

Philippians 3:1-11

How did Paul say to rejoice (v. 1)? Rejoice in the Lord. Epaphroditus' return, Timothy's impending visit, Paul's recovery from being sick and the prospect of him being released from prison were all legitimate reasons for rejoicing but all fade in comparison to rejoicing in the Lord.

What did Paul mean by "rejoice in the Lord?" Regardless of circumstances (Paul in jail) the Christian can and should always rejoice in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is our ultimate source and the reason for our joy. Rejoicing is a great way to start our prayers.

Who was Paul warning the Philippians "to watch out" for (v. 2)? Evidently the Judaizers, who plagued Paul and his converts throughout his ministry.

Who were the Judaizers and what did they teach? Judaizers were Jewish Christians who introduced additional requirements for justification: 1) converts had to be practicing Jews to be saved and could only enter the New Testament church by submitting to the Mosaic Law. 2) Gentile converts to Christianity had to abide by certain Old Testament rites (circumcision, dietary laws, going to Jerusalem for feasts). 3) Paul was not an authentic apostle and had removed certain legal requirements from the gospel.

Such false teachings (circumcision was especially emphasized because it was the rite that brought a person into Judaism) were perverting the gospel of grace and comprised the "Galatian heresy" that Paul dealt with extensively in his epistle to the Galatians. Unless prevented, Paul's converts would slip into the bondage of legalism by these false teachings. Christianity is not like adding Jesus to Judaism. It's not a new religion but a relationship.

Who are our opponents today—the modern day equivalents of the Judaizers? Legalists, cults. Those who preach that you must do good works to be right with God. Our relationship with Christ is a grace-based relationship—not a performance-based relationship.

But aren't good works important? Yes! Good works combined with right motives (a heart of obedience, e.g.) bring glory to God. Ephesians 2:10: "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" Note the sequence....Being in a right relationship with Christ precedes doing good works.

What was the significance of the term "dogs" (v. 2)? In ancient times many dogs were wild, vicious and unclean animals that threatened the safety of everyone. Jesus and other prophets used the term "dogs" to refer to opponents of God's truth. With great contempt, the Jews habitually referred to Gentiles as dogs.

What did Paul mean by "the circumcision" (v. 3)? The circumcision refers to believers in the church.

What is true circumcision? A spiritual circumcision of the heart performed by the Holy Spirit which happens the moment a person trusts in Jesus Christ (Romans 2:29). It is a change of heart. Physical circumcision for the wrong reasons—to satisfy the requirements of the law—is a false circumcision.

Why did Paul list his "more" reasons for "confidence in the flesh" than those of the Judaizers (v. 4)? For the sake of the argument, Paul adopted the Judaizers' attitude of confidence in the flesh. He did this to show that his rejection of Jewish advantages was not because he lacked them.

What was Paul's perspective on his credentials before his Damascus Road encounter with God? Not only was he a Jew, but he had magnificent credentials—he was "cream of the crop" material, a religious superstar at the top of his spiritual game—and he held a privileged position as a religious leader. Paul's attitude was, "Want to compare pedigrees? Bring it on!"

Paul had been convinced that the longer his pedigree and the more blocks he could check off, the more God would accept and be pleased with him. All his accomplishments were actually liabilities strengthening his false hope of salvation. To find salvation Paul had to lose all the "good things" of his religion that kept him away from Jesus.

What was Paul's perspective on those credentials now (vv. 7-8)? Paul eyes had been opened to what was truly important—his pedigree was of no value—and God viewed his self-righteous deeds as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Like Paul, every Christian has a before-and-after story that cannot be denied or taken from us—and it is perhaps our most powerful witnessing tool.

Was Paul merely talking about his credentials that he “considered loss?” He considered everything as loss. This was not an external spiritual exercise of merely exchanging one religion for another, or exchanging a system of rites, rules, doctrines, etc., for a more superior one. Paul had come in contact with a divine person, the Son of God—the once crucified, but now risen and glorified Christ.

Paul had made an eternal accounting decision—he came to the point where he opened his ledger book and looked at what he had accumulated by his Jewish inheritance and by his own efforts. He then took the entire list and placed it where it belonged—under the list of liabilities. He called it “loss,” and under assets he wrote, “Jesus Christ alone.” His only asset!

What was the only thing that mattered to Paul (v. 8)? “*...the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*”

How would you define righteousness? Being in a right relationship with God because of trusting in Christ's death on the cross for forgiveness of sins. The state of moral perfection required by God to enter heaven.

How do we become righteous? By placing our faith and trust in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22-25).

What were the two kinds of righteousness that Paul described (v. 9)? False righteousness—Paul's righteousness attained from his relationship to the law. True righteousness—God's righteousness given to Paul because of his relationship to Christ—a relationship that was secured when Paul placed his faith in Christ alone to make him righteous (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

According to Paul (v. 10), what were his three goals of Christian living?

- Knowing Christ. Paul said, “*I want to know Christ*” not “*know about Christ*.” There's a world of difference between those statements. Not mere intellectual or academic knowledge, knowing Christ means having a personal, experiential, intimate relationship with Jesus in the truest sense. Paul's purpose to “gain Christ” was more than to get into heaven. He wanted it to affect his day-to-day living.
- Knowing the power of Christ's resurrection. Paul wanted to know experientially the same power surging through his own being that raised Christ from the dead, overcoming sin in his life (Romans 7) and producing the Christian life.
- Knowing the fellowship of His sufferings. It's important to remember that Paul was in the custody of Roman soldiers when he wrote this, having experienced more suffering than we likely ever will. His suffering was a lived-out connection with God—not merely theological theory and ideas.

Christians who suffer because of their faithful testimony for Christ can enter into Jesus' feelings of suffering when He faithfully obeyed His Father. Paul wanted to stand for Christ. He wanted to become a carbon copy of Christ, receiving the abuse and persecution as Jesus did, knowing that he would be enabled to draw closer to the Lord in the fellowship of suffering (Galatians 2:19-20). There is real fellowship with the Lord in that kind of suffering. A believer who never suffers for the Lord's sake cannot experience that.

How do you cultivate and maintain a passion for knowing Christ in the midst of a busy, demanding life? Immerse yourself in the things of God. Go to the right places (church, Bible study, small group fellowship); get to know God by reading and studying Scripture; invest in the lives of others; live an obedient, intentional Christian lifestyle. Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).