

p 59 WEEK 8: REJOICING IN THE TRUE AND ONLY GOSPEL

Philippians 3:1–11

The Place of the Passage

Some have suggested that 3:1ff. seems like a strangely abrupt transition. But there are repeated themes and words in these verses that prove to be an orderly flow of thought from chapters 2–3. Having called the Philippians to hold fast to the “word of life” and to “rejoice” in mutual sacrifice for the gospel (2:16–18), and having shown Timothy and Epaphroditus to be Christlike models (2:19–30), Paul now further expounds upon that “word of life,” contrasting false teaching with his own conversion and present confession (3:1–11).

p 60 The Big Picture

The Philippians are to follow Paul in rejoicing in the Lord by resisting false teachers who trust in the flesh, and glorying instead in Christ alone as their complete righteousness.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through Philippians 3:1–11, which will be the focus of this week’s study. Following this, review the questions below concerning this section of the book of Philippians and write your responses. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, page 2285 or visit www.esvbible.org.)

Though 3:1 roughly marks the middle of the letter, Paul begins this section with “Finally ...” The Greek word, however, might better be translated “So then”—which may suggest that Paul is picking up an earlier point. With the rest of 3:1 in mind, what theme/verses from chapter 2 might Paul be returning to?

What might be the connection between the command to “rejoice in the Lord” in 3:1 and what follows in verses 2–11?

Paul introduces this section in verse 1 by acknowledging that the things that follow are “the same things” he has told his readers before. To repeat them is p 61 “no trouble” for him, and it is “safe” for them. But why is it worth repeating what they’ve already heard?

In biblical times, Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs (implying they were wild, impure, and outside). In verse 2 Paul warns of false teachers who require circumcision (“Judaizers”), and he calls *them* “dogs.” Why? What is he suggesting here?

Paul attests that because of Christ he has “suffered the loss of all things” (v. 8). Imagining the respectability, familiarity, and comfort of his former life as a religious leader, what might Paul have lost in embracing Christ? How does 2 Corinthians 11:23–29 further highlight this cost?

When Paul writes of what he used to consider “gain” (v. 7), what does he have in mind? Is he thinking in terms of *spiritual* gain or of the practical benefits (the “creaturely comforts”) of his former way of life? Explain why.

p 62 Verse 9 uses the word “righteousness” in two different ways. One is *so-called* righteousness and the other is *true* righteousness. Describe the difference.

The gospel is infinitely glorious, rich, and expansive, but here Paul condenses the gospel message to a few short lines, making clear what it is and is not. Do the same in your own words. Imagine a friend asked you what he or she must do in order to be made right with God; what would you say?

What did Paul mean when he wrote of his longing to know “the power of his resurrection” (v. 10)?

When Paul writes that he longs to “share” Christ’s “sufferings” (v. 10), he is striking a familiar note but in a new way. He has spoken numerous times about *partnership*, *partaking*, *participation*, *sharing*, etc. (e.g., 1:5, 7; 2:1; 4:14–15). The Philippians *share* in Paul’s ministry and suffering (1:29–30). Now, Paul similarly seeks to *share* Christ’s suffering. Explain the relationship between sharing the missionary sacrifice of others and sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

p 63 Compare these four phrases: “to know him,” to know “the power of his resurrection,” to “share in his sufferings,” and “becoming like him in his death” (v. 10). Do you sense any tension or see any surprises between any of them? Explain.

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

NO RIGHTEOUSNESS/ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS. If anyone had reason to be confident in himself—in religious heritage, zeal, discipline, moral scruples, etc., it was Paul. He wasn't perfect, but compared with others, he was "blameless" (Phil. 3:6). Humanly speaking, he had attained all of the "righteousness" one could. But by God's intervening grace, Paul was shown that the only hope for being made right with God is to abandon any and all confidence in his own goodness and good works. His "achievements" achieved nothing. Actually, even worse, they were "loss," even "rubbish" (vv. 7–8). All self-trust must be renounced (such is repentance). Only then is one ready to see Jesus' life and death not as a "loss" but as a "gain." True righteousness "comes through faith in Christ"; it "depends on faith" (v. 9). Faith itself doesn't save, nor does trust in faith. Faith is looking outside of self to trust in "Christ, the righteousness of God" for us.

REPEATING THE GOSPEL. After reiterating his call to "rejoice in the Lord," Paul further introduces this section of Philippians with this: "To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you" (v. 1). The "same things" that Paul goes on to write about in verses 2–9 are the truths of the gospel—warning of its distortion (v. 2) and explaining its essence through his own conversion (vv. 4–9). He had taught them these things before, but rehearsing them again is "safe." In fact, regardless of the conditions or times, repeating the gospel is *essential* for the church's fidelity and devotion. The gospel is "of first importance" (1 Cor. 15:3) and must be repeated, expounded, re-apprehended, and applied again and again.

p 64 KNOWING CHRIST. Philippians 3:1–11 is intensely personal, not only because Paul opens up his own life but also because of the way that he speaks of Christ. Salvation is desirable, of course, because sinners need forgiveness and the alternative is eternal condemnation; but it is ultimately desirable "because of the surpassing worth of *knowing* Christ Jesus" (v. 8). Christ is not merely the means to gain mercy, but mercy is the means by which we "gain Christ" (v. 8). Salvation is a Person.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE LAW VERSUS FAITH. Paul's words—as well as his life—elucidate two different, opposing religious models. One model rests its confidence in the law and the flesh; the other rests in Christ's righteousness as a gift through faith. This raises the question of how Paul can seem to speak disparagingly about the law, since it was given by God who commanded his people to obey it. Indeed, Paul elsewhere attests that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). But how one *uses* the law makes all the difference in the world. God intended the Mosaic law primarily as a preparation for the righteousness that would come through the Messiah (see Gal. 3:23–25). But, like many Jews in his day, Paul had grown up trusting "a righteousness of [his] own that comes from the law" (Phil. 3:9). Obedience to the law was the primary basis for a right standing with God. He later came to see that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:3). But many in his day, even some professing Christians, hadn't rightly understood this. Some mingled Christ and this distorted view of the law. They imposed the legal demands of the law on others, especially Gentiles, who, in their reckoning, needed to be circumcised and to keep the law. But such barking "dogs" (Phil. 3:2) should be ignored, Paul insists. Those who have the *true* circumcision "worship by the Spirit, ... and glory in Christ ... and put no confidence in the flesh" (v. 3).

Theological Soundings

RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. Paul's highest hope and longing was in "the resurrection from the dead" (v. 11). This is a culminating event in God's plan, when the bodies of living and dead believers will rise and be made new like Christ's post-resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:35–55). They will dwell in a new heaven and new earth without corruption, death, sin, conflict, curse, or threat (Rev. 21:1–5). They will be "glorified" in that they will be like Jesus and will "see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). God will forever dwell with his people, fulfilling all his grand promises.

p 65 Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Philippians 3:1–11 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Philippians 3:1–11

p 66 As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Philippians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.