



# Changing Values & Pursuits

Philippians 3:1-11

As Paul continues his letter to the Christians in Philippi, he continues to mention joy and rejoicing. Read Philippians 3:1.<sup>1</sup> After telling them to rejoice in the Lord, Paul warns them of false teaching (3:2-3), and he shares his own change of values and pursuits (3:4-11). True joy is possible because of these changes.

## Watch Out

Read Philippians 3:2-3. Paul says to watch out for “dogs,” “evil doers,” and “mutilators of the flesh” (3:2). This likely refers to “Judaizers” – Jewish “Christians” who insist that Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians submit to Jewish religious customs, including circumcision.<sup>2</sup> But Paul says *we* (including Gentile Christians) are *the circumcision* – that is, the people truly belonging to God.<sup>3</sup>

1. What three things does Paul mention that show that someone truly belongs to God? (3:3)<sup>4</sup>

## Change in Values

Paul knows something about “putting confidence in the flesh” (3:3). Read Philippians 3:4-9. Paul’s evaluation of things obviously changed!

### Past Evaluation

2. What things did Paul previously value? How do you think Paul previously felt about himself? (3:5-6)<sup>5</sup>



<sup>1</sup> ‘the same things’ - Paul repeated his teachings but repetition was useful as a ‘safeguard’ to their faith. Likewise, we need to hear the truths of the Bible again and again to strengthen and encourage us in the faith.

<sup>2</sup> ‘dogs’ – the Jews used this term for the ‘unclean’ Gentiles, but Paul turns it around and applies it to the Judaizers. ‘evil doers’ – the Judaizers thought they were doing the works of the Law but, by opposing the gospel of grace, they were doing works of evil. ‘mutilators of the flesh’ – by distorting the purpose and significance of circumcision in God’s plan, the Judaizers had made it nothing more than a useless cutting of the body.

<sup>3</sup> Jews called themselves ‘the circumcision.’ The Jews were distinct in their value of circumcision, which was a sign of God’s covenant with his people in the Old Testament (*Genesis 17:9-14*). While physical circumcision marked the Jewish people, ‘spiritual circumcision’ is what really mattered, even for Jews (*Romans 2:28-29*). The people who truly belong to God (whether Jews or Gentiles) are those who have been ‘circumcised by Christ’ (*Colossians 2:11*).

<sup>4</sup> ‘serve God by his Spirit’ – we cannot truly serve God unless we belong to Christ. If we truly belong to Christ, the Spirit indwells and leads us (*Romans 8:5-9; John 4:24*). ‘boast in Christ Jesus, and...put no confidence in the flesh’ – rather than putting our confidence in human effort, we should put our confidence in what Christ has done for us. ‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast [in themselves]’ (*Ephesians 2:8-9, NIV*). However, we *can* ‘boast in Christ.’

<sup>5</sup> ‘circumcised on the eighth day’ – according to Jewish law; ‘people of Israel’ – God’s people; ‘tribe of Benjamin’ – respected tribe; ‘Hebrew of Hebrews’ – pure blooded Hebrew-speaking Jew. (= inherited status) ‘Pharisee’ – religious party, known for knowledge of Jewish law and strict observance; ‘zeal’ – heart-felt commitment; obedience to Jewish law – ‘faultless’ in the eyes of people (= personal achievements).

Many people with Paul's status and religious achievements would consider themselves "good enough" for God's approval.

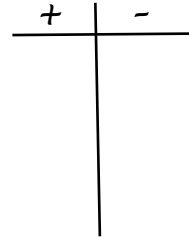
3. What do people today think will make them "good enough" for God?

### *Present Evaluation*

When Paul met Jesus (*Acts 9:1-19*), his evaluation of things changed!

4. What does Paul *now* think about the things he previously valued? (*3:7-8*)<sup>6</sup>

5. Why has his evaluation changed? What does he now understand about being "right with God"? (*3:8-9*)<sup>7</sup>



### **Change in Pursuits**

A change in values results in a change of pursuits. Read Philippians 3:10-11.

6. What does Paul want? What does this involve?



7. Do you think all Christians should want what Paul wants? As Christians, what should *we* be doing to know Christ more?

### *Reflection & Application*

- What are the things you consider valuable in *your* life? Is knowing Christ on the list? Do you value true happiness, peace, joy, and purpose? The Bible says true righteousness (which is necessary for these things) comes only through faith in Christ. Do you need to trust in him?
- Brothers and sisters, what are *you* pursuing? If knowing Christ is truly valuable to us, it will be shown by our pursuit of knowing Christ more and more in our daily lives. What do you need to do in your daily life to know Christ more?

<sup>6</sup> What he previously considered 'gains' he now considers 'loss' and 'garbage' (*3:7-8*). The Greek word *skybala*, translated 'garbage, rubbish, filth, dung,' is a strong word. The previous 'gains' aren't just useless, they are harmful! They aren't necessarily bad in themselves, but relying on them for God's acceptance is deadly in a spiritual sense.

<sup>7</sup> Paul contrasts 'a righteousness of my own that comes from the law' with 'the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith' (*3:9*). In this context, 'righteousness' means 'right standing before God.' Paul says elsewhere, 'Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe' (*Romans 3:20-22a, NIV*).