

Bible Study January 18, 2023

PHILIPPIANS 3 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

Rejoice in the Lord

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Reject Self-Righteousness

Repetition is the key to learning. As a safeguard, Paul reviewed the basics with these believers. The Bible provides our safeguard both morally and theologically. When we read the Bible individually, study it in groups, and hear it taught at church, it makes us aware of corrections we need to make in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

The dogs seem to refer to these Jewish teachers that would come to the gentile churches and try to convince people that salvation could be gained by works. They must follow all the OT laws in order to be saved. Paul warned the people in Corinthians about these false teachers, Galatians, Rome, Philippi.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV) ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

These “dogs” and “people who do evil . . . mutilators” were Judaizers—Jewish Christians who wrongly believed that it was essential for Gentiles to follow all the Old Testament Jewish laws, especially submission to the rite of circumcision, in order to receive salvation.

³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

They place confidence in the outward things they do. But we who are the circumcision, Worship by the spirit of God and Glory in Christ Jesus? Where is your confidence?

Is it in the flesh, Church attendance? Your exercise routine? your diet? your bible reading? Your giving? Paul criticized the Judaizers because they looked at Christianity backward, thinking that what they did (circumcising—cutting or mutilating the flesh) made them true believers rather than the acceptance of the gift of grace given by Christ. What believers do to serve God is a result of faith, not a prerequisite to faith.

⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for 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; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Paul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, a heritage greatly esteemed among the Jews. From this tribe had come Israel's first king, Saul (1 Samuel 10:20-24), and the tribes of Benjamin and Judah were the only two tribes to return to Israel after the Exile (Ezra 4:1). Paul was also a Pharisee, a member of a very devout Jewish sect that scrupulously kept their own numerous rules in addition to the laws of Moses. Paul explains for these mostly Gentile believers that his Jewish credentials were impeccable.

Paul had impressive credentials: upbringing, nationality, family background, inheritance, orthodoxy, activity, and morality (see 2 Corinthians 11 and Galatians 1:13-24 for more of his credentials).

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Knowing God is infinitely more valuable than any of your other pursuits. When you know God you can partake in his divine nature, you access his great promises.

2 Peter 1:3 (ESV) His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

After Paul considered everything he had accomplished in his life, he decided to write it all off as “worthless” when compared with the greatness of knowing Christ. We should value our relationship with Christ as more important than anything else.

⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

Your righteousness comes from God, not from keeping the Law.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

No amount of law keeping, self-improvement, discipline, or religious effort can make us right with God. Righteousness comes only from God, and we are made righteous—receive right standing with him—by trusting in Christ. When we do this, he exchanges our sin and shortcomings for his complete righteousness.

¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Paul gave up everything—family, friendship, and freedom—in order to know Christ and his resurrection power.

What are you willing to give up in order to know Christ? Is that your desire?

- A crowded schedule, in order to set aside a few minutes each day for prayer and Bible study?
- A friend's approval?
- Some of your plans or pleasures? Whatever you must change or give up, having Christ and becoming one with him will be more than worth the sacrifice.
 - **Hebrews 5:8-9 (ESV) *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him***
 - **2 Timothy 2:11-12 (ESV) ¹¹ *The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;***
- That same mighty resurrection power helps us live morally renewed and regenerated lives. But as we walk in our new life, we also share in his death by considering our old way of life and sinful desires as dead and unresponsive. Just as the Resurrection gives us Christ's power to live for him, the Crucifixion marks the death of our old, sinful nature. We can't know the victory of the Resurrection without personally experiencing the meaning of the cross.

Reach toward the Goal

¹² *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*

Sometimes trying to live a perfect Christian life can be so difficult that it leaves us drained and discouraged. We may feel so far from perfect that we think we can never please God with our lives. Those who are mature should press on in the Holy Spirit's power, knowing that Christ will reveal and fill in any discrepancy between what we are and what we should be.

¹³ *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Jesus said **Luke 9:62 (ESV)** *Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*

Romans 8:1 (KJV) *There is therefore, no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.*

Paul said that his goal was to know Christ, to be like Christ, and to be all Christ intended for him. This goal absorbed all of Paul's energy. This is a helpful example for us. We should not let anything take our eyes off our goal—knowing Christ. With the single-mindedness of an athlete in

training, we must lay aside everything harmful and forsake anything that may distract us from living like Christ. What is holding you back?

Because our hope is in Christ, however, we can let go of past guilt and look forward to what God will help us become. Don't dwell on your past. Instead, grow in the knowledge of God by concentrating on your relationship with him now. Realize that you are forgiven, and then move on to a life of faith and obedience. Look forward to the prize of heaven later and a fuller and more meaningful life now because of your hope in Christ.

15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Christian maturity involves acting on the guidance that you have already received. We may feel that we lack experience or knowledge of the Christian faith. We can always make the excuse that we still have much to learn, but we should rest confidently in what we do know. We should live up to what we already know and live out what Christ has taught us. God will provide the plain teaching we need whenever we need it.

17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Paul challenged the Philippians to pursue Christlikeness by following Paul's own example. This did not mean, of course, that they should copy everything he did; he had just stated that he was not perfect (3:12). Rather, Paul was calling them to focus their lives on being like Christ, just as he did. At the time this letter was written, the Gospels had probably not yet been widely circulated, so Paul could not tell the believers to read the Bible to see what Christ was like. Instead, he urged them to imitate him. What kind of follower would a new Christian become if he or she were to imitate you?

Remember Your Heavenly Citizenship

18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

- Citizens of a Roman colony were expected to promote the interests of Rome and maintain the dignity of the city. In the same way, citizens of heaven ought to promote heaven's interests on earth and lead lives worthy of heavenly citizenship. Too many Christians have failed to transfer their citizenship to heaven. They still seek earthly pleasures and treasures instead of heavenly ones. Paul told the Philippians to remember that they were citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives.

Freedom in Christ does not mean freedom to be selfish. It means taking every opportunity to serve and to become the person God made you to be. Paul promised this great privilege for every citizen of heaven. Those who struggle with pain, physical limitations, or disabilities can find this wonderful and certain hope in the resurrection especially comforting. (For a more detailed discussion of our new bodies, see 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.)