

Community Group Guide



the Church at Martinsburg

Paradox: An Unnatural Response to Natural Circumstances
“Conflict”

Philippians 3:1-11

Pastor Jacob Atchley

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Introducing the Sermon Series

A *paradox* is a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but, in reality, expresses a possible truth. The book of Philippians communicates a series of paradoxes: joy in the midst of suffering, unity in the midst of diversity, freedom in the midst of imprisonment, contentment in the midst of turmoil. These are only a few.

The apostle Paul wrote this epistle to the church at Philippi while he was in prison. The Philippians had sent one of their own, Epaphroditus, to take support to Paul. In turn, Paul supports them through this joy-filled letter.

Sermon Overview and Outline

In chapter 3, Paul seems to abruptly shift from the joy that he has in Christ to a section on warning and teaching. Why does he do this – how are these two sections related? Honestly, many of us are guilty of divorcing chapter 2 from chapter 3 in Philippians. This week, we’ll see that Paul is so serious about our joy in Christ being pure and complete that he’s willing to confront the issues that could keep us from finding joy.

Outline:

- Safeguards and Confrontations (vs. 1-3)
- Giving Up to Gain (vs. 4-11)

Scripture Passage

Have a volunteer read the following scripture passage(s).

Philippians 3:1-11

[1] Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. [2] Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— [4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I

counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—[10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Discussion Questions

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means.

1. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend's message did you find most helpful, eye-opening, troubling?
2. Have you ever been guilty of grumbling or complaining? Looking back how could you have handled the situation in light of today's passage.
3. Read Philippians 2:12-13. How does the instruction to work out your salvation coincide with the work that God is doing in you for his purpose?
4. Complaints, arguments, and disunity have been the marker of many Christian churches. What steps can we take to ensure that the church we are part of is marked by charity, unity, mission, and the gospel?
5. Verse 20 speaks of a Christian taking a genuine interest in the welfare of others. What or how are you intentionally focused on the welfare of others? Who can you be praying and encouraging regularly for the sake of the Gospel?

Prayer

As you pray with your group, consider praying for the following things:

- Any personal requests. Pray for the personal requests that may have been shared in your group.
- A desire to have the Word of Christ dwelling richly in the hearts of your fellow group members (Col. 3:16).
- Ask the Lord to help you keep your mind set on Christ so you may experience the paradoxes of life with Christ.

Weekly Scriptures

Encourage your group members to consistently read Scripture. The daily Scripture reading plan from the church is be a helpful place to start.

Monday - Philippians 1

Tuesday - Philippians 2

Wednesday - Philippians 3

Thursday - Philippians 4

Friday – 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Saturday – Romans 1:16-17

Weekly Update

Remind your group of some of the important things coming up for the church.

Upcoming events:

One-Day Preaching Workshop

On Saturday, June 27, Dr. Mark Johnson will be teaching a one-day preaching workshop at 50 Monroe Street. This even is open to all men interested in teaching the Bible.

Membership Matters Workshop

Membership Matters at the Church at Martinsburg and the first step toward formal covenant membership at the church is through the Membership Matters Workshop (FKA the “Gospel Class”). Our Membership Matters Workshop will be held on 7/11 at 50 Monroe. For more information and to register, just visit membership.martinsburgchurch.org.

Baptism Celebration

We will be celebrating with baptisms on July 19th! If you have members in your group who have yet to be baptized, encourage them to follow through in obedience. They can register to be baptized at baptism.martinsburgchurch.org.

Follow-up

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email, text, etc. to your group with some or all of the following:

- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- Encourage individual members of your group with specific passages of scripture that deal with something they might be experiencing.
- Challenge your group members to read through the entire book of Philippians this week.
- A reminder to pray for the requests made during your group time.

Commentary

**This commentary has been taking from the *Philippians: An Unnatural Response to Natural Circumstances Study Guide*. You can pick up a physical copy at the Guest Services table.*

Many of us are guilty of divorcing chapter 2 from chapter 3 in Philippians. Paul talks about joy and then seems to abruptly turn to warning and teaching. But Paul is so serious about our joy that he wants to make certain we find it. Paul wants us to find deep, abiding joy... joy in the gospel.... joy in Jesus. “It’s grace wrought gladness in

the heart that remains even when your eyes are clouded with tears and blood-shot with weeping, and when trouble surrounds you on every side. This joy remains and triumphs because it is not derived from us, nor is it based on our circumstances. It comes from God Himself. In fact, the Lord Jesus Christ at one point could describe the whole mission of His work in this world this way to His disciples: ‘I came that your joy might be made full [or complete].’

...why then does Paul stop talking about that and go into...this eleven-verse doctrinal exhortation? Here’s the answer. Because what Paul is talking about in the second half of verse 1 all the way down to verse 11 is not unrelated to his exhortation about joy. In fact, the doctrine that he is going to expound here is absolutely integral to and connected with, inseparably, the joy that he’s talking about in verse 1... In fact, the overarching theme of this whole passage is that doctrine – true doctrine...not false doctrine but biblical, rich, truthful, biblical doctrine – is for your joy. It is designed to foster your experience and expression of joy in the Christian life.”¹

3:1-3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh –

Safeguards and Confrontations

Following all that Paul has previously stated in Chapters 1 and 2, he is not now simply giving a suggestion. This is God’s command through Paul: Rejoice in the Lord. The kind of joy Paul is talking about is not what we would call “happiness.” Happiness is a word based upon “happenstance.” As long as all is well, happiness happens. But to rejoice is a choice. It is joy based upon our trust in God, His purposes, and His power. In choosing to rejoice, we experience a divinely produced emotion, a fruit produced by the Holy Spirit.

The warning that follows is 3-fold but refers to the same group of people, namely the Judaizers. Previously Paul reminded the Philippians not to be alarmed by their opponents (1:27-28) – now he describes their opponents so that they can recognize and beware of them. He describes them as *dogs*, a derogatory image because the dogs of their day were scavengers who fed on the garbage in the cities. They were greedy animals governed only by their appetites. These false teachers were also *evil workers* who garnered pride through their outward righteousness. And he calls them the *false circumcision* for they taught that circumcision and keeping the Law were necessary for salvation. The word for “false circumcision” (*katatome*) literally means “mutilation.” Paul is saying that these false teachers mutilate the gospel by

¹ Duncan, J. Ligon. *Fighting for Joy, Growing in Humility, Knowing Christ and the Peace that Passes Understanding: A Study of Philippians – Put No Confidence in the Flesh*. <http://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/fighting-for-joy-growing-in-humility-knowing-christ-and-the-peace-that-passes-understanding-a-study-of-philippians-35-put-no-confidence-in-the-flesh/print>, 2006.

adding human merit to the person and work of Jesus Christ for salvation. The *true circumcision* (peritome) may or may not have had the outward mark, but they had experienced the true spiritual cleansing that the physical circumcision symbolized – genuine believers with circumcised hearts. Genuine believers will be known as true worshipers, those that worship God in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Real believers also *glory in Christ Jesus*. *Glory* (kauchaomai) means to boast or exult. It is “boasting with exultant joy about what a person is most proud of.” Genuine believers boast and exult in Jesus. And finally, they put no confidence in the flesh in contrast to the false teachers that were trusting in their own righteousness. “It is only those who turn from sinful self-efforts and embrace the truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone who are saved.”

Giving Up To Gain

3:4-6 ...though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

“Having unmasked the Judaizers in verse 2 and defined Christians as the ‘true circumcision’ in verse 3, Paul anticipates the Judaizers’ response. They would undoubtedly argue that the Philippians being Gentiles, did not understand the rich heritage of Judaism. But the same could not be said of the Apostle Paul. His Jewish credentials were impeccable, easily equaling or surpassing those of the Judaizers.” If anyone could have worked their way into salvation, it would have been Paul. Here he cites seven of his ‘credentials’, three inherited and four achieved.

Circumcised on the eighth day: Literally, “with respect to circumcision an eighth-day-er.” Paul was a Jew by birth, obedient to the Jewish rites before he could willfully obey.

Of the nation of Israel: By birth a member of God’s chosen people and receiver of all the blessings of that covenant nation.

Of the tribe of Benjamin: Born into a prominent tribe; “Benjamin was the younger of the two sons born to Jacob’s favorite wife, Rachel. He was also the last of Jacob’s sons to be born and the only one born in the Promised Land...When the Promised Land was divided among the twelve tribes, the holy city of Jerusalem was included in Benjamin’s territory. When the kingdom split after Solomon’s death, only Benjamin and Judah remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty... By Paul’s day, many Jews no longer knew what tribe they belonged to. Intermarriage during the years of exile had blurred the tribal lines. But Paul’s family had remained pure Benjamites.”

A Hebrew of Hebrews: Strictly adhered to his family's heritage and remained committed to the Hebrew language.

As to the Law, a Pharisee: The highest level in devout, legalistic Judaism; derives from a Hebrew word meaning "to separate". The origin of the Pharisees is not known for certain, but the sect probably arose formally during the intertestamental period. It had been developing since Ezra's time when the concern for God's law was revived. Although relatively few in number (the first-century Jewish writer Josephus estimated their number at 6,000), they had the greatest religious influence on the common people. To be a Pharisee was to be a member of an elite, influential, and highly respected group of men who fastidiously lived to know, interpret, guard, and obey the Law."

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church: Zeal was viewed by the Jews as the highest religious virtue. To be zealous is to love God and hate what offends Him. From Paul's perspective as a Pharisee, to love God was synonymous with hating Christians.

As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. Not claiming sinlessness, but having behavior witnessed by others that was above reproach; outward righteousness.

3:7-8 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the Loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

In verses 7 & 8 Paul uses the accounting terms *gain* (*kerdos* – the profit column) and *loss* (*zemia* – the loss column) as well as the word *count* (*hegeomai*) meaning "to reckon". "Paul seemingly had it all. He had undergone the proper rituals, he was a member of God's chosen people, he was from a favored tribe in Israel, he had scrupulously maintained his orthodox heritage, he was one of the most devout legalists in Judaism, he was zealous to the point that he persecuted Christians, and he rigidly conformed to the outward requirements of Judaism. Yet he saw that as useless for salvation, and the reality of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ was revealed to him. The apostle did not come to believe that those things were good, but Christ was better; instead, he viewed all of them as bad. They were deadly because they deceived him into thinking that he was right with God." The verb tenses of the words "have counted" and "count" indicate that Paul counted the meritorious works of his past as loss and continually counts anything he might use to try to earn God's favor in the present or future as loss.

In the context of Paul's suffering, verse 8 also gives a practical means of preparing for any conflict or suffering. John Piper defines counting all things as loss for the sake of Christ in this way:

1. It means that whenever I am called to choose between anything in this world and Christ, I choose Christ.

2. It means that I will deal with the things of this world in ways that draw me nearer to Christ so that I gain more of Christ and enjoy more of Him by the way I use the world.

3. It means that I will always deal with the things of this world in ways that show that they are not my treasure, but rather show that Christ is my treasure.

4. It means that if I lose any or all the things this world can offer, I will not lose my joy or my treasure or my life, because Christ is all.

This is Paul's preparation for suffering "because suffering is nothing more than the taking away of bad things or good things that the world offers for our enjoyment – reputation, esteem among peers, job, money, spouse, sexual life, children, friends, health, strength, sight, hearing, success, etc. When these things are taken away (by force or by circumstance or by choice), we suffer. If we have followed Paul and the teaching of Jesus and have already counted them as loss for the surpassing value of gaining Christ, then we are prepared to suffer."

Intimately and experientially knowing Christ is of incomparable value. To truly know Him as gain is more than having knowledge about Him or relying on facts regarding Him. Salvation knowledge demands a personal, relational understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ, a communion that every believer experiences if they genuinely belong to Him. For this great prize, Paul gladly suffered the loss of all things.

3:9-11 ...and be found in Him, not have a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Paul, through faith, chose God's righteousness over his own legalistic self-righteousness. Faith (pistis) is to be firmly persuaded so as to place full confidence in something or someone. It is based upon God's truth as the one reality.

It "is the confident, continuous confession of total dependence on and trust in Jesus Christ for the necessary requirements to enter God's kingdom. It involves more than mere intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel; saving faith includes trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and surrender to His lordship. It is on the basis of faith alone that righteousness...comes from God to repentant sinners. Righteousness is right standing with God and acceptance by Him. That repentant sinners have their sin imputed to Christ and His righteousness imputed to them, is the heart of the gospel... This doctrine is at the core of the gospel. On the cross, God judged Jesus as if He had personally committed every sin ever committed by every person who ever truly believed. When a sinner embraces Jesus as Lord and trusts only in His sacrifice for sin, God treats that sinner as if he lived Christ's sinless life."

We can know Jesus and the power of His resurrection. This is the same power that saved each of us, but more than that, it is the resurrection power of Jesus Christ that sanctifies us on a daily basis, empowering us to defeat temptation/trials, live

godly, fruitful lives, and courageously proclaim the gospel in our world. It is this very power that transforms us into the image of Jesus.

We can know Jesus intimately and experientially. We can know Him and conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of Christ by the resurrection power that saved us and continues to sanctify us. This power comes in the person of the Holy Spirit living in each believer. And we can know Christ through the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings. Suffering ultimately forces our dependence upon God as we exchange our impotence for His sovereign love and power in the midst of our circumstances. As we participate in the sufferings of Christ, we are being conformed to His death, dying to our own sin and self. Jesus Himself always lived by denying the temptations to live in His own power or for His own ends. He lived only to do the Father's will. We are to be conformed to His death in the same way, through the same self-denial.

To lose all for the sake of gaining Christ, knowing Him, being found in Him, is the normal Christian life. Our union with Jesus is our greatest gain. "What do believers gain by their union with Christ? The knowledge of Christ in their identification with Him; the righteousness of Christ imputed to them in justification; the power of Christ for their sanctification; participation in the sufferings of Christ; and sharing Christ's glory in their glorification. No wonder Paul gladly exchanged the religious credits in his loss column for the surpassing benefits of knowing Christ."

**All quotes, unless specifically identified, come from *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Phillipians* by John MacArthur, Moody Publishers, 2001.

John Piper quoted from his sermon "Called to Suffer and Rejoice: That We Might Gain Christ", Desiring God – website. www.desiringgod.org

Added resource: *The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament* by Spiros Zodhiates, World Bible Publishers, 1994.