

“Giving Up to Gain”

August 10, 2025

Philippians 3:1-11

I. Introduction

As well as being under house arrest, Paul was shackled 24/7 to one of his guards. Although he had some visitors, Paul must have had a lot of time to reminisce. Writing this letter to the Christians in Philippi would have helped bring back memories of the “Old Days.” I suspect that the scars as well as the aches and pains he had reminded him of the persecutions—the beatings, shipwrecks, and stoning—he had experienced. But Paul had a heart for people, and those inconveniences would pale into insignificance as he remembered the different cities to which God had led him; and the men and women and children who had come to make Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior. Because of his love for them, he wanted them to finish their lives with testimonies like his from [2 Timothy 4:7](#), “**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**”

Throughout his ministry, Paul had been followed—shadowed—by a group called the Judaizers. Judaizers were supposedly Christian Jews who, early in the history of Christianity, tried to impose the Jewish way of life on Gentile Christians. They taught that Gentile believers had to become Jews in order to be saved. This meant being circumcised, keeping the dietary laws and the laws of purity as well as keeping the 613 Laws of Moses that the religious establishment had pulled from the Old Testament. Paul wanted to warn the Philippians to be on their guard against the Judaizers or, for that matter, any other false teacher. In today’s Scripture, Paul explained that there are only two kinds of righteousness—works-based righteousness and faith-based righteousness—but only faith righteousness is acceptable to God. Paul began with works righteousness and false teachers.

II. Works Righteousness & False Teachers

A. The Warning The “**finally**” in [verse 1](#) didn’t mean Paul was about to bring his letter to a close, he was only half done. The Greek word also means “*for the rest*” or “*now then*.” It was a word of transition as he introduced a new topic and a warning. Paul began his warning with the admonition to “**rejoice in the**

Lord.” Paul was about to describe various trials, beginning with false teachers, that the Philippian church was experiencing and would continue to experience in the future. In the midst of these trials, Paul hoped—really, he commanded--that the Philippians should **“Rejoice in the Lord!”**

Biblical joy is not the same as happiness, the feeling of delight associated with favorable events. True joy continues in the face of weakness, pain, suffering, even death—James wrote in **James 1:2**, **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”** Biblical joy produces a deep confidence in the future that is based on trust in God’s purpose and God’s power. Joy or rejoicing is an act of the will as one chooses to obey God. It is a fruit of walking in the Spirit. Rejoicing—joy is a mark of a true believer. Paul warned that false teachers were going to come, but the Philippians were not to be alarmed or lose their joy by their opposition. Peter wrote about this, too, **turn to 1 Peter 4:12-13.** Back in Philippians, Paul described those false teachers who opposed the Gospel using three terms: dogs, men who do evil, mutilators—in the Greek, each one began with the command, “Beware.”

1. Re: False Teachers a. Beware of the dogs! The orthodox Jew would call the Gentile a “dog,” but here Paul called these false teachers “dogs”! “Dogs” refers to the wild scavengers—feral dogs—that plagued ancient cities. These animals roamed in packs, feeding on garbage and occasionally attacking humans. Paul was not just calling false teachers names; he was comparing them to the dirty, vicious scavengers that were a danger to decent people. They were troublemakers and carriers of dangerous spiritual infections.

b. Second, Beware of men who do evil! Though these false teachers prided themselves on their supposed righteousness, they were in reality **“men who do evil.”** They taught that the sinner was saved by faith *plus* good works, especially the works of the Law. Paul called their so-called “good works” evil or evil works because they were performed by the flesh (the old nature) and not the Holy Spirit. They glorified the worker and not Jesus Christ. **Turn to Titus 3:3-7.** Just like **Ephesians 2:8-9**, these verses from Titus make it clear that no one can be saved by doing good works, even religious works. As **Ephesians 2:10** goes on to say, a Christian’s good works are the result of his faith, not the basis for his salvation.

c. Third, Beware of those who mutilate the flesh! The Judaizers taught that circumcision was essential to salvation ([Acts 15:1](#)), but Paul called such circumcision a mutilation. He wrote in [Col. 2:11](#), “**In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ.**” The true Christian has experienced a spiritual circumcision and does not need any fleshly operation.

2. Re: True Christians

a. They worship by the Spirit. Then to compare the false teachers/false Christians, Paul described true Christians, i.e., “**we who are the circumcision.**” The first quality of a genuine believer is a heart that overflows with worship. He wrote that true Christians “**worship by the Spirit of God.**” The indwelling Holy Spirit causes true and acceptable worship out of love for the Savior. [Romans 8:9](#) says, “**You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.**” The Spirit only indwells Christians; only true Christians can truly worship their Savior. True Christians are not identified by attending church or performing religious duties, but by a worshipping heart.

b. They glory in Christ Jesus. People who depend on works righteousness are usually boasting about what they have done. True Christians have nothing of which to boast; they give the credit for all that they are and have to the Lord Jesus Christ. They “**glory in Christ Jesus.**” They echo Paul’s words from [1 Cor. 15:10](#), “**By the grace of God I am what I am.**”

c. Finally, true Christians put no confidence in the flesh. The flesh is the old sinful nature one receives at birth. The Bible doesn’t have anything good to say about the “flesh.” In [Romans 7:18](#) Paul wrote, “**I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.**” In [John 6:63](#) Jesus said, “**The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.**” Only true repentance, which puts no confidence in the flesh, leads to salvation. The only “good work” that takes the sinner to heaven is the finished work of Christ on the cross; **turn to Hebrews 10:11-14.**

B. An Example Paul then gave an example of works-based righteousness—his earlier self as Saul of Tarsus. Paul knew from experience the futility of trying to obtain salvation by means of good works. He wrote, “**If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.**” He then went on to list things in which he trusted at one time as the rabbi, Saul of Tarsus. This was a works righteousness - religion. If anyone could be saved by religion, he would have been the man. He was the poster child for “works righteousness.” Saul of Tarsus seemed to have it all. He had undergone the proper rituals—he was “circumcised on the 8th day;” he was a member of God’s chosen people—he was a Jew; he was from a favored tribe in Israel—he was from “**the kingly tribe of Benjamin;**” he had intently maintained his orthodox heritage—he was ”**a Hebrew of Hebrews;**” he was one of the most devout legalists in Judaism—he was “**a Pharisee;**” he was zealous to the point that he persecuted Christians; and he rigidly conformed to the outward requirements of Judaism—measured by the righteousness of the Law, he was “**faultless.**” When he looked at himself or looked at others, Saul of Tarsus considered himself righteous. From the outside, he thought he was a success, but he did not stop to consider the inward sins he was committing.

III. Faith Righteousness

That is until that one day when the Lord Jesus met Saul on the road to Damascus ([Acts 9:1-19](#)). When he met Christ, he realized how futile his good works were and how sinful his claims of righteousness were. The reality of salvation by grace through Jesus Christ was revealed to him. It was then that Paul abandoned his “works righteousness” for the righteousness of Jesus Christ—faith righteousness. Paul didn’t come to believe that all the things he had done were good, but Christ was better; instead, he viewed all of the “good things” as bad. They were deadly because they deceived him into thinking that he was right with God. “**Whatever was to my profit I now consider lose for the sake of Christ.**” Paul gave up to gain.

A. Paul Lost or Gave Up his self-righteousness—all his cherished treasures. His treasures of birth and his treasures from observing the law were seen as rubbish - garbage. His own “treasures,” his self-righteousness brought glory to himself personally, but they did not bring glory to God. They were “gain” to him only, and as such, were selfish and worthless. Paul lost his religion and his reputation as he trusted the

Lord Jesus Christ and Him only for his salvation. Paul gave up his self-righteousness, but he gained far more than he lost.

B. Paul Gained:

1. the knowledge of Christ. To “know Christ” means more than knowing about Jesus Christ; it means to have a personal relationship with Him through faith. This is a knowledge gained through experience; it comes from walking with Christ, praying to Him, obeying His will, and seeking to glorify His name. It transforms the entire person; as [2 Cor. 5:17](#) says, “**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**” Salvation is knowing the Lord Jesus Christ in a personal way.

2. the righteousness of Christ. When Paul put his faith in Christ—when he trusted Christ, he lost his own self-righteousness and gained the righteousness of Christ; [Romans 4:5](#) says, “**To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.**” Paul looked at his earthly “treasures” and discovered that he was spiritually bankrupt—[Isaiah 64:6](#) says that “**all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.**” [Romans 3:23](#) emphasizes that “**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” But when Paul trusted Christ, God put Christ’s righteousness to his own account—[2 Cor. 5:21](#) says, “**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**”

3. the fellowship of Christ. When Paul became a Christian, it was not the end for him, it was the beginning. He gained the fellowship of Christ. He had “**the fellowship of sharing in his, i.e., Jesus,’ sufferings.**” Paul gained a friend to be with him in his temptations and persecutions. One who had endured so much and was ready to be a sympathetic understanding friend. [Turn to Hebrews 4:15-16.](#)

4. the resurrection from the dead. A final gain for Paul was the guarantee of his future resurrection from the dead. This is the resurrection described in [1 Corinthians 15:51-54](#). On that day, all believers will be changed as they are raised up and will be clothed with immortality as they ascend to be with their Lord and Savior forever.

IV. Conclusion

There are false teachers today just as there were in Paul's day. They have come up with a variety of ways for "*righteousness through works*" as they distort God's Word, but circumcision, baptism, the Lord's Supper, tithing, or any other religious practice cannot save a person from his sins. Neither can racial heritage nor belonging to a religious family have anything to do with a person's salvation. The world is full of people who, like Saul of Tarsus, are sincere in their religious beliefs. They will make any effort, pay any price, and sacrifice anything in their attempt to please God. They may be devout, orthodox Jews, loyal Roman Catholics who attend mass regularly, or Protestants who are involved in church service and ceremonies. They may fast, pray, or live in poverty, always seeking to do good. But religious zeal guarantees nothing. Today's Scripture points out that these people are absolutely wrong—their works are merely "**rubbish**."

There are people who claim to follow no religious system at all but lead model lives—sometimes better than those claiming to be Christians. They believe that following the "right" pathway to God is ultimately unimportant because God will accept them anyway. *What more could God ask than leading a moral life and holding sincere convictions?* Paul emphasized that these people are absolutely wrong, too. Only faith in Jesus Christ can save. **Romans 6:23** says, "**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" Peter put it this way in **Acts 4:12**, "**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**"

By making Jesus his Lord and Savior, Paul gained far more than he lost. In fact, the gains were so outstanding that Paul considered all other "things" nothing but garbage in comparison. This is why he wrote, "**Rejoice in the Lord!**"—his life didn't depend on the cheap "things" of the world but on the eternal values found in Jesus Christ. People who live for "things" are never really happy because they must constantly protect their treasures and worry lest they lose their value. A believer with his eyes on Jesus Christ can have joy. His treasures in Christ can never be stolen and they never lose their value. So, what about you--on what do you base your righteousness, your acceptance into heaven—on your good works or on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? What are the things that matter most to you?