

Lesson 3

Rejoicing in the Lord, Not Trusting in Self-effort

Philippians 3:1-4:1

Take some time to slowly read through Philippians 3:1 – 4:1 every day this week, asking the Holy Spirit to illumine your thinking and to speak to you through this portion of the Word of God.

“... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:14

1. What concept from last week’s lesson was especially helpful or thought provoking to you?
2. Look for a verse in the lesson this week that is meaningful to you and make it your memory verse. Write it down, carry it with you, put it on your refrigerator or mirror or dashboard and memorize it. Share your memory verse with your small group.

In the first century A.D. there was a huge dilemma roiling the newly born church: must an individual first convert to Judaism in order to become a Christian? Was it necessary for a male to be circumcised in order to become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Is salvation the result of faith alone or faith combined with human effort? The matter was officially settled in 50 A.D. at the Council of Jerusalem which is described in Acts 15. Gentiles *did not* have to become Jews in order to become Christians. Salvation is the result of *faith alone*.

Although the matter was officially settled, there was a group of Jewish Christians called the Judaizers who refused to abide by this decision. The Judaizers followed Paul’s itinerant ministry, stirring up division and confusion by teaching that Paul’s Gentile converts must be circumcised. This situation is referred to in the third chapter of Philippians.

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Philippians 3:1-4:1

3. Explain the origins of Jewish circumcision from Genesis 17:9-14.

4. Circumcision is an outer action that is meant to symbolize or picture an inner spiritual reality. From Deuteronomy 30:6 and Romans 2:28-29 what does circumcision picture?
5. The term flesh in the Bible refers to fallen human nature, or being apart from relationship with the Lord.
6. From Philippians 3:4-6, list the ways Paul could boast in the flesh (self-effort).
7. Consider and discuss ways that we as contemporary believers can also trust in our flesh.
8. From Romans 8:1-17, make two lists: one of the things of the Spirit and one of the things of the flesh. Discuss how these contrast.
9. When we truly grasp the fact that God's grace to us is a free gift that we do not earn nor deserve because we are "good" enough, we may wonder if how we conduct ourselves even matters to God. See Romans 6:1-2 and 6:15 and discuss Paul's answer.
10. Discuss how Paul views all of his accomplishments of the flesh in Philippians 3:7-9.
11. What does Paul consider to be most precious in Philippians 3:8-10? What is most precious to you?
12. For what was Paul "laid hold of" by Jesus Christ? See Philippians 3:12 and Acts 9:1-19.

13. Consider Hebrews 12:1-2 as a parallel passage. What additional insights do you gain from this passage?

14. In Philippians 3:12-14, how does Paul express the same tension we saw in Philippians 2:12-13: that salvation is a free gift from God, but that we have the responsibility to live it out in our daily lives?

15. Is there something in your life that “lies behind” but has not been “forgotten”? Ask the Lord to show you and then to bring His light and truth and healing to this situation. Take some time this week to allow Him to set you free in this area. Discuss if you like.

16. In Philippians 3:17 Paul invites us to follow his example. From the first three chapters of Philippians how does Paul’s example most challenge you?

17. Thinking of the analogy of having dual citizenship, what are some of our rights and privilege as citizens of heaven?

18. What glorious truth is taught in Philippians 3:21, I Corinthians 15:12-20 and 15:42-58? What does this mean to you?

19. Philippians 3:21 and 4:1 are connected by the word *therefore*. Why should we stand firm in the Lord?

20. Based on your study this week, what do you think God is teaching you or inviting you to do or be?