

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

July 3, 2024

Series - The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

The Prison Epistles

The Letter to the Philippians – The Joy of Faith

Text - Philippians 3:1 - 11 –

Congregational Reading – Philippians 3

Introduction

In our study today in chapter three of *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, Paul is beginning to sum up the thoughts that he wanted to express to this dear church in Macedonia that he had visited on three different occasions on his second and third missionary journeys. You will remember that Paul is writing this letter while he was under house arrest during his first imprisonment in Rome.

This chapter is a very important passage of Scripture as it gives us a window into the heart and mind of the Apostle Paul as he reflects upon his life. We know about many of the facts of Paul's life from the Book of Acts, including his miraculous salvation experience on the road to Damascus; but here, however, Paul takes an inventory of his life and reviews what was going on in his heart when he threw away all of the things that he was trusting in before his salvation while striving to establish his own righteousness. In this passage, the Bible tells us that he flushed all of those things down the drain, and instead clung completely to the finish work of Christ on the Cross of Calvary.

The song writer of *Rock of Ages* sums this thought up well in the second and third stanzas when he said:

*Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.
Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;*

*Helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die*

Illustration

When I was a new Christian, I enrolled in a course at Ocean County Baptist Church in Toms River that was designed to help us be more effective witnesses for the Lord.

The course was called Evangelism Explosion, and it taught us what to do and say as we followed up on people who had visited the church. One of the first things we were told to do after the conversation was started was to ask two “diagnostic questions”. The first question broke the ice and guided the conversation in a spiritual direction.

“If you were to die today, are you 100% sure that you would go to Heaven, or do you have some doubts?”

The second question was asked to determine what they were trusting in in order to get to Heaven.

“If you were to die today and stand before God, and He were to say to you, why should I let you into Heaven, what would you say?”

Most of the times the answer to this question revealed that the person was trusting in their works. Invariably the answer would be:

I am a member of a church, or I am a Christian.

I have been baptized.

I am a good person.

I have never murdered anyone.

These answers all indicated that the person was really depending on himself or herself to enter Heaven. Their salvation was somehow dependent upon them, not on Christ.

What would your answer be?

These are exactly the kind of answers that Paul would have given before he met the Lord on the Damascus Road. Paul had to be shown just like I had to be shown, that his good works weren't all that good. In fact, God would call them filthy rags. Paul had to get rid of

all the things that he was trusting in and place his faith completely in the finished work of Christ.

I. Final Exhortation and Warnings (vs. 1 – 3)

"Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." (Philippians 3:1)

Notice "Finally, my brethren" – Paul is only halfway finished with this epistle, yet he is drawing his final conclusions.

Illustration – Don't get mad at me when I say, "I'm almost through" or "In conclusion", and then preach for another twenty minutes because that is exactly what Paul does here. I am just following his Biblical example.

"rejoice in the Lord" - We must be careful to understand these first two verses in their overall context. Paul is driving toward the finished work of Christ. There are an infinite number of things that we can rejoice about: God's provision; God's protection; Answered prayer; etc.

However, in context, I believe God is telling us through the Apostle Paul to rejoice in the finished work of the Lord. (see v. 3 – rejoice in Christ Jesus) Get excited about what God has done for you, and don't at all boast or glory in the things that you have done.

In Luke 10, the Lord Jesus sent the disciples out two by two, and they saw the Lord do many miracles and mighty works through them:

"And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:17-20)

Jeremiah said this:

"Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise

lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD." (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

"Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." (Philippians 3:2)

“beware of dogs” – obviously, this is not referring to the canine that is loose in your backyard; but who is it speaking about. The word “dogs” has been used metaphorically for many different types of people:

David, in the Psalms, referred to his enemies as “dogs”.

Isaiah used the word “dogs” to speak of false prophets:

"His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter." (Isaiah 56:10-11)

Jesus referred to the Gentiles as “dogs”:

"But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." (Mark 7:27-28)

Here in Philippians 3, however, I think the context would demand that the word “dogs” is referring to the legalists that were trying to keep people under the Law.

In fact, the phrase “evil workers” and the word, “concision” all speak of the same group of people.

"For we are the concision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (Philippians 3:3)

Paul is stating here that the concision that he was trusting in was the concision of his heart:

"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that concision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and concision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Romans 2:28-29)

II. Paul’s Examination of His Works Before Christ (vs. 4 – 6)

Now Paul will demonstrate the pre-Christ credentials that he used to boast about:

"Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:" (Philippians 3:4)

If any human could boast, Paul could.

"Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;" (Philippians 3:5)

There are seven things that Paul lists in vs. 5 and 6 that indicate what he used to trust in. Paul had the right parents and was from an exclusive tribe. He was trained by the best and was part of an elite group.

"Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." (Philippians 3:6)

He followed the Law perfectly, though Paul is not saying here that he was sinless. He was zealous for God.

Illustration - What are you trusting in? You may be able to say:

- I was born in a Christian home; my dad was a preacher.
- I was dedicated to the Lord by my parents as an infant and was baptized by immersion at the age of 7.
- I am a member of the great Baptist Church downtown.
- I live a separated life. I don't cuss, drink, smoke, dip, or chew; and I don't run with the girls that do.
- I went to the Christian school. I even attended the Bible college.
- I go to church three times a week.

Folks, those things are all wonderful, but there isn't one of them, or even all of them combined that will get you to Heaven. You must do what Paul did: flush those things down the commode, and trust Christ. He died for you.

III. The Excellency of the Work of Christ (vs. 7 – 11)

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." (Philippians 3:7)

"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ," (Philippians 3:8)

"And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:"

(Philippians 3:9)

This verse made a tremendous impact on John Bunyan, the great Baptist preacher who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* from a jail cell in Bedford, England:

John Bunyan was driven almost to distraction because he realized that he was such a great sinner with no righteousness of his own. And he said at that time, "When God showed me John Bunyan as God saw John Bunyan, I no longer confessed I was a sinner, but I confessed that I was sin from the crown of my head to the sole of my feet. I was full of sin." And Bunyan struggled with the problem of how he could stand in God's presence even with his sins forgiven. Where could he gain a standing before God? And so, walking through the cornfields one night, as he wrestled with this problem, the words of Paul (who was another great sinner, who called himself the chief of sinners) came to him, and his burden rolled off his shoulders. The word from Paul was Philippians 3:9: "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And when you read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, you're reading actually the story of Bunyan's life. And you remember, when Pilgrim came with that great burden on his shoulders through the Slough of Despond, he didn't know what to do until finally he came to the Cross, and there the burden rolled off, and he trusted Christ as his Savior.¹

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;" (Philippians 3:10)

"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Philippians 3:11)

You will notice in vs. 10 and 11 that Paul didn't want to just know about Christ, he wanted to be like Him. He wanted live for Him. He wanted to be conformed to His image, and he was willing to suffer for Him.

Christian, many of you know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, you know that salvation comes through His finished work on the Cross of Calvary, and not through your good

¹ McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (Romans 1-8)* (electronic ed., Vol. 42, p. 69). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

works. That's great! But, how about going a little further in the Christian life, and get to know the power of His resurrected life:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

*"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."
(Romans 6:4)*

How about going even further, and be willing to die to yourself, your will, your dreams, and sacrifice your life for His cause.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1)

Paul was not saying here that he hoped to someday attain eternal life, he was saying that he wanted his life to be so conformed to the image of Christ that he would accurately display the new, resurrected life that had been given to him at salvation.

Knowing Christ means more than just being saved – salvation is just the beginning. It is living your life, moment by moment, in intimate communion with Him; it is giving your life wholly to His will.

Do you know Him?

Is your life daily growing more intimate in the knowledge of Him?