who have abandoned all hope of ever pleasing God. The gift of God's résumé comes to those who not only turn from their sin, but turn from their righteousness.

The gaining of Christ requires the loss of all former things, because to be rich in Christ means to be rich in him alone, not in him plus in other gains. For Paul, it is a theological truism that grace and self-confidence are in radical antithesis: grace plus anything cancels out grace.

But if our false righteousness is like the knock-off Gucci that we buy because we can not afford the real thing, then how do we get that which is not attainable? That is why we speak of the gospel as a gift, why our résumé is not about what we can do, but what God graciously gives to us.

That is the gift God gives when we have eternal life based on Christ's résumé.

With Paul we can boast in Christ Jesus, we can serve God by means of the Spirit, we can claim the true circumcision, perfect obedience to God's demands, we can toss out that résumé we've created and consider all our goodness as rubbish - because we can gain Christ, we can be found in him. Forget your résumé that comes from the law, from your working hard to obey God. Instead there is a righteousness, a résumé which comes from God and is by faith.

How is this going to change the way you live now? If my résumé is not about me, not about my performance, not about my good qualities, not about my obedience to God's Law, but it is about Christ's perfect keeping of the Law for me, then my life will be different. No matter what happens, no matter if life trashes my trophies, if everything I've worked for comes crashing down, if I fail or if God takes away that which is very important to me - who I am is not so wrapped up in that résumé, in that good thing that I will come crashing down, too.

If my kids do not turn out the way I want them to, will it hurt? Sure. But does it mean my standing before God is any lower? Never. If I lose my job, will I be frustrated, certainly. But am I any less a child of my Father for all eternity? Of course not.

These things no longer have control over me, they no longer jerk me around. So I can lose something now and not have it devastate me. Doesn't mean I don't weep, it is not that I no longer care, it still hurts - but I'm not destroyed. If you are found in Christ, if your résumé is His, then the rug can never be pulled out from underneath you.