

Philippians 3:1-11

Rejoice in the Lord!

What did Paul say to rejoice about? 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 are all great reasons for rejoicing but all fade in comparison to rejoicing in the Lord.

What does 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? 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 prerequisites 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) certain Old Testament ceremonial practices were still binding; 3) Gentile converts to Christianity were to abide by rites (circumcision, dietary laws, going to Jerusalem for feasts), and 4) Paul was not an authentic apostle and had removed certain legal requirements from the gospel.

Such false teachings (circumcision was especially emphasized because it brought a person into Judaism) were perverting the gospel of grace and comprised the "Galatian heresy" Paul dealt with extensively in his epistle to the Galatians. Unless prevented, Paul's converts would slip into legalism's bondage by these false teachings. Christianity is not like adding Jesus to Judaism. It's about 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: *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).*

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

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

And what is true circumcision? A spiritual circumcision of the heart happening when a person trusts in Jesus Christ. Physical circumcision for the wrong reasons—to satisfy the law—is a false circumcision (mutilation).

What's up with Paul's listing his "more" reasons for "confidence in the flesh" than those of the Judaizers (v. 3:4b)? For the sake of the argument, to illustrate that his rejection of Jewish advantages was not because he lacked reasons for confidence.

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—the cream of the crop, a religious superstar at the top of his spiritual game—and he held a privileged position as a religious leader. Want to compare pedigrees? Bring it on!

Paul had been convinced that the greater his nobility, the more blocks he could check off, the more God would accept and be pleased with him. All his accomplishments were actually liabilities solidifying 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 is Paul's perspective on those credentials now (v. 7-8)? Paul eyes are opened to what is truly important – his pedigree is of no value – and God views our 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.

Is Paul merely talking about his credentials that he “considers loss”? He considers everything as loss. This was not an internal 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 opened the ledger book of his life, saw what his inheritance and efforts had accumulated, and then took the entire list of those assets and placed them under liabilities – where they truly belonged. He called all those “loss,” and under “assets,” wrote, “Jesus Christ alone.” His only asset!

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

Define righteousness. Being in a right relationship with God because of Christ's death on the cross. 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 are the two kinds of righteousness that Paul describes (v. 9)? False righteousness – Paul's righteousness attained from his relationship to the law. True righteousness – God's righteousness given Paul from his relationship to Christ – a relationship secured when Paul placed his faith in Christ alone to make him righteous (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

According to Paul, the three goals of Christian living are (v. 10) to:

- Know Christ. Paul said, “I want to know Christ” not “know *about* Christ.” There's a world of difference between those statements. Not merely intellectually or academically knowing, it's 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, but to affect his day-to-day living.
- Know 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.
- Know 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 or 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 He did, so he would draw closer to the Lord in the fellowship of suffering (Galatians 2:19-20). A believer who never suffers for the Lord's sake cannot do that.

How do you cultivate and maintain a passion for knowing Christ in the midst of a busy, demanding life? Press on! (**vs. 12**) Go to the right places (church, OCF small group fellowship); get to know God by reading and studying Scripture; live an obedient, intentional Christian lifestyle.

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