

Philippians 3:1-11

Section 1: 3:1-6 – Rejoice, Be Watchful & True Believers

In addition, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write to you again about this is no trouble for me and is a safeguard for you. ²Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh— ⁴although I have reasons for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; ⁶regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

3:1 – Rejoice in the Lord

Rejoicing is to be rooted in Jesus and Jesus should be the object of our rejoicing. It's easy to lose focus and to make our lives about ourselves. It doesn't help that the world is constantly trying to make us self-focused. Have you ever heard any of these phrases: just do it, have it your way, you deserve to be happy, self-care, or you deserve it?

The greatest joy you can experience is found in Jesus, not ourselves, nor material things, nor in this world. The more we rejoice in Christ the more willing we will be to suffer for Him, and the less danger of being drawn away from Him.

3:2 – Be Watchful

Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord and then warns them about false teachers. Paul uses three different descriptors to help us understand the dangers of false teachers.

- *Watch out for the dogs.* Dogs in their cultural context is different than what we think of dogs today. They were not cute pets that lived in homes and were in commercials. Dogs were scavengers that roamed around seeking things to devour. They were considered dangerous, dirty and unmerciful. Just like today, calling someone a dog is not a compliment. Paul was implying that the “dogs” simply followed him around, anxious to devour those who were not doctrinally or theologically grounded. This is why having a strong understanding of doctrine and theology is important. There are scavengers roaming and looking for people to lead astray.
- *Watch out for the evil workers.* They were evil because their mission was evil, not good. Anyone that distorts the gospel or changes the truth of Scripture is working evil. We're reminded here that false teachers have missionaries too. If they're distributing a distorted gospel, then they're dangerous and deadly. Remember, just because someone is working hard, taking mission trips or carrying around a Bible does not mean they are glorifying God.
- *Watch out for those who mutilate the flesh.* Paul is taking a direct shot at the Jews. They believed that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Paul is reminding us that salvation is not based upon any work we can do, but only on the grace found in Christ Jesus our Lord. If anyone adds to the gospel, like you need Jesus and anything else...it is a false gospel and those proclaiming that message are false teachers.

3:3 – True Believers

Paul gives us three marks of being a true follower of Christ.

1. *We worship by the Spirit of God.* When Paul uses the word worship, he isn't speaking simply of what we do in a Sunday morning gathering. He's talking about a life devoted to God in spiritual service (Rom. 12:1-2). True believers possess the Spirit. Does the Spirit of God dwell in you? Do you worship and serve God by the Spirit? On what are you basing your assurance of salvation? Don't base it on attendance at meetings or on involvement in social work. Rest and rejoice in the fact that the Spirit of God dwells in you, enabling you to worship and serve God for the praise of His glory.

2. *We boast in Christ Jesus.* Boasting has become a common characteristic within our American culture. Social media has caused an explosion of self-boasting. True believers give credit where credit is due, Jesus. Any good within us is Jesus. Any love within us is Jesus. Any success we have is Jesus. We are weak, Jesus is strong. Our glory is in Christ alone. We don't glory in our earthly statue, in our achievements, or in our gifts. Personal boasting in salvation is excluded for the Christian, for salvation has come to us through the work of Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9). 1 Corinthians 1:31: "The one who boasts must boast in the Lord."
3. *We do not put confidence in the flesh.* Where do we draw our strength from, where do we draw our wisdom from, where do we find value? True believers understand that we need Jesus. Everyone has their confidence somewhere, and Christians have confidence in Jesus, not our own efforts or goodness. The human earth is prone to trust in other things, instead of Christ, for salvation. Look at all the religions that exist around the world. They all try to teach you how to earn grace, earn salvation, earn...earn...earn. The true gospel is a "free gift" to those that believe. Salvation isn't earned, it is a gift. Therefore, our confidence is in Jesus alone. And if anyone could have boasted in the flesh, it was Paul. Yet, Paul will only boast in Jesus.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Consider the things that people treasure. Why do they treasure these things?
- ❖ Why is it important to resist legalism and false gospels?
- ❖ How can our church be protected from legalism and false gospels?
- ❖ According to 3:3, what are the three distinguishing marks of a genuine Christian?

Section 2: 3:7-11 – Knowing Christ Jesus our Lord

⁷But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, ¹¹assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.

3:7-8 - Loss

Paul has just finished listing all his earthly accomplishments as we come into verse 7-11. Paul counts all his accomplishments as "a loss". The idea behind the word "loss" is this, that which was lost had no value. Why did all his earthly accomplishments have no value? He was comparing them to knowing Jesus. Paul may have had Matthew 16:26 on his mind as he wrote verse 7 and 8:

*²⁶What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his life?
Or what will a man give in exchange for his life?*

Paul continues to be expressive to describe how valueless everything is without Christ at the end of verse 8, by using the word "dung". The crudeness of the term is deliberate, as Paul wants to strike us with the worthlessness of life apart from Jesus. You can have the Bread of Life that will eternally satisfy or you can have a pile of dung. Which do you prefer: the dung of religious self-efforts and earthly praise and possessions or the eternal joy of knowing Christ as your Savior and Lord? Paul made his decision, and he's trying to help others choose wisely.

3:7-8 – Knowing and Gaining Christ Jesus

Paul uses a progressive flow to emphasize his desire for Christ over all the world has to offer.

- 1) Considered to be a loss because of Christ (v7b).
- 2) Consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (v8a).
- 3) Suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ (v8b).

Is Jesus greater than anything this world has to offer? This is the question Paul is answering in verses 7 and 8. Paul emphatically proclaims, JESUS is greater than EVERYTHING. Paul is seeking after Jesus with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. This reminds us of David's words in Psalm 63:1:

God, you are my God; I eagerly seek you. I thirst for you; my body faints for you in a land that is dry, desolate, and without water.

The foundation of Paul's seeking was a relationship. When we read the phrase "*knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*," it reveals a lot about the type of relationship that Paul had with Jesus. This word "know" is an intimate knowledge that only comes through a personal relationship. We can know facts about things that have nothing to do with a personal relationship. For example, we can google our favorite sports athletes or actors and find out random facts about their careers or lives, but that doesn't mean we now know them personally. What type of relationship do you have with Jesus? A fact-based relationship or a personal relationship? Paul is telling us that we should give up everything to have a personal relationship with Jesus.

Remember the story about the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-22)? He loves the world more than Jesus. Our love for the material things of this world will retract from our love for Jesus. Consider everything this world has to offer as expendable compared to knowing Jesus Christ our Lord.

3:9-11 – Found in Him

In his list of accomplishments Paul said that with regard to righteousness he was "blameless" (v. 6). However, he couldn't live up to a sinless perfection (Rom. 7:14-25). He, like us, needed someone else's righteousness in order to be justified before God. Here's the problem. Only righteous people are going to heaven. Yet none of us are righteous (Rom. 3:9-18). Therefore, we need another source of righteousness, and that's why the gospel is good news. As Paul says here in Philippians 3 and elsewhere, believers have received the righteousness that comes from God through faith in Christ alone (Rom. 3:21-26); we call this "imputed righteousness." This is the opposite of works-based righteousness or self-righteousness. We need the righteousness of another. We need God's righteousness. Let's look at 2 Corinthians 5:21 for further detail:

He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

What a glorious exchange! Christ received our punishment though He never sinned, and we received His righteousness though we didn't deserve it. Consequently, we are found in Christ. That means that God sees us through the righteousness of Christ. Believers are now protected from judgment, and we can know that we have forgiveness from God and are accepted by God.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Is there anything in your life that you are unwilling to give up for Christ? Is there anything our church is unwilling to give up for Christ?
- ❖ Do you long to know Jesus more and more intimately?
- ❖ Why do you need Christ's righteousness?
- ❖ How does suffering for Christ enable us to know Christ more?
- ❖ How does the hope of your resurrection encourage you in the Christian life?