**Philippians 3:1-11**

When we began our study in Philippians we discussed that Paul’s letter has often been called the “Epistle of Joy” and joy is expressed through all four chapters of the letter: Chapter 1 was “Joy in Living;” Chapter 2 “Joy in Serving;” and now Chapter 3, “Joy in Sharing” (in the coming week we will see that the focus in Chapter 4 is “Joy in Resting).

True joy is a fruit of the Spirit in the life of believers. In fact, it ranks second, after love, in Paul’s letter to the Galatians (5:22-23): “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”* Like all manifestations of the Spirit’s work in our lives, joy is constantly under attack by the world, the flesh, and the devil.

As Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians, the deeds of the flesh will try to weaken our joy through things like enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, and envy (Gal. 5:17-21). The world will try to stifle our joy through pain, suffering, tragedies, and stress. Consider the stress that is going on all around us during the Corona virus pandemic period we are currently undergoing. And at the same time the devil is trying to thwart our joy by taking our attention away from Jesus Christ and tempting us to find joy in things that cannot satisfy.

The real threat to the joyful Christian life comes into focus in the third part of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Remember the overarching purpose for Paul’s letter to the Christians at Philippi: *to encourage them to find Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered joy in living, serving, sharing, and resting.* Paul reinforces this theme in the opening line of chapter 3: “*Rejoice in the Lord.”* Yet, knowing that there are threats out there, he wants to share with his readers a “safeguard” for their joy (Phil. 3:1). **READ PHIL. 3:1-11**

*1Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. 3For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— 4though I myself have reasons for such confidence.  If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. 7But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.* (3:1-11)

It is significant that a Roman prisoner would beseech people who were free to be joyful in their Savior. It seems that is should be the other way around. Paul learned what every child of God needs to learn—there can be rejoicing in the Lord even when outward circumstances are contrary to a spirit of rejoicing.

Repetition is a vital part of learning. Either orally or in writing (perhaps in 1:27-30) the apostle had given the same truth to the Philippians before. He made no apology for repeating the instruction by writing the same things to you again. It was no trouble for him to review the essentials again. He felt constrained to do so for their benefit. The instruction was a safeguard for them. When serious error is present, there is safety in repetition.

One particular group in Paul’s day was especially guilty of putting confidence in the flesh. These were the Judaizers. They plagued Paul and his converts constantly. Confused about the gospel, they added works of the law to faith in Christ, both for salvation and for Christian living. The Old Testament rite of circumcision was of special concern to them. They insisted that it was necessary for salvation. They did not omit faith in Christ but added works of the flesh. Paul called such men “*deceitful workmen”* (II Cor. 11:13).

(3:2) Paul also called the Judaizers dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. The dogs Paul wanted his readers to picture were not the house pets we think of today, but feral or wild dogs roaming the backstreets in packs—dirty, flea-infested, disease-ridden scavengers with uncertain pedigrees. . . mangy mutts. When I retired from the Navy, I took a job in Saudi Arabia and worked there for two years. I lived in a compound on the edge of the desert. At night you could hear the howl of packs of wild dogs roaming the area. All of the Saudi nationals that I had contact with were afraid of any dog and considered dogs to be unclean and to be avoided at all cost. Paul is instructing the saints in Philippi not to follow those people, but to beware of them, to watch out for them. He considered their work dangerous and not of God. It was common for some Jews to refer to Gentiles as dogs, which were considered unclean animals. It is ironic that Paul turns the insult on these Jewish Christians who were trying to prop up their man-made ways of purity.

Second, he calls them “evil workers.” Ironically, the Judaizers were claiming to be the promoters of good works—works so good, in fact, that they could merit a right standing before God. However, Paul says they were actually workers of evil. They sowed a corrupt, twisted non-gospel, teaching that people could be saved only by faith *plus* works of the Law. However, the good news of Jesus Christ is that salvation is by grace alone (it’s a gift), through faith alone (not by works!), in Christ alone (not by any means other than the work of Christ!). We are to rejoice *in the Lord* and what He has done for us, not in any human means of trying to gain favor with God.

Third, the false teachers are “the false circumcision.” The translation we use softens the harsh language evident in Paul’s original Greek text. He uses a Greek term that sounds familiar to the word for “circumcision,” but he modifies it slightly to render the word for “mutilation!” This is how Paul describes those who say that men must be circumcised to be saved.

(3:3) The Old Testament rite of physical circumcision was not only a sign of covenant relationship, but it was also intended to be related to spiritual circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6). Writing to Gentiles, Paul made it clear that he and they were the true circumcision. This was because they had no confidence in the flesh and instead worshiped by the Spirit of God and gloried in Christ Jesus alone.

Instead of boasting in human accomplishments as the Judaizers and Jews did, a child of God should glory in Christ Jesus alone. The word glory used here means “*boast”* or *“exult”* (1:26; 2:16; II Cor. 10:17). Everyone is a *“boaster,”* either in Christ or in himself.

Paul gave some interesting autobiographical facts in these verses. On the surface it appears he was boasting. However, closer examination reveals that this was precisely what he tried to avoid and warn against. To be sure, there was a time when the apostle had confidence in the flesh. But this was no longer true. To stress that he used to have great boldness and pride in his own achievements, Paul reviewed his past for the Philippians. After this he told about his crisis conversion experience on the road to Damascus.

(3:4-6) It cannot be emphasized too strongly that Paul did not place any confidence in the flesh. He had gained victory over the temptation of the devil. His presentation in these verses was intended to review for the Philippians the things in which he could have placed confidence if he had wanted to. In fact, the list included things in which he did place great value and trust before he met Christ. His intention was to show that in the flesh he had more in which he could have boasted than did any of the Judaizers.

The anyone else (v.4) referred to all who place confidence in the flesh. Paul wrote as though he were challenging the Judaizers to a showdown. His preliminary conclusion before he even got specific was that no matter what named those privileges advantage was brought forth by his opponents, his advantages exceeded theirs (Gal. 1:14).

Seven advantages listed in Philippians 3:5-6 demonstrate what Paul used to have in the flesh but what he later counted as loss for Christ. Two kinds of advantages are detailed. First are those things that the apostle had by birth, apart from his choice. Four of these are listed: circumcision, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, and a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents. Next he, which he voluntarily chose—being a Pharisee, being a persecutor of the church, and having a flawless external record of legalistic righteousness.

Circumcision was named first probably because it was a big issue with the Judaizers. Paul’s specific time, the eighth day, stressed that he was not a proselyte or an Ishmaelite but a pure-blooded Jew. Proselytes were circumcised later in life and Ishmaelites after the age 13 (Gen. 17:25-26).

Paul was of the people of Israel, which describes his heritage. His parents were both true Jews, unlike some of the Judaizers. He could trace his family back to Abraham. He was a true member of the covenant people (II Cor. 11:22).

He was also a Benjamite, from which tribe came Israel’s first king (I Sam. 9:1-2). This tribe had a special place of honor and was viewed with great esteem. Even after the kingdom was disrupted the tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to the house of David.

Hebrew was Paul’s native tongue. Unlike some to the Israelites, he did not adopt Greek customs. He knew thoroughly both the language and customs of the people of God. He was a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents.

In regard to the Law, Paul was a Pharisee, a member of the strictest sect among the people. In addition to the Law of Moses the Pharisees added their own regulations, which in time were interpreted as equal to the Law.

What greater zeal for the Jewish religion could anyone boast of than that he persecuted the church? Paul did this relentlessly before his conversion to Christ (Acts 9:1-2). No Judaizer could match such zeal.

In “*legalistic righteousness*” Paul also excelled. In fact, in his own eyes he was faultless.

(3:7-9) Any of those who troubled the saints at Philippi would have loved to have been able to list to his own credit those things Paul did. On the human side these were reasons to have religious self-confidence. But all those things enumerated in verses 5-6 the apostle considered loss for the sake of Christ (v.7).

Consider means to *“think through or reflect on.”* After reflection he considered them loss. This he did at a point in time in the past and that decision was still in effect when he wrote. Doubtless Paul considered his life-transforming conversion on the Damascus Road as the time when he switched from confidence in the flesh to confidence in Christ alone.

It would be hard to find a more forceful refutation of human effort to please God than what Paul presented here (v.8). Paul considered as loss not only the things already listed (vv. 5-6), but everything (v.8). In exchange for confidence in the flesh Paul gained the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus personally. Christ was now his Lord.

His former *“gains”* (v.7) he considered *“rubbish*” so that he might gain Christ. Nothing else really mattered to him any longer. Having Christ as his Savior and Lord so far surpassed anything he had in Judaism.

Those who “*gain Christ*” (v.8) are those found in Him (v.9). Christ is in the believer and the believer is in Christ. Paul wanted his life to demonstrate these truths.

In verse 9 we find a great summary of the doctrine known as *imputation,* a term that refers to crediting something to a person’s account. Here’s a simple definition of how the word is used theologically: “*In salvation, our sin and guilt are credited to Christ, and His righteousness is credited to us.”* Because Paul was now “in Christ” (3:9), everything that Christ had accomplished through His death and resurrection—payment for sin and eternal life—had been credited to Paul’s otherwise bankrupt account. Paul had thought that before he met Jesus, the massive sum in his “righteousness” account had made him rich. What he hadn’t realized was that the balance was a negative number! The righteousness that was credited to Paul’s account the moment he embraced Christ by faith was the unmeasurable righteousness of the perfect God-man. And Christ’s righteousness not only canceled Paul’s debt, but it also placed in his account “everything pertaining to life and godliness (see 2 Pet. 1:3).

Being in Christ, he was not clinging to any righteousness of his own doing associated with Law-keeping. Such righteousness is viewed by God as no righteousness at all but rather as “*filthy rags*” (Isa. 64:6). The righteousness that saves and in which Paul rested is through faith in Christ. This is the only kind that comes from God and is by faith. When a believing sinner responds in faith to the Spirit’s work in his heart, he is clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26). In this position he is *“accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph. 1:6). Thus robed, the believing sinner stands complete in Christ.

(3:10-11) These verses contain an open and honest confession to the Philippians. Paul already knew Christ as his Savior. But he wanted to know Him more intimately as his Lord. To know (v.10) means *“to know by experience*.” The *“surpassing greatness of knowing Christ*” is now elaborated in verses 10-11. This is how Paul wanted to know Him. More of what he desired in his Christian life follows.

To experience the power of His resurrection was also the apostle’s goal. The power, which brought Christ forth from the dead, now operates in believers’ lives since they have been *“raised with Christ” (Col. 3:1).* *“Power”* here means ability to overcome resistance*.* By setting forth his own goals and ambitions Paul gave the Philippians an example to follow. His example was, of course, in stark contrast to the Judaizers whose example they were not to follow.

Paul also longed to share in the fellowship of Christ’s suffering and is so doing to become like Him in His death (3:10). These sufferings were not Christ’s substitutionary sufferings on the cross. Paul knew that those could not be shared. But he did desire to participate with Christ, since he was one of His, in suffering for the sake of righteousness (1:29). God had used Ananias to tell Paul that this is precisely what he would do as a servant of Christ (Acts 9:16). The apostle did indeed suffer for Christ because he represented Him so openly and truly.

“Somehow” *(v.11)* is not an indication of doubt or uncertainty, but of intense concern and involvement. Paul was saying that because of this new relationship that both he and the Philippians had, they had the sealed promise of future hope—attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

**APPLICATION (PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11).** To put Paul’s accomplishments in Judaism in perspective, let’s cast them in a more modern expression. He had obtained all the honors: as a teenager he was an Eagle Scout, homecoming king, valedictorian, obtained a full-ride scholarship to an Ivy League school. He had then graduated with top honors, and then going on to excel in his field with every possible honor. But then he realized that, in comparison to knowing Christ, everything he had accomplished turned out to be filthy rags. Rubbish. Useless. Dung!

Paul’s ancient words hit today’s overachievers hard. For those who see high achievements as paramount and seek after awards and recognition—this passage is for you, me, and everyone we know. Our own righteousness, good works, fame, riches, and impressive achievements will not get us one step closer to heaven or one mark higher in God’s estimation. In fact, these will drive us further from depending on Christ alone for salvation. This warning also addresses believers who have received Christ’s salvation by grace alone through faith alone, but who nevertheless turn to their own strength and accomplishments to live Christlike lives. That, too, is an impossibility.

A couple of very simple reminders grow out of the contrast Paul shares in Philippians 3:1-11. First, *trusting in your own achievements can bring you glory now, but it leaves you spiritually bankrupt later.* The hardest part of getting driven, self-made, “type A” people to understand the gospel is to help them understand that grace is *unmerited* favor. It can’t be earned, it can’t be bought, and it can’t be sought and found. It can only be received! This hard truth is painful for go-getters who have come to believe that anything worth having is worth sweating for. The truth is, when it comes to salvation, surrendering our efforts is the only way to gain a restored relationship with God, the result of which is eternal life.

Second, *trusting in Christ’s accomplishment on the cross gives Him the glory now and results in our eternal righteousness.* This is what Paul means when he tells the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord” (3:1). We glory in Him, not in ourselves. We celebrate His accomplishments for us, not our work for Him. Paul discovered—and perhaps we shall too—that all human efforts to live a life pleasing to God apart from Christ are pointless and fruitless.

**Prayer:** *Our Heavenly Father, we praise and thank You for Your Son, for what He is and what He has done. Help us to forget ourselves, our achievements and to ignore our own worldly honors. We give You glory now. In our present world of fear, as we struggle to deal with the uncertainty of this great pandemic, we claim Your promise that you are the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts us In all of our troubles so that we can comfort others in any troubles with the comfort we ourselves have received from You. In Jesus name we pray. Amen!*