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Grounders:

When my oldest daughter was in sixth grade, she played in her first organized school basketball game with her dad as the coach. All ten girls traveled around the court like an amoeba with a player occasionally emerging from the crowd with the ball. Then it happened, my daughter broke free from the mass of players and shot the rock with perfect form. It banked off the glass into the basket, scoring the first bucket of her career. Elated, she repeatedly jumped for joy, celebrating her accomplishment as if she had won the NCAA Final Four. There was just one problem. She had scored at the other team's basket. After a teammate pointed out her dilemma, her joy turned into tears of embarrassment. I substituted her out of the game, and told her, "Now you know what it's like to score, so go out and shoot at the right basket."

The Apostle Paul teaches us that accomplishments become embarrassments when we shoot at the wrong goal (Philippians 3:1-11). Joy comes from believing in Christ, surrendering our lives to Him, discovering forgiveness from the penalty of sin and freedom from the power of sin (3:1). However, if we think that we can earn our way to this salvation by keeping the law, we will be embarrassed at judgment.

First, Paul tells us to *beware of legalistic accomplishments* (3:1-6). Legalism believes that keeping the law will lead to our salvation. It places confidence in our ability to save ourselves which is religion. As a Hebrew Pharisee from the tribe of Benjamin, named after Israel's first king, Paul communicates that he had every right to boast about being faultless in his legalistic righteousness.

Here is legalism's equation: Legalism = rules > relationships. Jesus referred to this equation as straining out a gnat while swallowing a camel (Matt. 23:24). We follow the letter of the law only to miss the spirit of the law.

Do you ever strain out a gnat to swallow a camel? This week, keep a daily score card of the times you place rules over relationships. It might occur when you exit the parking lot of a concert or sporting event preventing cars from exiting in front of you. It might happen when you are in the express checkout line at the grocery, and you notice that the person in front of you has more than 12 items in his cart. It might unfold when you win an argument with your spouse or when your child's playing time on his sports team doesn't meet your standard of fairness. Placing rules over relationships strains gnats and swallows camels.

Second, Paul tells us that *legalistic accomplishments become embarrassments because we shoot at the wrong goal* (Phil. 3:7-11). Paul says that he considers all his legalistic fervor as rubbish compared to experiencing Christ. This week, surrender your legalistic score card to Christ each night, reciting Philippians 3:9 which states that only He can score our righteousness with God through our faith in Him as Savior and Lord. Only then do we experience freedom from the penalty and power of sin.

Accomplishments become embarrassments when we shoot at the wrong goal.

In Him,
Mitch