

Joy's Enemy

Philippians 3:1-11

Words of Caution

3:1

Paul called on believers to **rejoice in the Lord**. The word "rejoice" appears several times in the epistle (1:18 [twice]; 2:17-18 [twice]; 3:1; 4:4 [twice], 10). It seems from this repeated emphasis that the Philippian Christians needed this word. Most of God's people need this challenge often. It is easy for believers to let circumstances discourage them. The cure for discouragement is to rivet one's attention on the Lord and rejoice in Him.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Immediately Paul addressed the problem. Although he focused on the message of the false teachers—circumcision—Paul also discussed their methods. In this there can be no doubt as to his conviction regarding them and their religious activities. Paul's writing revealed his concern that the church realize the nature of its opponents. His style became graphic and picturesque, a sign of his interest in the subject.⁸ Both the terms which describe the opponents and the definition of true Christians would appeal to a Jewish audience.

⁸ This is known in the quick, pithy sentences which open the passage and in the frequency of figures of speech here. Hawthorne, 123, lists six figures of speech found here: anaphora (repetition of the same word), paronomasia (sound-alike words), polysyndeton (repetition of *καί* in close succession), alliteration, short disjointed sentences, and chiasm.

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

Workers of Chaos

3:2-7

Dogs is a figurative reference to false teachers whom Paul regards as just as filthy as dogs.

The NET Bible

One particular group in Paul's day was especially guilty of putting confidence in the flesh. These were the Judaizers. They plagued Paul and his converts constantly. Confused about the gospel, they added works of the law to faith in Christ, both for salvation and for Christian living. The Old Testament rite of circumcision was of special concern to them. They insisted that it was necessary for salvation. They did not omit faith in Christ but added works of the flesh. Paul called such men "deceitful workmen" (2 Cor. 11:13).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

A *Pharisee* was a member of one of the most important and influential religious and political parties of Judaism in the time of Jesus. There were more Pharisees than Sadducees (according to Josephus, Ant. 17.2.4 [17.42] there were more than 6,000 Pharisees at about this time). Pharisees differed with Sadducees on certain doctrines and patterns of behavior. The Pharisees were strict and zealous adherents to the laws of the OT and to numerous additional traditions such as angels and bodily resurrection.

The NET Bible

The two other descriptions were direct plays on words with Jewish ideas. The second was "those who do evil." These Jews, oriented to salvation by the good works of the law, had pride in their exemplary lives. Probably, like the Paul of the past, they considered themselves blameless. In reality, however, what they supposed to be good works were not. They hindered the gospel, providing a stumbling block to genuine faith. Describing their character, not their activity, Paul warned against their zealous activities. Third, they were "mutilators." In a figure of speech employing sound-alike words, Paul turned his thoughts to their circumcision. Circumcision represented the first requirement of the law and symbolized their approach to God. They took great pride in it, as 3:19 reveals. Paul recognized that their circumcision was simply a cutting. It had no value apart from genuine faith in Christ.

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

Paul gave some interesting autobiographical facts in these verses. On the surface it appears he was boasting. However, closer examination reveals that this was precisely what he tried to avoid and warn against. To be sure, there was a time when the apostle had confidence in the flesh. But this was no longer true. To stress that he used to have great boldness and pride in his own achievements, Paul reviewed his past for the Philippians. After this he told about his crisis conversion experience on the road to Damascus.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The spiritually circumcised were described three ways. Each part of the description is linked together by the fact that in the Greek text the three are preceded by one article that goes with them all. The three together, therefore, characterize genuine Christians. Paul identified himself with that group, even though he also had physical circumcision. By so doing, he anticipated the discussion of the choices which became apparent when he chose Christ (3:7ff.). By stating that "we" were the true circumcision, Paul associated himself with Gentiles and Jews who relied on Christ rather than religious ritual.

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

It would be hard to find a more forceful refutation of human effort to please God than what Paul presented here (v. 8). Four Greek particles (*alla menoun ge kai*) are translated **what is more** and introduce the strong statements of verse 8. Paul considered as **loss** not only the things already listed (vv. 5-6), but **everything** (v. 8). In exchange for confidence in the flesh Paul gained the **surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus** personally. Christ was now his **Lord**.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Wellspring of Joy

3:8-11

The word here translated "dung" was often used in Greek as a vulgar term for fecal matter. As such it would most likely have had a certain shock value for the readers. This may well be Paul's meaning here, especially since the context is about what the *flesh* produces.

The NET Bible

These verses contain an open and honest confession to the Philippians. Paul already knew Christ as his Savior. But he wanted to know Him more intimately as his Lord. **To know** (v. 10) means "to know by experience" (*gnōnai*). The noun (*gnōseōs*) is used in verse 8. The "surpassing greatness of knowing Christ" is now elaborated in verses 10–11. This is how Paul wanted to know Him. More of what he desired in his Christian life follows.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Joy flows from the confidence in and continuous of love of Christ.

Q1. Who in your life can steal your joy?

Q2. How can we cultivate our love of Christ so joy can flow from us?