

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Chapter 3

In 1605 Miguel de Cervantes published *Don Quixote* who dared “*To dream the impossible dream ... willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause!*” The apostle Paul marched into 1st century idolatry and religious legalism to fight for a heavenly cause, i.e., the *good news* that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, took our place on the cross.

Under arrest in Rome, Paul awaits trial before Nero on bogus charges of demeaning the Jews’ religion. Circa 60 A.D. Paul writes to Christ’s followers in northern Greece at Philippi, the first church he planted in Europe. False teachers have slipped in, twisting Paul’s message. Now he unloads a stern warning in defense of the Gospel of the Grace of God. Let’s read Philippians 3:1-21 (p. 1068, GNB).

Dog Pounding

Philippians 3:1-3

Some Jewish followers of Christ were misleading the new believers in Philippi (Acts 15:1; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Paul called them dogs for compromising his new “faith plus nothing” Gospel with their mixed-breed belief of earn-it-yourself salvation. These misguided Christ-followers insisted you must also obey religious laws, be circumcised, offer animal sacrifices, etc. God had required that *before* Christ died in our place. But *after* the cross God sets us right with Himself as a gift to be received, not earned. Let’s read Galatians 1:6-12, 2:16, 6:12-15 (p. 1055).

DISCUSS: Why is Paul so worked up about circumcision?

Street Creds

Philippians 3:4-11

Paul’s bio was golden: a circumcised Jew; descendant of Benjamin and Israel’s King Saul; best education; a prominent Pharisee; expert in the Torah; meticulous in keeping its demands; terrorized Jesus’ people in what he wrongly deemed a holy cause (Acts 22:20).

As God’s hand-picked voice to the Gentiles, he wrote much of the New Testament! Impressive, but when he met Christ, Paul called his previous credits “dung” (Romans 4:2; 2 Corinthians 11:30).

Suffering for Christ can move you into God’s “No Worries” neighborhood where nothing intimidates you. Paul forfeited everything to know Jesus rather than return to religious bondage. Let’s read Colossians 2:11-17 (p. 1072); Galatians 5:1-6 (p. 1059); John 8:31-32 (p. 962).

In life we pay the natural consequences of our sin. But God no longer sees sin when He looks at a believer. His focus is now on making us into a reflection of His Son (Romans 4:7-8, 5:20, 8:1,29).

DISCUSS: What impact should this truth have in your life?

God raised Christ to life and transforms you from being spiritually dead to being “alive in Christ!” He put **all** your sins on Jesus, then gave you **all** of Jesus’ righteousness. Let’s read 2 Corinthians 5:21 (p. 1049); Ephesians 2:1-9 (p. 1062); Titus 3:5-7 (p. 1088).

DISCUSS: What religious expectations/pressures haunt us?

Fool’s Gold Philippians 3:12-21

Paul knew pride would sidetrack his sprint for “the prize” of being in Jesus’ presence. With the penalty for his sins paid for once for all, he flushed his past to risk it all to spread the Gospel. Hardships can prompt you to trust Him more and yourself less (2 Timothy 3:12). You’re a living billboard, declaring that Jesus is your only treasure.

Your earthly “assets” may vanish. But if you’ve already counted them as loss compared to the surpassing value of gaining Christ, you’ll have the comforting presence of His Spirit living in you!

As the chorus says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."

Will Call

Some people mix make-yourself-worthy religion with God’s just-ask-for-it grace. Do-it-yourself salvation seems logical, even admirable, but it’s suicidal if that’s what you’re staking your eternal destiny on. God took it on Himself to make you qualified to be “saved” from sin’s penalty. Your standing with God depends not on your performance but on God’s promise. His forgiveness is yours to claim by faith at Will Call.

“Whoever Will Call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Have you placed that call yet?

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"NO WORRIES" VERSES FROM PHILIPPIANS

"God, who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus." 1:6

"Your lives will be filled with the truly good qualities which only Jesus Christ can produce, for the glory and praise of God." 1:11

"I want you to know that the things that have happened to me have really helped the progress of the gospel." 1:12

"My deep desire is that I shall never fail in my duty, but that at all times, especially now, I shall be full of courage so that with my whole being I bring honor to Christ whether I live or die. **For what is life? To me, it is Christ.**" 1:20-21

"Don't be afraid of your enemies; always be courageous, and this will prove to them that they will lose and that you will win because it is God who gives you the victory. For you have been given the privilege of serving Christ, not only by believing in Him but also by suffering for Him." 1:28,29

"Your life in Christ makes you strong, and His love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit and kindness and compassion for one another." 2:1

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than you. Look out for one another's interests, not just your own. Have the attitude Christ Jesus had: He always had the nature of God but did not think that by force He should try to remain equal with God. Instead, of His own free will He gave up all He had and took the nature of a servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to His death on the cross." 2:3-8

"God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey Him." 2:13

"I reckon everything as loss for what is much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have thrown everything away; I consider it as mere refuse so that I may gain Christ and be completely united with Him. I no longer have a righteousness of my own that is gained by obeying the Law. I now have the righteousness that is given through faith in Christ that comes from God, based on faith. All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of His resurrection, to share in His sufferings and become like Him in His death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life." 3:8-11

"I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to Himself. Of

course, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. So I run straight towards the goal in order to win the prize which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above." 3:12-14

"We are citizens of heaven and eagerly wait for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like His own glorious body, using that power by which He is able to bring all things under His rule." 3:20-21

"Always be joyful in your union with the Lord. Rejoice! Show a gentle attitude toward everyone. The Lord is coming soon." 4:4-5

"Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking Him with a thankful heart. And God's peace which is far beyond human understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus." 4:6-7

"Fill your minds with things that are good, that deserve praise, that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honorable. Practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you." 4:8-9

"I've learned to be satisfied with what I have. I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have more than enough. I've learned this secret so that anywhere, at any time, I'm content, whether I'm full or hungry, have too much or too little. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power Christ gives me." 4:11-13

"With all His abundant wealth through Christ Jesus, my God will supply all your needs. To our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever! Amen." 4:19-20

PAUL'S PARADOXES in PHILIPPIANS ch. 1

1:3-4 "I thank my God for all the memories I have of you. Every time I pray for all of you, I do it with joy." **PARADOX:** *Despite being under house arrest, Paul abounds in gratitude and exhilaration.*

1:7 "Together we share God's favor whether I'm in prison or defending and confirming the truth of the Good News." **PARADOX:** *Paul guarded and established the Gospel even while jailed.*

1:12 "I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what happened to me has helped to spread the Good News." **PARADOX:** *His woes have been assets in advancing Christ's message.*

1:14 "Through my being in prison, the Lord has given most of our brothers and sisters confidence to speak God's word more boldly and unafraid." **PARADOX:** *Paul inspired others to preach fearlessly.*

1:18 "Nothing matters except that, in one way or another, people are told the message about Christ, whether with honest or dishonest motives, and I'm happy about that." **PARADOX:** *Paul is joyful to have even his detractors preach the good news about Jesus.*

1:21-24 "For what is life? To me, it is Christ. Death, then, will bring more. ... I am pulled in two directions. I want very much to leave this life and be with Christ, which is a far better thing; but for your sake it is much more important that I remain alive." **PARADOX:** *Paul is equally content to do his worthwhile work on earth, or to die and be forever with God who had dramatically salvaged his life.*

1:28 "Don't be afraid of your enemies; always be courageous, and this will prove to them that they will lose and that you will win, because it is God who gives you the victory." **PARADOX:** *Persevering gallantly while being persecuted will conquer your enemies.*

1:29 "For you have been given the privilege of serving Christ, not only by believing in him but also by suffering for him." **PARADOX:** *Trusting in Christ and suffering for Him are equal blessings.*

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