

"All of Christ, None of Me"

Philippians 3:1-11

March 8, 2026

Let's review some of the highpoints that we have seen in Philippians so far:

- "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (1:6).
- And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (1:9-11).
- "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (1:21).
- "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27).
- "stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (1:27c).
- 1:29
- "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests but also for the interest of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:3-5).
- Finally, last week we saw the examples of Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus who poured out their lives selflessly and sacrificially in service to others as an act of worship to God.

This is a great sampling of the Christian life! But we need to be very careful that a subtle shift in our thinking doesn't get us severely off track as we consider these exhortations. I'm talking about a dangerous 'occupational hazard,' not only as a Christian but as a human being. *We have a human instinct to want to earn God's love.*

We know from our human relationships that seeking to earn acceptance changes the relationship and makes it performance-based rather than grace-based and love-motivated. Performance-based relationships are motivated by fear, not love.

Some of you have been caught in the trap of trying to earn someone's friendship. Some of you have experienced the painful disappointment of seeking to earn a parent's approval or love. And most of us at some point have believed that God loves us on the basis of something we do or don't do. For example, certainly God delights in our pursuit of Him through worship, prayer, and meditation on His word. But do our spiritual disciplines actually *earn* God's favor? [illus: I delight in every moment I get to spend with my granddaughter, Judah. She doesn't have to earn my delight. It is simply the overflow of love.]

This can get a little confusing because the Christian life is far from effortless. The NT is full of commands and exhortations. So clearly, God is not opposed to *effort*—that's how we grow. But He is opposed to *earning* because in our sinfulness it's not only unachievable, it's prideful (justification vs. sanctification).

Where does this instinct come from to want to earn God's acceptance? At the very core of our being, we were created to please God and to find our pleasure in Him. But sin severed our love-relationship with God. So, we resort to fear-based performance.

What does this have to do with our study of Philippians or our theme of invincible joy? Fear-based performance that seeks to earn acceptance does not produce joy. Joy is the overflow of grace-based love. As we come to the halfway point in the book of Philippians, Paul, having given us so many exhortations for the Christian life, now pauses to make sure that the Philippians (and ourselves) don't return to performance-based religion which leads to spiritual bankruptcy rather than true righteousness.

Here's the heart of today's passage: **Any human effort that seeks to *earn* right standing with God is a deficit which results in spiritual bankruptcy, but knowing Christ and possessing the surpassing value of His perfect righteousness results in resurrection life.**

Let me highlight four truths that guard us against spiritual bankruptcy and point us to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus.

1. **Rejoicing in the Lord keeps us centered on the grace of God**
(Phil 3:1).

[3:1] This exhortation to “rejoice in the Lord” seems to float out there by itself. Let me encourage you to think of it as a hinge that adjoins the two halves of Philippians. Paul had just encouraged them to rejoice in their reunion with Epaphroditus and to receive such honorable men with joy. Yet the joy of their fellowship is not an end in itself but a means of rejoicing in Jesus who is the heart and soul of their fellowship. So, we could read it this way: “rejoice in seeing Epaphroditus again and receive him in the Lord with all joy, for he nearly died, risking his life in this ministry. Beyond that, rejoice in the Lord!”

More importantly, Paul is introducing a new section in which he will emphasize the Philippian’s need to stay focused on the Lord Himself, and not revert to mere human effort and law-keeping to please God. So, when Paul says, “rejoice in the Lord,” this is more than a generic exhortation, it’s an acute reminder of the gospel of grace by which they have been saved through the sacrificial death of Jesus on their behalf. Rejoicing in the Lord Jesus as our perfect righteousness before God, unearned and freely granted by faith, keeps us grounded in the grace of God so that we don’t revert to the spiritual bankruptcy of human striving.

2. **True worship in the Spirit exalts Jesus and repudiates confidence in our sinful flesh** (Phil 3:2-3).

This comes in the form of a warning. **[vs. 2-3]** This is not complementary language to say the least. Today, dogs are regarded as pets—man’s best friend. But in the ancient world, dogs were typically wild, unclean, and dangerous. They scavenged through garbage, ate dead carcasses, and were a menace in the city streets.

More significant, is the fact that Jews would sometimes refer to immoral, pagan, Gentiles as dogs. Paul is putting the false teachers he’s warning about in this category. But ironically these “dogs,” these evildoers, are Jews who insist that circumcision is a requirement that must be added to faith in Christ—that’s why Paul says they mutilate the flesh. These false teachers are also known as *Judaizers*—the whole book of Galatians addresses this issue—Jews who acknowledged Jesus as Messiah but believed that faith in Jesus

was insufficient apart from also keeping the law of Moses, especially circumcision.

But Paul says in vs. 3 that the true circumcision, meaning the true people of God, are those who “worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” These 3 aspects of genuine worship communicate an essential message. First, the true people of God have the Holy Spirit. So they worship by the Spirit and not just by the flesh. They don’t just go through the motions. The Spirit of God is working within them. If you don’t have the Spirit of God, you are not a child of God.

So, how do you get the Spirit? You put your hope and trust in Jesus. Not just mental ascent to the idea of Christianity. You *glory* in Christ Jesus which means that He is not peripheral in your life—He *is* your life. He is the most important thing about your life. Consider this: If Jesus truly is the Son of God, if He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, if He is the Redeemer and the only one who can reconcile you to God, then His only rightful place in your life is to be supreme and central. If Jesus is peripheral in your life, you don’t have Jesus.

But notice Paul doesn’t stop here. He now makes it clear that to have Jesus means putting no confidence in your flesh. In other words, you are not justified by having Jesus plus your own effort. To have Jesus, means that you trust fully and completely in Him alone as your source of salvation—that nothing you could possibly do, could add to or improve the sinless sacrifice of His life for you. So true worship is not about what we do but rather a response to what Christ has done for us.

Most of us today probably don’t feel like we are being pressured to add the law of Moses to our faith in Jesus, however the spirit of legalism is alive and well in the church today. Legalism is the belief that to be acceptable to God (justified/saved), one must add a certain code of conduct to their faith in Jesus. But essentially, this reliance on human effort is a denial of the sufficiency of Jesus’ perfect, righteous, sinless sacrifice for us. It’s saying, “What Jesus did is not enough, I need to add something to it!” But *you can’t add to perfect* without subtracting from it, because anything you add is tainted by sin. Imagine I got an original painting by Michelangelo that was still in perfect condition, but I decided I should add some red to it. It would not add to its value; it would destroy it.

Legalism (leaning on your own effort) is the gospel of self-achievement. It's an attempt at self-atonement, usurping the work of Christ with our own effort. But true worship is glories in who Christ is and what He has done, not who I am or what I have done.

3. **Human striving to earn God's favor results in spiritual bankruptcy** (3:4-7).

Paul now turns to his own life experience to show us that all the religious status and works he prided himself in before He met Jesus, was not only worthless but spiritually detrimental. **[vs. 4-7]**

Paul points to 7 aspects of Jewish life that would have been impressive to any Jew:

- *Circumcised on the 8th day* - Paul was a Jew by birth and had been subjected to Jewish rituals from the beginning with strict adherence to the law.¹
- *Of the people of Israel* - Paul was not a proselyte who converted to Judaism. He was born into the chosen people of God.
- *Of the tribe of Benjamin* - this was a distinguished tribe for several reasons. King Saul had been from the tribe of Benjamin and Jerusalem, the holy city, was in its territory. When the kingdom divided, Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the Davidic Dynasty.²
- *A Hebrew of Hebrews* - his family had a pure Jewish heritage.
- *As to the law a Pharisee* - Paul was committed to the strict adherence to the law. This was the highest level in devout, legalistic Judaism.
- *As to zeal, a persecutor of the church* - Paul as so zealous in his Jewish beliefs that he sought to destroy whatever he believed God hated, even if it included persecuting and killing Christians.
- *As to righteousness under the law, blameless* - Paul's not saying that he was sinless, but that his life was exemplary when it came to

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Philippians*, pg. 228.

² Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-centered Exposition), pg. 138.

obeying the 613 laws of the OT. Paul was a self-righteous person and proud of it.³

And yet Paul goes on to say that all of these things he once put his confidence in were regarded as loss when he met Christ. Don't miss Paul's message. Don't put your confidence in religious rituals, family heritage, rank, religious traditions, knowledge, rule-keeping, personal zeal, or obedience to certain laws or some other rules or code of conduct. Confidence in any of these things keeps you from trusting solely in Christ who perfectly fulfilled God's law and offered Himself in your place. *Human striving to earn God's approval results in spiritual bankruptcy.*

4. **Knowing Christ and receiving His righteousness by faith is the only means of perfect standing with God** (3:8-11).

[8-11] Let me get right to the point. The only way for you to be accepted by God is not on the basis of your own self-made righteousness, but on the basis of Jesus' righteousness. How do you become a child of God? You need a perfect righteousness to be acceptable to a perfect, holy God. And the only person who has that kind of perfect, righteous standing before God is Jesus. When you stop trusting in yourself to trust fully in Jesus, He clothes you with His own robe of righteousness.

When Paul met Jesus and discovered His perfect righteousness, Paul said he counted everything else as worthless, rubbish (literally, dung/excrement) in light of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus. There was nothing that Paul was not willing to give up to have Jesus. Even Paul's attempt to impress God with his obedience to God's law—his attempt to be self-righteous became repulsive to Paul. Paul traded gladly traded everything to have a righteousness that God grants to those who put their faith in Jesus.

What might this look like in your life? Faith in Jesus means that you put no confidence in your good works, your attempts at moral living, your attempts at being good or religious person, your association with a

³ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-centered Exposition), pg. 139.

particular denomination or family heritage.⁴ All of that means nothing because the only thing of value that you can present to God to cover your sin is Jesus Himself.

Those who truly know Christ and have been born again and adopted into God's family have just one testimony—"It's all of Christ and none of me." In other words, I did nothing to accomplish my salvation. Its all and only by Jesus; *His death* which was acceptable because of his perfect, sinless life. *His resurrection*, signifying the sufficiency of His sacrifice. *His righteousness*. *His perfect standing* with the Father. *His love*. *His grace*. *His pursuit of me* when I was lost and blind in self-righteousness.

The incomparable value of Jesus and the gift of His righteousness was so precious to Paul that it left him with just *one passion* in vs. 10: "*that I may know Him* and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming like him in His death."

Paul longs to grow deeper in His relationship with Jesus because to know Him is to know God. Paul had already come discover that there was no power for change in the law. And there was certainly no power for change in his own sinful flesh and human effort. But there is power in the resurrection of Christ, the One who overcame sin and death. And when Paul put His faith in Jesus, He became one with Jesus, and the Holy Spirit—the same power that raised Jesus from the dead—took up residence in Paul's life.

Yet Paul's passion to know Christ and His supreme worth also meant sharing with Christ in suffering. The suffering of Jesus on Paul's behalf had become so precious to him that Paul would embrace whatever suffering was necessary to follow Christ in this world. And nothing would result in knowing Christ more deeply than communing with Him in suffering; drawing near to Jesus as His High Priest, Comforter, and Living Hope in the face of suffering. Just as Jesus selflessly laid down His life for Paul, Paul also needed to die to himself to give Christ His rightful place in his life. And this dying to self would lead to resurrection life, eternal life, where Paul would know Christ in His fullness.

⁴ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, "*Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-centered Exposition), pg. 137-139.

One commentator pointed out that vs. 9 articulates the doctrine of *justification*—being made right with God on the basis of faith in Jesus, whereby we are clothed in His robe of righteousness. Justification then leads to *sanctification* in vs. 10—only in knowing and trusting Jesus at the expense of abandoning all confidence in ourselves, can we truly begin to change at a heart level to be come like Jesus. Finally, vs. 11 is *glorification* where we are raised to new life to forever be with Christ and like Christ.⁵

This is the heart of the gospel: *We can be clothed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus by faith*. But this faith in Jesus comes with full abandonment of self and our sin-stained attempts to please God.

We are like a homeless man who lives in filth and squalor. We are malnourished and lacking any true, enduring purpose in life. And then God, the creator of all that is, whose wealth has no limit, comes to us and says I want to give you a new life—new clothes, a new home, a new family, a new inheritance and the promise of having what you need in this life. We say, "That sound's good. I want that!" So we come out from under the bridge and we are bathed and dressed in new, fine clothes. But then, some pride rises up in our heart. We don't want to be a 'charity case' where everything is done for us, so we run back under the bride and grab our old sweater and put it on over our new clothes. But the old sweater is filthy and smells like urine. It adds nothing to our new wardrobe—it destroys it.

Don't let pride keep you from the life God offers you. Jesus says, "Take off those old rags. Let me bathe you and give you a new heart. Let me adopt you into my family and clothe you in my robe of perfect righteousness. Come with Me and experience the full and perfect acceptance of My Father as your Father."

Do you see the surpassing value of Jesus? He is sinless and perfect in every way. He is the embodiment of all the divine perfections of God Himself. And He humbled Himself and gave Himself sacrificially for you, bearing the weight of God's wrath against your sin out of love and mercy for you. He invites you into the eternal security of union with Himself in a covenant of

⁵ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, "*Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-centered Exposition), pg. 141-146.

love. Won't you abandon any vain confidence in yourself to earn God's favor from your sinful, human effort? Abandon confidence in your:

- Works
- Religious rites or activities
- Associations—there's no free pass for Catholics or evangelicals or Baptists, etc.
- Personal goodness
- Own significance
- Right theology, or knowledge, or understanding

Count it all rubbish—it's all fake money that can't buy God's approval. Take hold of Christ—He's the only true currency, and He has paid the price to redeem you out of sin and reconcile you to God. Put all of your confidence in His sinless life, His perfect sacrifice, and His triumphant resurrection.

Prayer:

- Cease striving
- Eyes to see the surpassing value of Jesus - changes everything about the way we live and rest.