

Topics of the Bible ~ A Christian's Goal ~ Leader's Guide

[All scripture verses are from Philippians Chapter 3]

1. In Verse 3:1, what is Paul writing again? Why is he repeating these things?

He is reviewing the basics with these believers. The Bible is our safeguard both morally and theologically. When we read it, it alerts us to corrections we need to make in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

2. Who were the “dogs” that Paul spoke of? Why was he criticizing them? (3:2-3)

The “dogs” were the Judaizers, Jewish Christians who wrongly believed that it was essential for Gentiles to follow all of the old testament Jewish laws, especially submission to the rite of circumcision, in order to receive salvation. Many Judaizers were motivated by spiritual pride. Because they had invested so much time and effort in keeping the laws, they couldn't accept the fact that all their efforts didn't bring them a step closer to salvation. It is easy to more emphasis on religious effort (“confidence in the flesh”) than on internal faith but God values the attitudes of our hearts above all else.

Don't judge people's spirituality by their fulfillment of duties or their level of human activity. And don't think you will satisfy God by feverishly doing his work. God notices all you do and will reward you for it, but only if it comes as a loving response to his free gift of salvation.

Who are the Judaizers of today? They are the ones who say that people must add something to simple faith; must do something to be saved. No person need add anything to Christ's offer of salvation by grace through faith.

3. Paul had many advantages (upbringing, achievement, education, birth) that he could have trusted in. How does it help you to know that? (3:4-6)

At first glance, it looks like Paul is boasting about his achievements. But he is actually doing the opposite, showing that human achievements, no matter how impressive, cannot earn a person salvation and eternal life with God. Paul had impressive credentials: upbringing, nationality, family background, inheritance, orthodoxy, activity, and morality. Paul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, a heritage greatly esteemed among the Jews. Paul was also a Pharisee, a member of a very devout Jewish sect that scrupulously kept its own numerous rules in addition to the laws of Moses. However, his conversion to faith in Christ (Acts 9) wasn't based on what he had done, but on God's grace. Paul did not depend on his deeds to please God because even the most impressive credentials fall short of God's holy standards. Are you depending on Christian parents, church affiliation,

or even “being good” to make you right with God? Credentials, accomplishments, or reputation cannot earn salvation. Salvation comes only through faith in Christ.

4. Paul says that all his advantages are worthless compared with what? How do you compare your knowledge of Christ with the other things in your life? (3:7-8)

When Paul spoke of his “profit” in Verse 3:7, he was referring to his credentials, credits, and successes. After showing that he could beat the Judaizers at their own game (being proud of who they were and what they had done), Paul showed that it was the wrong game. Be careful of considering past achievements so important that they get in the way of your relationship with Christ.

After Paul considered everything he had accomplished in his life, he said that it was all “a loss” when compared with the greatness of knowing Christ. This is a profound statement about values: a person’s relationship with Christ is more important than anything else. To know Christ should be our ultimate goal. Consider your values. Do you place anything above your relationship with Christ? If your priorities are wrong, how will you reorder them?

5. The law of Moses, discipline, going to church, or “being good” cannot make us right with God. What is the only way to get a right relationship with Christ? (3:9) What changes must you make or what must you give up in order to know Christ?

No amount of lawkeeping, self-improvement, discipline, or religious effort can make us right with God. Righteousness comes only as a gift from God. We are made righteous (receive right standing with him) by trusting in Christ who exchanges our sin and shortcomings for his complete righteousness.

Paul gave up everything—family, friendship, and freedom—in order to know Christ and his resurrection power. We too have access to this knowledge and this power, but we may have to make sacrifices to enjoy it fully. What do you have to give up in order to know Christ? A crowded schedule in order to set aside a few minutes each day for prayer and Bible study? Your friend’s approval? Some of your plans or pleasures? Whatever it is, knowing Christ is more than worth the sacrifice.

6. When Paul wrote, “somehow, to attain to the resurrection” was he expressing uncertainty or doubt? (3:11) Do you have any doubt that you will be resurrected?

When Paul wrote, “somehow, to attain to the resurrection” he was not implying uncertainty or doubt. He was unsure of the way that he would meet God, whether by execution or by natural death. He did not doubt that he would be raised, but attainment of it was within God’s power and not his own,

Just as Christ was exalted after his resurrection, so we will one day share

Christ's glory (Revelation 22:1-7). Paul knew that he might die soon, but he had faith that he would be raised to life again,

7. What ideas does Paul's attitude give you that you might copy? (3:12)

Paul says that his goal is to know Christ, to be like Christ, and to be all Christ has in mind for him. This goal absorbs all Paul's energy. This is a helpful example for us. We should not let anything take our eyes off our goal—knowing Christ. With the single-mindedness of an athlete in training, we must lay aside everything harmful and forsake anything that may distract us from being effective Christians. What is holding you back?

8. Specifically, what should you do that Paul was doing? He says that the Christian life is like a race. What must you do to win your 'race'? (3:13-14)

Paul had reason to forget what was behind—he had held the coats of those who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:57-58, Paul is called Saul here). We have all done things of which we are ashamed, and we live in the tension of what we have been and what we want to be. Because our hope is in Christ, however, we can let go of past guilt and look forward to what God will help us become. Don't dwell on your past. Instead, grow in the knowledge of God by concentrating on your relationship with him now. Realize that you are forgiven, and then move on to a life of faith and obedience. Look forward to a fuller and more meaningful life because of your hope in Christ.

9. Explain verses 3:15-16 in your own words.

Sometimes trying to live a perfect Christian life can be so difficult that it leaves us drained and discouraged. We may feel so far from perfect that we can never please God with our lives. Paul used "perfect" (KJV, 3:12) to mean mature or complete, not flawless in every detail. Those who are mature should press on in the Holy Spirit's power, knowing that Christ will reveal and fill in any discrepancy between what we are and what we should be. Christ's provision is no excuse for lagging devotion, but it provides relief and assurance for those who feel driven.

Christian maturity involves acting on the guidance that you have already received. We can always make excuses that we still have so much to learn. The instruction for us is to live up to what we already know and live out what we have already learned. We do not have to be sidetracked by an unending search for truth.

10. Where should you look for an example of how to live? (3:17)

Paul challenged the Philippians to pursue Christlikeness by following Paul's

own pattern or example, This did not mean, of course, that they should copy everything he did; he had just stated that he was not perfect (3:12). But as he focused his life on being like Christ, so should they. The Gospels may not yet have been in circulation, so Paul could not tell them to read the Bible to see what Christ was like. Therefore he urged them to imitate him. That Paul could tell people to follow his example is a testimony to his character, Can you do the same? What kind of follower would a new Christian become if he or she imitated you?

11. How does Paul describe people who live like enemies of the cross of Christ? (3:18-19)

Paul criticized not only the Judaizers (see Q. 2), but also the self-indulgent Christians, people who claim to be Christians but don't live up to Christ's model of servanthood and self sacrifice. These people satisfy their own desires before even thinking about the needs of others. Freedom in Christ does not mean freedom to be selfish. It means taking every opportunity to serve and to become the best person you can be.

12. As citizens of heaven, how do you need to be? (3:20)

Paul contrasts Christians with people who think only about this world. Christians belong to heaven. The Christians at Philippi lived in a Roman city. Its citizens obeyed the laws and customs of Rome. Christians are citizens of heaven. Therefore our behavior must match the standard of their home in heaven.