

Philippians Chapter 3
Part 1
'Joy in spite of things'

Philippians 3:1-11 - New American Standard Bible

The Goal of Life

'¹Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. ²Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; ³for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, ⁴although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: ⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. ⁷But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.'

As Paul goes on in his missionary letter, he loses no excitement or joy; he is as exuberant about the Christian life in chapter 3 as he was in the introduction, pouring out instructions and injunctions for the believers at Philippi.

If circumstances and people can rob you of your joy, so can things, he says, and it is this thief that Paul deals with in chapter 3. It is important to see the whole message of this chapter before looking at it in detail.

In verses 1 – 11 he recounts his past and cautions the Philippians against Judaism creeping into the church, being specific about the uselessness of works as opposed to faith in Christ. He goes on to list his pedigree as a former Pharisee, renouncing past privileges as he counts them as nothing compared to the value of knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord. Paul is saying if I could have gloried and trusted in the flesh I had as much cause as any man, but the things which I counted gain while a Pharisee, I count lost for Christ.

Philippians 3:12-16 - NIV

Pressing on Toward the Goal

'¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is

ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶Only let us live up to what we have already attained.'

In verses 12 – 16 Paul is describing is the **spiritual mind** as he expresses his own determination to press toward the goal of the prize of the high calling he has in Jesus. He portrays himself as an athlete running to the finish line, not satisfied with where he is right now, but straining forward to a higher goal.

Philippians 3:17 – 21 NIV

'¹⁷Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.'

In verses 17-21 he talks about his future with renewed vigour and vision as he envisages our citizenship in heaven and the transformation of our bodies into the likeness of His glorious body.

He pauses for a moment in verses 18 and 19 as he describes, almost in parenthesis, the Christian whose mind is on **'earthly things'**, living their lives as enemies of the cross - before he rushes on to describe our high calling in Christ Jesus, contrasting this with those whose god is their stomach. In these days he would probably have called these Christians earthbound eagles – they are eagles but act like chicken, grubbing around with the things of this world rather than soaring in the heights, the thought of this causes Paul's heart of love to mourn over them.

The lesson Paul will be pushing home in this chapter is life in the 'Spirit' versus life in the flesh, faith versus works, and he tells us these are incompatible. The city of Philippi was a Roman colony, a 'Rome away from Rome'. He contrasts this with the believers at Philippi and says in the same way the people of God are a colony of Heaven on the earth and we need to remember this and not get so acclimatised to our culture that we become like it. We must remember we are aliens and strangers in this world.

Philippians 3:20

He tells us that we need to look at the earth from heaven's viewpoint, describing the spiritual mind. It is easy, he is saying, to get caught up in things, not only tangible things, the things we can see, but also in the intangible such as position, reputation, achievement and fame. He urges the Christians at Philippi not to look at these things but to press on for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

In Colossians 3 he puts it this way

Colossians 3 The Message

He Is Your Life

¹⁻² *So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.*

³⁻⁴ *Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.*

⁵⁻⁸ *And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God. It's because of this kind of thing that God is about to explode in anger. It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better. But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk.*

⁹⁻¹¹ *Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.*

¹²⁻¹⁴ *So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*

¹⁵⁻¹⁷ *Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.*

¹⁸ *Wives, understand and support your husbands by submitting to them in ways that honour the Master.* ¹⁹ *Husbands, go all out in love for your wives. Don't take advantage of them.* ²⁰ *Children, do*

what your parents tell you. This delights the Master no end. ²¹Parents, don't come down too hard on your children or you'll crush their spirits. ²²⁻²⁵ Servants, do what you're told by your earthly masters. And don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you'll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you're serving is Christ. The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being a follower of Jesus doesn't cover up bad work.'

Oh my!

Philippians 3:7

And Paul mentions the things that are behind him.

It is true that the things Paul refers to were highly sought after in his days before Christ called him. Are there things that **you** need to put behind you in order that you can run your race with joy? Things that were far from 'to your profit'; hurts, wounds and betrayals from which you need to be released.

Do you need to make closure on the past so that you can run unhindered into everything Jesus has for you? Just take a moment now to reflect and talk to Him, asking Him to make closure where necessary, He cannot commission you to anything new whilst the past is still holding you.

Some of the things that are behind Paul are mentioned in

Galatians 1:14

These were religious things, they were not tangible, his feelings of self-satisfaction, superiority and morality, holding himself above the ordinary folk. Today we can be snared by things tangible and intangible and as a result – we lose our joy. It doesn't mean the things are not good, but the good is always the enemy of the best.

Matthew 6:31 – 34

1 Timothy 6:17

Jesus Himself warns us about our lives -

Luke 12:15 New International Version

⁴⁵Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Many people who have the things money can buy have lost the things that money cannot buy.

The key word is in –

Philippians 3:1-11

And it is the word '**count**'. In the Greek two different words are used, but the basic idea is the same – to evaluate, to assess. Socrates said '*The unexamined life is not worth living*', yet few of us sit down and weigh seriously the values that control our decisions and directions.

Many people today are slaves of things and as a result do not experience joy. In Paul's case, the things he was living for before he knew Jesus seemed to be very commendable. A righteous life, obedience to the law, the defence of the religion of his fathers, but none of those things gave him acceptance with God. Like most religious people Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven.

It was not the bad things that kept Paul from Jesus, it was the good things. Paul had to lose his religion to find his salvation and relationship with God.

Acts 9:1-31

When Saul or Paul opened his books to evaluate his wealth he discovered that apart from Jesus, everything else he had lived for was refuse. Paul explains it in this section. There are only two kinds of righteousness - 'works' righteousness or 'faith' righteousness, and only the righteousness of **faith** is acceptable to God.

Let's just look for a moment at 'works' righteousness – another way of saying this is 'law versus grace'. Today we know that no-one is saved by the works of the law, but in Paul's day these issues were still being thrashed out – you can trace some history from -

Philippians 3:1-6

Paul starts this exhortation – something said or written in order to urge somebody strongly to do something - with the word 'finally' – it does not mean that he is about to close the letter because he keeps on going. The word 'finally' in this regard means – 'for the rest', or 'by the way you need to know this'.

Philippians 4:8

This is the 'finally' that means Paul is about to close. 'For the rest' means that Paul is about to introduce something central. Paul had warned the believers at Philippi before, but he is about to warn them again and he says this -

1. Look out for dogs.
2. Look out for evil workers
3. Look out for mutilators

So here is a triple warning and to find out what he means by this warning we need to look at church history for a moment. From the beginning the Gospel came to the Jews –

Acts 2:36

Romans 1:16

The first seven chapters of the book of Acts deal with the Jewish believers, or with Gentiles who were Jewish proselytes.

Acts 2:10

Acts 8:5-25

The message went to the Samaritans but that did not cause too much of a problem because Samaritans were part Jewish. But when Peter went to the Gentiles in Acts 10, he caused uproar! Peter was called on to explain his activities.

Acts 11

The issue was that the Gentiles mentioned in Acts 10 had become Christians without first becoming Jews and this was new for the church which at this time was largely made up of Jewish converts. Peter had to explain to them that God had told him to preach to the Gentiles too, and that appeared to settle the matter, but not for long. Paul was sent out by the Holy Spirit to minister especially to the Gentiles –

Acts 13:1-3

Paul's first missionary journey.

Acts 22:21

Peter opened the door of faith to the Gentiles in Acts 10 and Paul followed his example on his first missionary journey –

Acts 14:26-28

It was not long before the strict Jewish believers took issue with Paul and opposed his ministry; they followed him to Antioch teaching that it was necessary for the Gentiles to submit to Jewish rules before they could be saved as it was customary for Jewish proselytes to undergo circumcision as part of their acceptance into Judaism.

Acts 15:1

This disagreement led to a conference in Jerusalem, you can read it in Acts 15. The result of this conference was approval of Paul's ministry and triumph for the Gospel of Jesus and His grace. Gentiles did not have to become Jewish or be circumcised in order to be saved.

However some dissenters were not satisfied – religion always opposes relationship – it was not what they wanted to hear. Having failed in their opposition to Paul at Antioch and Jerusalem, they followed him wherever he went – just as the Pharisees before them had followed Jesus attempting to trip Him up – they tried to steal his converts and the churches he planted. The Bible calls this group of people ‘false teachers’ – they try to mix law and grace. The early church had a name for them ‘Judaizers’.

You will find if you read the letter to the Galatian church that it was largely written to correct false teaching; Paul marvels that they are so quickly being turned from the truth back to rules made by men. It is to the Judaizers that Paul is referring in the first two verses in Philippians 3 and he uses three terms to describe them –

- (1) **DOGS.** The orthodox Jews would call a Gentile a dog. In fact Jesus did the same thing with the woman who came to Him to have her daughter healed. He said *‘Have you come to take the children’s bread?’* But she said *‘Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table.’* (Matthew 15:26,27).

The term ‘dogs’ that Paul is using does not mean Paul is comparing the false teachers to literal animals, what he is painting a picture of is that these Judaizers snapped at Paul’s heels and followed him from place to place, dogging his footsteps, and ‘barking’ their false doctrines. They were troublemakers and carriers of a dangerous heresy.

EVIL WORKERS. These men taught that a sinner was saved by *faith and good works*, especially the works of the law, but Paul is quick to point out that their good works are really evil works because they are performed in the old way of doing things and not by the Spirit. These evil works glorify the workers, not Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8-10

Titus 3:7

These scriptures make it clear that no-one can be saved by good works, even religious ‘good works’. Our good works are a result of faith in Jesus.

- (2) **MUTILATORS.** These people believed that circumcision was essential to salvation.

Acts 15:1

Galatians 6:12-18

Paul states that circumcision of itself is only a mutilation. The true Christian experiences a spiritual circumcision in Jesus, a circumcision of the heart.

Colossians 2:11

So in contrast to the false teaching, Paul gives the true teaching –

Romans 2:25-29

John 4:19-24

God is Spirit and those who worship Him worship in Spirit and in truth.

Ephesians 2:8-10

And those who worship Him know that He has plans for them and works for them to do that are not initiated by fleshly effort or religious fervour.

John 17:4

John 19:30

Hebrews 10:11 – 14

Philippians 3:4-6 New International Version

'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.'

Paul wasn't speaking from inexperience, he knew all about trying to gain salvation through his own efforts. As a young man he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the great Jewish rabbi and had a promising career lined up as a Jewish leader before his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Acts 22:3

Galatians 1:13-14

But Paul gave all that up when he became a Christian and joined the hated Christian sect and became a preacher of the Gospel.

Galatians 6:12-13

The Judaizers were compromising in order to avoid persecution. But Paul was being true to Jesus' message of grace and as a result, he was being persecuted. In this section of the letter to the Philippians Paul examines his own life and becomes like an auditor who opens the books to see what wealth he possesses, only to find that without Jesus, he is bankrupt. When Paul looked at himself or others looked at him he was considered righteous, then one day he saw himself compared with Jesus – it was then he re-evaluated his life, abandoned his own works of righteousness for the righteousness of Christ.

To Paul, then 'things' were represented by his Jewish heritage, his religious achievements and his standing in the community. All of these things were valuable to him prior to his conversion. Paul was born into a pure Hebrew family and entered into a covenantal relationship when he was circumcised. He came from the tribe of Benjamin – of which he was justly proud – Joseph and Benjamin were Jacob's favourite sons because they were born to Rachel.

As a Pharisee Paul had reached the very summit of religious experience, the highest ideal any Jew could hope to obtain. If anyone was going to heaven it was a Pharisee – yet all this he counts as rubbish for the sake of knowing Christ. Before his conversion he looked at the standards set by men, after his conversion he says he knows nothing, but Christ and Him crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:2 NASB

'For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.'

As we draw this section to a close then – what 'things' do you need to re-evaluate in your life right now in order that you can say with Paul – *'I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.'*

Is your standing in the church or the community more important to you than your standing before Christ?

Is there any area where you are depending on your own works of righteousness rather than the righteousness which is by faith in Christ Jesus?

In the following section we will look at the righteousness of faith.

