

## Christ is my Life—studies in Philippians (4)

# Exulting in Christ

## Philippians 3:1-16

Here is another chapter full of Christ and now, of exulting in him.

- We exult, glory or boast in Christ (Gr. *kauchaomai*—v. 3).
- Knowing Christ surpasses anything else (v. 8).
- We want to know him (v. 10).
- We press on to respond to God's call in Christ (v.14).
- We eagerly await his coming (v. 20).

There has been a church in Philippi for a decade now but their understanding is still undeveloped enough for eager Christians to be diverted by something that sounds 'more' Christian. 'Be circumcised.' 'Keep the law'. 'Be like Jews have been for centuries'.

This problem never goes away. It may be that our egotism wants some credit for the new relation with God that we have. Or it may be that our anxious conscience is not set to rest unless we can jump through all the hoops that are put before us. Whatever, people who have a 'Christ-plus' product will always find a market.

Paul's response is to show how entirely Christ has fulfilled God's agenda and that a Christian is someone who exults, boasts or glories in Christ and not in anything they can do (v. 3).

### A happy warning (vv. 1-2)

The reading begins with joy (v. 1; 'joy' or 'rejoice' occurs 14 times in this book).

- Joy is directly related to what God does (e.g. Psa. 47:1-3; 66:1-3; 81:1-7).
- Joy is a measure of faith, and the lack of it indicates we have reverted to trusting ourselves. Remaining in joy is not just good for our health, it is the way of remaining in the faith.

The need for joy is linked with a warning against teachers who want to add requirements to the gospel—so he is happy to warn them.

- The warning is severe—'look out' he says, three times. Much is at stake.
- The Judaising enthusiasts are not God's people (*dogs*—cf. Mark 7:27) and they don't keep the law (*evil doers*). They are, in fact, idolators (*mutilators*, cf. 1 Kin. 18:28) and not real circumcisers. The matter is important—getting it wrong not only destroys joy. It misrepresents God and produces nothing where much was promised.

The false teachers are probably not obvious until they are exposed.

- The Christian life is a life of doing good, keeping the law. Someone asking us to do more sounds right.
- If exulting is related to anything we do, and is not based on Christ and his works, God's people are being led astray.
- By the gospel, God removes all other reasons to boast (Rom. 2:17, 23; 3:27; cf. 5:2, 11).

### The nature of God's people (v. 3)

The circumcision, the only circumcision, is circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29) and can only be done by the gospel (Col. 2:11; Deut. 30:6). The real shows up what is false. This leads to...

- ...service enabled by the Holy Spirit, not merely following a code (cf. Isa. 29:13, quoted in Matt. 15:8f; also 2 Cor. 3:6).
- ...exulting in Jesus Christ; perhaps this is why Paul began his section with joy.

- ...putting no confidence in effort that simply arises from us—the flesh.
- The following verses (vv. 4-14) are autobiographical (cf. 2 Cor. 11:22). Paul has ‘been there’ and knows the tricks!

### **What we count as valuable (vv. 4-6)**

Justifying oneself is a powerful motivator of guilty people.

- We exult when what we rely on succeeds.
- Paul tells us his list of credentials by which he had fleshly confidence.
- According to the letter of the law, he passed with flying colours.
- Any religious culture can become our ‘circumcision’ and ‘law’.
- We all have a list of things—perhaps unconscious—that we like to have in place so that we can approach God, be at ease with peers and be at peace with ourselves.
- It may be that God has revealed himself, established us as his people, and now we have mistaken the resulting form for the power and think we can maintain what God began.

### **Christ shows up everything else (vv. 7-9)**

It took a meeting with Christ to show this was all worthless—Paul was persecuting his Messiah—killing Christ all over again—effectively a God-hater.

- Grace comes alive when we know ourselves truly. We turn from what we can produce to what Christ has won for us. Many turn to Christ when they discover their own bankruptcy.
- Revival times sometimes reveal that ‘devoted’ servants of Christ are in fact haters of one another and only interested in their own gain. E.g, the East African revival.

Being right or righteous is not something for us to assert. We must ‘be found’ (v. 9)—by God—in Christ, without a righteousness of our own.

- E.g. a dying man wrote a note for those who would find him: ‘I have taken all my bad works, and all my good works, left them in a heap and fled from both to Christ’.

‘Righteousness’ here is a gift from God, not an accomplishment by us.

- It is a judgement made by God not by us or anyone else.
- It is a gift of grace, not what we deserve.
- It is not the result of obeying God’s law, but it does fulfill it. Note that Paul uses law as wisdom and prophecy rather than as command (Brian Rosner in *Paul and the Law*).
- It is through faith in Christ—*he* is our righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21)—that is, what he did in obedience to God’s purpose, constitutes our righteousness.
- This is God being true to himself through making propitiation for our sins.
- As such, this righteousness is holy, eternal, satisfying to God, and to our conscience.
- This puts any lesser ‘righteousness’ in the shade!
- William Tyndale described the gospel as ‘good, mery glad and joyfull tydinge, that maketh a mannes hert glad, and maketh hym synge, dounce, and leepe for oiye.’

### **Christ—a life pursuit (vv. 10-11)**

Here is what it looks like to exult in Christ and pursue being in him above everything else.

- We want to know him.
- We want to know the power of his resurrection. (Cf. Eph. 1:18-21.)
- We share his suffering—the suffering of being lovers of God and of the world he wants to save.
- We anticipate being raised from the dead. This is the ultimate justification.
- We take no credit for our zeal; Christ and his works have because it is inspired in us by Christ and his works.