



EVERLASTING JOY

The Book of Philippians

Lesson Three

In Philippians chapter 3, Paul begins by reaffirming his theme of joy. He also delivers a strong warning to the Philippians about the false teachers that were around, comparing them to dogs, evil workers, and butchers. His main objective seems to be to remind them that their confidence and joy must be found in Christ, not in themselves or in their achievements. No amount of religious activity or works can buy a ticket to Heaven, contrary to what the Judaizers were teaching. From personal experience, Paul knew that living under the works of the Law wouldn't get you anywhere.

Paul proves his point by using his past (1-11), his present (12-16), and his future (17-21). He gives his friends a mini autobiography, becoming open and transparent with what he's learned. I believe Paul is challenging them to evaluate their own life in the same way. Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." I think he had a point. Let's take Paul's challenge and evaluate our life, making sure that our confidence is only found in Jesus Christ. Irving Jensen wrote, "Philippians chapter 3 is the mountain peak of Philippians, challenging and inspiring its readers with the highest of goals." I pray that each of you will be inspired to press on toward the goal! **Memory Verse of the Week:** "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14

1. Let's begin today by reading Philippians 3:1-21. Observe and list the facts you find. This is your chance to be a detective. Look for key words,

repeated thoughts, and clues to Paul's main point. Make sure to include them on your **Key Word Sheet**.

2. Title each of the following sections and write a short summary to express the main point.

Section 1: Verses 1-11

Section 2: Verses 12-16

Section 3: Verses 17-21

3. Are there any exhortations in this chapter? Any promises? Any warnings?
4. How does this chapter relate to chapter 2?
5. Verse 10 tells us that Paul had a passion to know Christ. What's the difference between knowing Christ and knowing about Christ?
6. How do we get to know Christ? (Do you know Him personally, or do you only know "about" Him?)

7. In verses 1-11, what does Paul remind them to rejoice in?

The word “finally” in verse 1 indicates that Paul is drawing his letter to a close. (Or getting his second wind!) He gives them three exhortations in the first three verses. Paul reminds them to rejoice in the Lord, beware of the false teachers, and examine themselves to see if they are of the true circumcision.

8. What reason does Paul give for repeating himself in verse 1? Why?

9. F.B. Meyer says that joy is a “thing to be cultivated.” How do we cultivate joy?

Jesus Christ is central in the book of Philippians. He is our life (1:21), our supreme example (2:5-11), our goal (3:10), and our provider (4:13).

Paul was warning them against those who were teaching that the believers needed to live and act like Jews in order to be saved. These “Judaizers” were legalists that were trying to get the new converts to live under the Law instead of rejoicing in the grace of Jesus Christ. They wanted them to observe the Jewish dietary laws and certain rituals, such as circumcision, and other strict traditions. The Conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15) settled the debate, saying that Gentiles did not have to become Jewish proselytes to become Christians. The Judaizers were not happy, and needless to say, followed Paul around, trying to steal converts and corrupt the Gospel of grace. In fact, Paul wrote the Book of Galatians mainly to come against this teaching.

10. What did Paul compare the Judaizers to? Why?

11. Paul draws a comparison between them (the false teachers) and the believers, or the true circumcision. What three things are characteristic of the true believer?

Paul compared the Judaizers to dogs. Let me remind you that he's not talking about little fluffy who is part of your family. In those days, dogs were dirty scavengers that ran wild, feeding on garbage and filth, fighting among themselves, as well as attacking those around them. The Judaizers were like scavengers, out to devour them with their false doctrines. Evil workers referred to those guilty of evil deeds, and the word mutilation is also translated "concision," which refers to those people hooked on externals and devoid of reality. Paul was actually making a play on words by calling them "the mutilation" because they were mutilating the Gospel by insisting that you had to mutilate your flesh to be rightly related to God.

- 12.** What does it mean to have "confidence in your flesh"?
- 13.** After Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), his life was changed. How does he view his accomplishments now?

It's easy to get distracted by things, isn't it? Paul's "things" were religious achievements, fame, and reputation. He was a model Pharisee ... He was a zealot for God. But he was missing the boat. After he met Christ, he knew that his confidence couldn't be in "who or what" he was, but only in Jesus. He knew he was a sinner who needed a Savior (Ephesians 3:8, 1 Corinthians 15:9, 1 Timothy 1:15). Paul didn't brag or boast in his own achievements, but in the cross of Christ.

- 14.** In what does your confidence lie? Answer the following questions:
 - A.** Do you brag or take pride in your own accomplishments?
 - B.** Do you find your worth and/or identity in what you do, or have done?
 - C.** Do you think your religious achievements will get you to Heaven?
- 15.** According to verses 1-11, Paul said he counted it all loss for Christ. What did he mean?

The word “rubbish” can mean “excrement,” “dung,” or “trash.” It all meant nothing. He had gained Christ.

- 16.** What two kinds of righteousness are mentioned in verse 9? Can you explain the difference?
- 17.** Paul was no longer seeking earthly applause or rewards. He had different goals. What were they, according to verses 10-11?
- 18.** Trusting in your own achievements brings you glory right now, but not in eternity. How does putting your confidence in Christ bring Him glory now and you glory later?
- 19.** Are you still seeking earthly rewards and applause in any area of your life? If so, what should you do?
- 20.** What does it mean to “know the power of His resurrection”?
- 21.** Why do you think Paul wanted to know the “fellowship of His sufferings”?
- 22.** Being conformed to His death means becoming dead to sin and self-centeredness. In what areas do you need to become “deader” to sin and self-centeredness?

23. How can suffering (if we let it) cause us to know Jesus better?

24. In verses 12-16, list all the action words you find.

Paul is using athletic terms in this section, although which sport he's referring to is debatable. Some think he's talking about chariot racing, while others think he's talking about foot races. The same intensity, determination, and perseverance are needed for both sports. (I'll be using the foot-racing analogy!)

25. Did Paul think he had arrived spiritually? Was he content with where he was spiritually?

Verse 12 says he was "pressing on." Paul was pursuing godliness relentlessly, like an athlete training for his event. He was aiming to know the character of Christ and seeking to be like Him. He wanted to know Him better, love Him more deeply, and resemble Him more completely. Paul was determined; refusing to give up, no matter how difficult, demanding, or disappointing the challenges were that he faced. He wanted to "lay hold" or "seize and take possession of" Christ, as Christ had done for him.

26. Describe the daily discipline and determination of an athlete training for the Olympics. What does this tell you about your life as a Christian?

27. Are you facing any obstacles in your pursuit of godliness? Do the words "determined" and "persistent" describe your walk with God? (Are you pressing on?)

28. What “one thing” does Paul do? (This is my favorite question!)

The word “forget” in verse 13 means to “no longer be influenced by or affected by.” Paul wants them to “break the power of the past by living for the future.”

Runners are never supposed to look back in a race. They are always supposed to look forward and focus on the finish line. Many runners have lost a race by wasting precious seconds to look behind them.

29. What are the dangers of looking back and focusing on our past failures? (How can it hinder our walk? How can it zap our strength?)

The phrase “reaching forward” means “to stretch out.” This is most likely an analogy taken from the sprinting events as they reached forward in an attempt to cross the finish line first. Don’t miss the intensity that is being described in this section. As Stuart Briscoe put it, “He isn’t treating his Christian experience like a Sunday stroll in the park, but as a race to be run with relentless determination and commitment.”

Paul wasn’t striving to earn his salvation, but for the rewards that come with a life of godliness. In a real race, only the winners obtain the prize, but not in Christianity. We are all called to run “in such a way that we may obtain it.” (1 Corinthians 9:24)

30. How would you describe your race right now? (Don’t be discouraged if you haven’t “attained.” God is looking for progress, not perfection!)

In verse 15, Paul tells those who are mature to have this determined attitude. In the second part of the verse, he also gives them the license to grow at their own pace. Paul realizes everyone is at a different level spiritually, and knows it is God who will work in their hearts. In verse 16, he again tells them that no matter where they are right now, let’s all press on!

- 31.** Is there something in your past that you need to “forget” and not be influenced by? Take it to the Lord one last time and let it go. He’s forgiven you, now receive His forgiveness.
- 32.** I’m sorry, but I need to ask this question. Is there something other than Christ that you are relentlessly pursuing? Ask the Lord to give you the willingness to do the “one thing” that’s needful, which is knowing and pursuing Christ.
- 33.** According to verses 17-21, how was Paul’s life a pattern for others? Also read Titus 2:7 and 1 Timothy 1:16.
- 34.** Is your life a “pattern” for those around you? Think about and answer the following questions:
- A.** We’ve all seen a pattern that is used to sew some kind of outfit. Is your life a “pattern” that your children can follow as they seek to know Christ?
 - B.** Is your life a “pattern” for your neighbors that wonder what it means to be a Christian?
 - C.** As your friends seek to grow in Christ, can they look at your life as a “pattern” to follow?
- 35.** If your answer is “no” to any of the above questions, what changes do you need to make? Are you willing to make them? How can you be a better “pattern”?

- 36.** What made Paul “weep”? How did he describe the “enemies of Christ”?
- 37.** Are you setting your mind on earthly things? If our citizenship is in Heaven, where should we “set our minds”?
- 38.** What do we learn about our Savior in verses 20-21?

Paul says that our lowly or “vile” bodies that we have now are going to be changed. We are to be fashioned like His, conformed to His glorious body. These changes will take place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52) when Christ comes. John Phillips said, “The God who made us once can easily make us again ‘according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.’ Unbelief sees a dead body in a coffin; faith sees a risen, triumphant, omnipotent Christ.” We set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:1-3) by eagerly awaiting Christ’s return, by anticipating our future transformation, and by surrendering ourselves and allowing God to conform us into the image of His Son.

- 39.** You can usually spot a foreigner right away. Can the people around you tell by the way you act that you are a citizen of Heaven?

See you next week!

