

# How to Handle the Joy-Suckers of Life

## Philippians 3:1-11

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, March 30th 2025

### I. Introduction to a unified paragraph that is tightly tied to the subject of chapters 2-3

Paul begins this paragraph by saying, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” Some liberal commentaries have mocked the word “finally” since there is so much material that comes after it, and Paul gives another “finally” in chapter 4 verse 8. They have also wondered how on earth this command to rejoice can have any bearing whatsoever on the severe wording of the rest of the paragraph. So they conclude that this first sentence is either not authentic (how convenient) or it got misplaced somehow.<sup>1</sup> They ignore the fact that there is no Greek manuscript in existence that does not have this sentence right here where it belongs. The fact of the matter is that Paul is going to list all kinds of joy-suckers in verses 2-11, and he does not want these dear Christians to allow their joy to be sucked out of them. There is a *very* logical connection between the first sentence and the rest of the paragraph. Well, let’s dive in.

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<sup>1</sup> There are many versions of this. One claims that it might have been a portion of a previous letter to the Philippians that somehow got stuck in here randomly. For example, Kennedy says, “Clemen (Einheitlichk., pp. 139–140) cuts the knot by deriving the latter half of ver. 1 from the redactor. The whole section from 3:2 to 4:3 belongs to an old letter to the Philippians. Chap. 4:4 is the continuation of chap. 3:1a.” H.A.A. Kennedy, “The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament: Commentary*, vol. 3 (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), 448.” Dennis Johnson summarizes how some have tried to reconcile the tone change, saying, “Paul’s sharp shift in tone and topic from “Rejoice in the Lord” to “Look out for the dogs” inclines some New Testament scholars to speculate that Philippians 3:2–11 is a scrap from a different letter, mistakenly inserted here. Yet all the ancient manuscripts of Philippians—going back to the late second century—contain these verses right where we find them. There is no evidence that they were ever absent from any copy of this epistle. Others suggest that, while composing his letter, Paul received news that the Judaizers had reached Philippi. He therefore “shifted gears” abruptly to protect his friends against this plausible but poisonous teaching.” Dennis E. Johnson, *Philippians*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, 1st ed., *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 190.

## II. Paul's call to true supernatural joy in Jesus (v. 1)

### A. It relates to believers ("brethren") imitating leaders ("finally")

As I said, verse 1 begins by saying, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." I guess I should comment on that word "finally." In Greek literature, that word does not indicate that an author is wrapping up the book as a whole. The word "finally" is frequently used to indicate that he is finishing up a particular *topic*.<sup>2</sup> And Paul *is indeed* finishing up the topic of leaders to follow and leaders to avoid. In chapter 2 Paul had presented three leaders to imitate: Jesus, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. In chapter 3 he will wrap up his discussion on leadership by telling the Philippian Christians what kind of leaders to avoid like the plague. In contrast to the good leadership discussed in chapter 2, chapter 3 will address some audaciously bad and dangerous leadership.

But then comes the phrase that these same liberals have puzzled over: "rejoice in the Lord." But I find comfort in that phrase. What is so encouraging to me is that Paul never commands something that God's grace cannot supply. These Philippians were undergoing persecution from without and Judaistic undermining of the faith from within. So their environment was not conducive to natural happiness. But Paul is not talking about natural joy or happiness. What *is* he talking about? Well, he already has given us three hints.

### B. It is an ongoing constant imperative (v. 1a - χαίρετε)

First, Paul uses an imperative ongoing tense of the Greek verb for "rejoice" to indicate that this joy must be a constant reality in their lives no matter what circumstances they might face. That's the first hint that this is not natural joy. It is almost identical to Paul's command in 1 Thessalonians 5:16, which says, "Rejoice always." How can Paul command them to have joy when all of their circumstances militate against having joy? You might wonder the same thing about yourself. How can I have joy when my insurance company paid out far less than what it cost to replace my roof? How can I have joy when a loved one no longer wants to have anything to do with me? How can I have joy when I am perpetually in pain, or sick, or poor, or so busy that I can't get enough sleep? Those are all good questions. They

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<sup>2</sup> Though I won't comment on this in the sermon, if anyone wonders why Paul says more after this "finally" and even has another "finally" in 4:8, I will put this footnote reference that explains. Hansen says, "But this word 'finally' is not necessarily an indication that the letter writer has reached his final paragraph and is ready to say 'farewell.' The term means 'that which remains over,' that which is left. In some cases it refers to the last item in a sequence, 'finally,' but in other contexts it marks a transition to a new section and signifies an additional inference from the previous section. Since this term is used at the beginning, middle, and end of Hellenistic letters, its meaning is defined, depending on its place in the letter, as a sign of an inferential addition to previous points (see 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 3:1) or as a sign of the conclusion of the letter (2 Cor 13:11)." G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 214.

are questions that most of us have probably at least *silently* thought about when we have had down times.

### C. It is an imperative that can only be achieved “in the Lord” (v. 1b)

But it is precisely the difficulty of maintaining joy in difficult circumstances that drives us to the next point in your outline: *Paul is calling for a joy that we can't conjure up in our own strength.* This is not a natural joy or happiness that results from circumstances. Notice that Paul commands them to rejoice “*in the Lord.*” That is the next hint that this is a supernatural joy. It is only as they are brothers in the Lord (yet another textual hint) that they can have access to this supernatural joy in the Lord. The “in the Lord” shows the *source* of the joy as well as the *reason* for the joy. The reason for their joy was *not* pleasant circumstances. Paul had already shown them in chapter 2 that the Christian life that we are called to is a *supernatural* life that can't be lived out in our own strength. The Judaizers denied that. They were good at pretending to be righteous and imposing all kinds of legalistic rules on the Christians in Philippi. And by legalistic, I mean rules that aren't found in the Bible. Yet, despite these joy suckers, Paul insists that they maintain their joy in all circumstances. To the carnal mind it makes no sense. And even we Christians can sometimes find ourselves robbed of the joy that we *previously* possessed because we have allowed *circumstances* to dictate our joy or lack of joy. But this is a joy that is “in the Lord” and in Him alone.

### D. It is an imperative of which we need constant reminding (v. 1c)

And so the second sentence begins, “For me to write the same things to you is not tedious...” Paul has told them about this before, but he has to remind them again. And the word “tedious” implies that Paul has had to remind them of this truth *over and over again.* And when I am feeling down, I have to remind myself not to allow people or circumstances or poor health to rob me of my joy. There are constant joy-suckers out there, and I would encourage all of you to remind yourself of this call to supernatural joy when you begin to complain about your circumstances or you are tempted to get bitter. We need to remind ourselves that we are called to *fight* for this joy in the Lord. I often do so by thanking God *in* my circumstances and *for* my circumstances, and worshipping him, and praising Him for His kindness. As someone told me this past week, we all deserve worse, and His mercies are new every morning. Amen! When someone has sinned against me, I thank God for His forgiveness of *my* sins against *Him*. That gives perspective. I thank Him for my salvation, that I am still alive, for a wonderful family, for adequate finances, and anything else I can think of to thank Him for. I even thank Him for trusting me with the difficult circumstances themselves. And we have talked about this before - but just as Paul reminds the Philippians, I need to keep reminding you of this. We tend to forget. In any case, when I begin thanking God by faith, I find God's supernatural joy once again being poured out in my heart. We receive that joy by faith, and thanksgiving is just one manifestation of faith.

### E. It is an imperative that we need for our own safety (v. 1d)

And lest the Philippians think that this verse is just nice-sounding, theoretical, pie-in-the-sky, pious words that have no connection to real life, Paul adds, “but for you it is safe.” This

is important. This is for their safety. The whole of verse 1 again, “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.” What does he mean by that? Some think that Paul is only talking about avoiding the false doctrine of the Judaizers in the following verses. But it is the whole package, including not being robbed of joy. The Philippians will be in very dangerous waters spiritually if they allow God’s joy to be robbed from their hearts. And the Philippians were experiencing many potential joy-suckers. We will look at those joy-suckers in a bit, but I want you to take seriously the fact that *your spiritual safety is at risk* if you allow your joy to be absent for days and weeks at a time. In fact, so serious is this loss of spiritual joy, that I would advise you to fight every joy-robber as *soon* as you find this joy disappearing from your heart.

How do we get into these dangerous waters of a joyless Christianity? Paul has already dealt with two foundational issues in the previous chapter. Pride can rob us of joy the moment people don’t stroke our pride. So Paul has already admonished them to crucify their pride and to put on humility. When you are humble, those kind of joy-suckers *can’t* rob you of joy. They can’t.

Likewise, Paul talked about faith. Faith receives things from God. In contrast, complaining, feeling devastated, becoming disillusioned, disheartened, wanting to give up, feeling bitter, can all lead us to lose faith, and when we lose faith, we immediately begin to lose our joy. It is a constant danger that we need to be on guard against. So, again, if you have lost your joy, go back to the joy-Giver.

### III. Paul’s warning that joy thieves are an ever-present danger (vv. 2-8)

Well, let’s move on to Paul’s warnings about the joy-suckers (or what in the outline I have called joy thieves). Your joy-suckers may be totally different than the ones that Paul talks about here, but even *these* ones have practical applications in our lives.

#### A. Joy-thieves who add to the five *solas* (vv. 2-7)

Interestingly, all commentaries agree that the group of people Paul is going to talk about were the Talmudic Judaizers. Obviously the *written form* of the Talmud (the *books* that contain the Talmudic teachings) would not be written for a couple more decades. But - in our Revelation series we saw that Yohannan ben Zakkai compiled the Talmud in the 70’s of the first century by pulling together the already existing Traditions of the Pharisees - which Jesus condemned. So it is totally legitimate to call these people “Talmudic Judaizers” even before the Talmud was written, because it was the same demonic religion that they lived by. These Judaizers undermined the joy of the Philippians in several ways.

##### 1. “Beware” reiterates the danger of the Judaizers (v. 2a)

Most of our modern churches do not have these Judaizers in them. Some do, but most do not. So can we ignore the word “beware” at the beginning of verse 2? And the answer is, “No.” Satan is clever and he has come up with all kinds of ways of introducing the same joy-

sucking compromises into Christianity. Let me just give you three hints of similar things that we need to beware of today.

The first is racism. The Judaizer's treated Gentile Christians as second-class members of the church, and at least some of them insisted that you couldn't even be a Christian unless you became a Jew. Well, you can imagine that this racism could have been a potential joy-sucker. Is there racism today? Yes there is. And any who have experienced being a minority and being discriminated against are at an emotional disadvantage - if they do not have access to our God - the ultimate Joy-Giver.

Second, these Talmudists denied the sufficiency of Scripture. They insisted that all Christians had to keep the Pharisaic traditions of the fathers. You might not think that this is a problem today, but it *is* a current problem in two quite different ways. And both of these ways *add* to the Bible and treat the Bible as not being sufficient. Many Christians treat Greek and Roman classics as an essential component of Christian education - little realizing that they are pounding pagan presuppositions into the hearts and minds of their children every single day. You know that I don't believe in Classical Education or in public education. You need Biblically grounded education before you can even *start* discerning truth from error. It's a major problem. But there is another kind of adding to the Bible that is identical to what these Judaizers were engaged in. Some Messianic Judaism churches and many Hebrew Roots congregations study the Talmud and read the Bible through the eyes of the Talmud. This undermines confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture, which, we will see in a moment, is a major joy sucker.

Third, just as Talmudism insisted on faith plus works being needed for justification, Federal Vision (sometimes called the New Perspective on Paul) robs people of the joy of assurance of salvation by subtly redefining faith as faithfulness (or works done by faith) and by pushing justification off into the future - what they call "final justification" at the end of our lives. It's a misunderstanding of James, who is talking about the evidence of justification. In contrast, Federal Vision argues that Paul's critique of works in this book and in Galatians was *only* targeted against Jewish exclusivity, not faith + works in justification. It's a much more subtle form of a denial of Sola Fide, but it does dilute the doctrine of justification being through Christ's imputed righteousness received in a moment of time by faith alone. Well, you can understand how that can remove assurance and joy.

In fact, I would say that any watering down of the Five Solas of the Reformation will automatically suck supernatural joy out of the life of the Christian. Those five Scriptural solas form a foundation that helps us to stand in our joy. Let me go through those five solas.

Sola Scriptura means Scripture Alone. It affirms that Scripture alone can define what is a truly Christian approach to anything. Now, obviously the Judaizers denied that, but are there similar denials today? Yes. I could show you books on counseling (being used in seminaries and churches) that advocate for so-called Christian Skinnerianism (following the pagan counselor, Skinner), or Christian Rogerianism (following the pagan counselor, Rogers), or Christian Freudianism (following the pagan counselor Freud), or Christian Gestalt therapy, and on and on. It's the Bible *plus* a system developed from presuppositions outside of the Bible. Yet they insist that if you don't submit to their system of counseling,

you won't have wholeness. They are looking to a different source of joy and different methods for receiving joy. Let me give you another example. In civics you can read books that claim to be Christian Anarcho-Capitalism, Christian Libertarianism, Christian Constitutionalism, Christian Socialism, Christian Marxism, and (believe it or not) Christian Maoism. Again, it is the Bible plus an outside system that defines what it means to be Christian. And most of those systems have produced untold problems in the last two centuries. I won't get into it more, but just as Talmudism was a joy sucker because it added rules to the Bible, all modern forms of legalism are also joy suckers.

Sola fide is the second sola of the Reformation. It means that our justification is received by faith alone. The Bible *does* call us to good works, but we are saved *unto* good works. It is not the good works themselves that save us. Once we are saved, we work *out* the salvation we already have by being sanctified. This is obviously compromised by Roman Catholicism, but it is also compromised by Federal Vision which emphasizes a conditional covenant that requires the *faithfulness* (which is different than faith) and *perseverance* of the baptized person for its efficacy and for their final justification. Sola Fide is also denied by Five Point Arminians who think you lose can your salvation over and over again. All of these denials of sola fide remove assurance of salvation, which in turn robs people of joy. I won't get into it in detail, but rejection of the other three solas do so as well.

Sola Gratia, is the third sola. It means grace alone. Salvation is achieved by God's grace alone and not by our human effort. But how many people lose that assurance because they recognize that their efforts are not enough? Paul has a lot to say about that feeling in verses 5-7.

Solus Christus means Christ alone. It emphasizes that Christ is the only mediator between God and man and that salvation comes through His works alone.

Soli Deo Gloria means to the glory of God alone. Our purpose in life is to live to God's glory, and if the other solas are true, then God alone *can* receive the glory.

So even though we might not have the exact same dangerous people that Philippi had, we have other forms of the exact same problem. Watch what leaders you read or expose yourself to on the media.

## 2. Paul's derogatory description of these dangerous people in the church (vv. 2b-d)

And I want you to see that even though the Talmudic Judaizers claimed to be Christians and called themselves brothers, Paul minced no words when he describes them in verse 2. He says, "Beware of dogs (ouch!), beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!" Each of those words shows that Paul had absolutely no patience with these fake brothers who were undermining the faith.

### a) Scavenging dogs (v. 2b)

The Jews often referred to Gentiles as "dogs," but Paul turns it around and uses it of these Talmudic Judaizers. One commentary says,

he envisioned the packs of ravenous dogs which roamed the countryside eating whatever they could. They were scavengers. With this definition, Paul may have implied that they were simply following him, anxious to pick up those who were not theologically grounded after his missionary activity. Obviously Paul spoke in irony, turning the tables on these false teachers.<sup>3</sup>

*b) Evil workers (v. 2c)*

The next phrase, “evil workers” turns upside down their contention that if Christians don’t follow Jewish burdensome traditions and laws (that could not be found in the Bible), they couldn’t consider themselves to be righteous. Ironically, by contradicting the Bible, *they* were the ones who were evil workers. And any time Christians add rules to the Bible and then insist that you too must keep those rules to be a true Christian, they are ironically evil workers.

*c) Mutilators (v. 2d)*

The next description, “the mutilation,” is a reference to their insistence that every Christian must be circumcised. Now this was a requirement that they at least *thought* they could find in the Bible. But they weren’t actually reading the Old Testament very carefully since Deuteronomy has both believing Jews and believing *uncircumcised Gentiles* as entering into covenant with God. That demonstrates that circumcision was obviously *not* a means of salvation in the Old Testament. A believing Edomite, Egyptian, or other believing foreigner was called “your brother” in Deuteronomy 23:7 and those Gentiles entered into covenant with the Lord in Deuteronomy 31:12 side-by-side with the Jews. And Ezekiel 47 prophesied that in the New Covenant times Jew and Gentile believers would be treated equally. So when God made circumcision non-essential to salvation in the Old Testament, it was wrong to insist that these Philippians couldn’t be saved without getting circumcised. So rather than calling circumcision a sign of the covenant anymore, Paul calls it mutilation. It’s a mutilation because it was an *unnecessary* cutting. Why? Well, verses 3-6 explain.

But before I give a quick overview of those verses, I want to point out that not all name-calling is a bad thing. Paul called these teachers dogs, evil workers, and the mutilation. Is that hate speech? No. Such identification was essential in order to protect the Philippians from being victimized by them. Because those Judaizers denied the fundamentals of Christianity, Paul refused to call them Christian leaders, even though they no doubt called themselves Christians. And it’s OK to label Full Preterists as heretics. That is not unkind. It is protecting true Christians from thinking that denying the fundamentals of the faith is OK. It’s OK to label Roman Catholics as Papists since the pope is their ultimate authority, not the Bible. It’s OK to label abortionists as murderers, because that is exactly what they are. To soft-pedal some abortions as necessary is to undermine the fundamentals of the Bible.

So here is the point: so long as your name calling has the right motive, goal, is an accurate representation of the situation, it’s OK. People might call it hate speech, but it is the exact

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<sup>3</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 127.

*opposite* of hate. To soft-pedal grievous rebellion against Christ does not bring repentance (so that would not be loving to the Judaizers) and it does not protect the victims (so it would not have been loving to the victims either). But let's look at Paul's answer to these Talmudic Jews in verses 3-6.

### 3. Paul's answer to these Talmudic Judaizers (vv. 3-6)

#### *a) The church already possessed the true meaning of circumcision (v. 3)*

First, Paul points out that it has always been circumcision of the heart that counted for salvation, not circumcision of the flesh. Paul says, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh..." That last phrase is so important - who "have no confidence in the flesh." And the Judaizers should have known that from the Old Testament references to circumcision of the heart. Deuteronomy 10:16 treated Jews in Moses' day who weren't believers as uncircumcised in heart because they denied what their circumcision was supposed to point to. Their outward circumcision was supposed to point them to God alone who can circumcise (or regenerate) the heart. In Deuteronomy 30:6 Moses said, "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Apart from circumcision of the heart, they couldn't claim to love God. Jeremiah 4:4 and other passages indicate that it is *heart* regeneration that counts, not *outward* circumcision. So those Judaizers *weren't even following the Old Testament*. In Romans 2:29 Paul says,

he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

Now, it wasn't that outward circumcision couldn't *ever* be done. After all, Paul was circumcised and he even had Timothy circumcised so that he could more easily work among unbelieving Jews. But to insist on circumcision for *salvation* (as they tried to do with Titus) was anathema to Paul, and it was tantamount to trusting in the flesh for salvation.

In any case, the Bible indicates that in the New Covenant, circumcision was no longer a sign of the covenant and that the baptism that previously accompanied circumcision continued into the New Testament and replaced circumcision forever. Colossians (which was written three years before Philippians) had already been quite clear on that. Paul didn't have to go into detail on a lot of these topics because several New Testament books had already been written before Philippians.

#### *b) Though Paul kept the Talmudic rules better than the best Pharisees, he was still unsuccessful (vv. 4-6)*

And lest people dismiss Paul as a whining Gentile, Paul now proves that he knows exactly what he was talking about. He had previously been more Talmudic and Jewish than these Talmudic Judaizers. As a former Pharisee of the Pharisees, Paul had kept the Talmudic rules better than the best of the Pharisees, yet he knew that he was still unsuccessful in achieving salvation by his own efforts. He says in verses 4-6,

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; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

In other words, he had previously been a better Talmudist than all of them, and yet was thoroughly unsaved.

*c) He realized that he could only gain Christ by grace, through faith in the finished merits of Jesus (v. 7)*

So in verse 7 he says, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.” Paul knew that he could not gain Christ through works. He could only gain Christ by grace through faith in the finished merits of Jesus. And when you doubt your salvation, you need to keep returning to the fact that we are justified by trusting Jesus alone. Your feelings are irrelevant because demons can manipulate your feelings. Keep going back to the promises of the Bible; the promises of a God who cannot lie..

## **B. Joy thieves who add to the excellence of Christ add what amounts to rubbish (v. 8)**

But that naturally transitions into joy-thieves who add to *Christ*. Paul came to realize that anything we add to Christ is rubbish; it counts for nothing. Verse 8 says, “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.” You can’t get to heaven by even doing good things like having devotions, memorizing Scripture, praying, faithfully going to church, etc., if those things are a *substitute* for trusting Jesus completely and 100% for salvation. What are some modern examples of things that have substituted for Christ (sometimes without even realizing it).

### **1. Roman Catholicism**

Well, Roman Catholicism insists that their sacraments of baptism, confession, and Eucharist are salvific - in other words, they are necessary for salvation. They also insist that you have to pray to saints, and to Mary, and to other mediators. They also insist that good works are needed alongside of faith for a person to be justified, implying that Christ’s blood-sacrifice was *not* sufficient. Their sacramentalism makes salvation to be mediated through *rituals* rather than through *Jesus*. There are a lot of ways in which they have added to Jesus.

### **2. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD)**

Here’s another one. It’s a counseling technique. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism reduces Christianity to self-improvement, moral behavior, emotional well-being, and life-coaching as being what is needed. It actually sidelines repentance, sin, and Christ’s atonement and replaces the Gospel with with a life-coaching mentality, where God exists primarily to bless our personal goals rather than to transform our lives.

### 3. Prosperity Gospel

Here's another one: the Prosperity Gospel insists that if you have faith, faith will lead to financial gain, health, and success in life. Where's the focus? It's not on Christ; it's on faith. It's having faith in your faith. So faith becomes a transactional means to earn divine favor, and shifts the focus from Christ to what *faith* can gain. It's very subtle.

### 4. New Perspective on Paul

I have already mentioned the New Perspective on Paul (sometimes called Federal Vision), so I won't say more here.

### 5. Fundamentalist legalism

Fundamentalist legalism doesn't deny *Sola Fide*, but it does add all kinds of rules that cannot be found in the Bible. These rules relate to dress codes, abstaining from makeup, abstaining from wine (which God blessed), and other markers of their so-called righteousness. Though most of these people may be genuine believers, they have subtly robbed believers of joy and freedom by adding all kinds of man-made rules.

## IV. The true basis for joy in Christ (vv. 9-11)

So Paul concludes in verses 9-11 that *anything* that takes the focus off of Christ can rob us of joy, and that the true basis of joy is found in Christ alone.

### A. Knowing Jesus in justification (v. 9)

In verse 9 he focuses on knowing Jesus in justification - "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." *Justification* is what frees us from God's condemnation. We will no longer face the penalty of hell. We are forever freed from condemnation, hallelujah! If we are found united to Jesus, then nothing can condemn us because Jesus was perfect and His perfect righteousness is credited to your account by God. There is nothing you can add to Christ's merits in order to be justified in court. You will never have to face the Judge of the universe in His courtroom. Being declared "Not guilty" is the greatest joy a person can have. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." When you realize that truth, you have every reason for joy. Richard Melick explains this rather well. He says,

Significantly, Paul defined being in Christ in terms of righteousness. Being found in Christ means being clothed with God's righteousness rather than one's own. This is the heart of the matter. Fellowship with God is always based on righteousness. The Old Testament makes that clear...

In Scripture, righteousness is often a legal term, not a moral one. It means that a judge would pronounce someone righteous. Naturally, the ideal was that the person would actually be righteous, but the focus is on what the *judge* said. The verdict did not necessarily depend on the moral realities. In accord with that, the

primary question of both Judaism and Christianity was “what must a man do if God is to declare that he is in the right and so give judgment in his favour? The Jewish answer was that he must obey the Law of Moses.” For Paul, a righteousness attained by the law was only a relative self-righteousness. The best that could be hoped for was the blamelessness of which he spoke in 3:6b, but which he nonetheless had found inadequate for gaining salvation...

The alternative was *God’s* righteousness. Twice in the context of God’s righteousness “righteousness” and “faith” occur [together] ...First, Paul simply stated that righteousness is through ...“faith in Christ,” NIV). Further, he clarified that it is a righteousness from God and based upon faith.<sup>4</sup>

This is so foundational to maintaining joy in the Lord. It is critical that our children understand justification. It is our sins being legally given to Jesus (once and forever) and His righteousness being legally given to us (once and forever). And this is what we have recently been going through in our catechism. That is a solid basis on which we can always rejoice.

### B. Knowing Jesus in sanctification (v. 10)

In verse 10 Paul moves on to *sanctification*, which refers to the progressive growth we have in holiness. That is quite different from justification *but* it follows immediately *after* justification and gives *evidence* that we are new creatures. But here is the point of the logic of this paragraph: if you are secure in justification, you will have the joyful basis for growing in holiness *even when your sanctification is imperfect*. Our legal righteousness is the joyful *foundation* for joyfully pursuing holiness.

And there *is* joy in progressively becoming more and more like Jesus. The moment we are justified, God begins to change us by His grace and to produce within us a yearning to know Him more and more. We call this change where we become progressively more holy, “sanctification.” And Paul emphasizes that even our sanctification is only possible because of *God’s* power working in us by means of Jesus. It’s not self-improvement. It is supernatural. Even though our effort is involved in sanctification, *it is an effort that is enabled by grace*. Verse 10 says, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death...” Whether we suffer or not (and we have looked at that before), we need His resurrection power to work in us day by day. Kent Homer explains this rather well. He says,

Paul wants to know experientially the power of Christ’s resurrection. He is not thinking only of the divine power that raised Christ from the dead, but of the power of the resurrected Christ now operating in the believer’s life. This power

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<sup>4</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 133.

enables believers to “live a new life” (Rom 6:4) because they have been “raised with Christ” (Col 3:1; Eph 2:5, 6).<sup>5</sup>

I love the way James Montgomery Boice connects joyful sanctification with the earlier joyful justification. He says,

The power of Jesus Christ is a great reality. Many have come to know it. That is why Christians sing:

He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free; His blood can make the foulest clean— His blood availed for me.

Above all, Paul wanted to experience the resurrection power of Jesus Christ over sin daily as he strived to live a holy life before God.<sup>6</sup>

### C. Knowing Jesus in glorification (v. 11)

But then Paul moves on to show that even our final glorification in heaven is by grace. Theologians speak of that as happening at our resurrection, when even our bodies will be resurrected and glorified. Now, that obviously is not from our own human effort. You can't resurrect your body, right? But the same logical progression can be seen in glorification. You can't separate glorification from the earlier sanctification and from the earlier justification. They are a golden chain that all hangs together. Verse 11 says, “if, by any means, [or as the NASB more clearly renders it, “in order that] I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” The “in order that” refers back to justification and sanctification. He is making sure we understand those two doctrines so that we can be assured of the third doctrine of glorification.

So there are three stages to Christ's resurrection power working in us. At conversion there is a spiritual resurrection to life of our souls which brings unbelievable peace and joy and we are united to Jesus by faith and we are justified. In sanctification Christ's resurrection power is working in us to make us more and more holy, which makes us grow more and more in the joy of the Lord. And the final stage is that Christ's resurrection power will raise our bodies from the dead and glorify us so that we no longer sin and are most perfectly conformed to God's plan for us. And that will be what Scripture declares to be an indescribable joy that is full of glory. As Psalm 16:11 words it, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Hallelujah! The golden chain of salvation has joy at every point - initial joy, growing joy, and indescribable joy and full of glory. So this whole section shows us how to avoid the joy thieves that are all around us.

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<sup>5</sup> Homer A. Kent Jr., “Philippians,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 141.

<sup>6</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 186–187.

Paul wants your joy. He wants your peace. He wants your victory. This can only come through Jesus. Stick close to Him. Amen.