

“The Epistle of Joy (Part 9 – Philippians 3:1-11)”

Paul writes in Philippians 3:1-11: *“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. ²Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, ⁴ though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee ⁶concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

Here’s the essence of the message from this passage: ***A relationship with Christ, not a religious résumé, is what makes us righteous.*** The Apostle Paul outlines three concerns in this passage. *First*, Paul expresses this concern: ***watch out for the expectations of others.*** Paul quickly moved from sweet words in verse 1 to a stern warning in verse 2. He was opposed everywhere he went by the “Judaizers,” who were Jewish Christians who felt like Gentile Christians needed to also adopt Jewish customs (i.e. dietary restrictions, special days, circumcision, etc.). He called these false teachers “dogs,” “evildoers,” and “mutilators of the flesh.” These many agitators were mutilating the message of the Christian Gospel by trying to add/take away from it. So, we too, need to watch out for those who would draw our attention away from Jesus Christ and on to anything lesser. We need to keep our eyes on Jesus and our nose in the Book.

Second, Paul expresses this concern: ***weigh your accomplishments against Christ.*** Paul pleaded with the Philippians to not go where the Judaizers wanted to take them. Paul had been down that road and discovered it’s a dead end. Paul’s former fleshly achievements were more impressive than most, but to his horror he discovered that the ladder of success he had climbed was leaning against the wrong wall. One glimpse of the glorified Christ made Paul instantly realize that his best was nothing more than a giant pile of manure. Compared to intimately knowing Jesus, which is everything, what the world views as “impressive gains” are really “losses.” The world’s way of thinking is completely opposite to God’s; it’s upside down, completely backwards, and absolutely wrong. Weighed against the weightiness of Christ the best of our good works are worthless. Everything is a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord. Most of us have no trouble admitting that our sins are smelly, but secretly, many of us think our good deeds help balance out the bad. It’s not our attitude toward our sins that fouls us up; it’s

our attitude toward our own goodness. A good thing can become a bad thing if it keeps us away from the best thing. We must remember: IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS!

Third, Paul expresses this concern: ***widen your experiential knowledge of Christ***. It's the greatest exchange ever when we trust Christ alone for the salvation of our soul – Jesus takes our rottenness and transfers His righteousness to our accounts! The goal of the Christian life is to *know Christ*. This means knowing Him absolutely and intimately, not just intellectually. Salvation is all about knowing Jesus personally, not just knowing about Him. In order to know Christ better we need to spend time with Him in the Word and in prayer, even as we learn to entertain His abiding presence all throughout the day. Power comes to Christian believers on the basis of Christ's resurrection. The power of Christ's resurrection works in our present situations, helping us to see that suffering is a part of our intimate relationship with the Lord, and it also guarantees our final glory!

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Never tolerate any attempt to *add to* or *take away from* the Biblical, Christian Gospel.
2. In what areas are you tempted to “put confidence in the flesh” (i.e. put stock in *your* achievements or good deeds to gain favor with God)?
3. Here's a formula worth remembering: Jesus + Nothing = Everything.
4. Do you want to know Jesus more intimately? What changes need to be made to see this happen?
5. Instead of trusting your own fleshly résumé, trust instead in the impressive and fully truthful résumé of Jesus Christ.