

### **Phil 3:1-11 Where does your confidence lie?**

As an engineer in Silicon Valley, I have reviewed many resumes in my life. People put forward the best part of themselves: letters after their name, job experience and titles, educational background. And perhaps you've looked at social media sites of people, who project those aspects that they're most proud of: best art work, musical creations, beautifully staged food, exotic vacations. When we look at these resumes or enjoy the social media posts, we may wonder: Do these images or personas truly represent them? Is this where their confidence lies?

The apostle Paul examines this question - or the first century equivalents of resumes and number of likes. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul gives an autobiographical sketch of his own accomplishments and pedigree. You may say, it's his resume, his LinkedIn profile, his Instagram story. The difference is that Paul transparently shares from his heart what he has confidence in and can boast about. And it's a very counter-cultural view.

Our journey in Philippians takes us to the 3rd chapter. In the first 11 verses, we find three important topics: Counterfeits, Confidence, and Christ. Paul's trajectory starts with a warning against Counterfeit Christians and compares them to marks of a true believer. Then he examines where we may put our Confidence, and lands in the most important person in the world: Christ.

Let's begin in verse 1: Paul encourages us with this exhortation:

*"... my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you."*

As you know, Philippians is often called a Letter of Joy. (do you remember the mnemonic from last week?) Paul does not tire of saying "rejoice" over and over again.

If any four words ought to characterize a follower of Jesus, if there are four words we can live and walk by, it ought to be these four: "Rejoice in the Lord". Rejoicing in the Lord can strengthen us during trials, protect our hearts during suffering, lift us up during blessed times. Rejoicing is not plastering a smile on our frozen countenance, but a genuine internal confidence that all events are ordered by our sovereign Lord. Even during pandemics, illness, economic downturns or even passing of a loved one, we can "rejoice in the Lord". This Joy originates from a quiet trust in His adequacy, not ours. We know that He is always present, ever close, never changes. This confidence allows us to "rejoice in the Lord".

From this starting point, Paul transitions rather abruptly into the first topic of our passage: Counterfeit Christians. In these next two verses, Paul contrasts Counterfeit Christians to the true people of God.

Paul continues in verses 2-3:

*"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."*

Are you as taken aback as I am by Paul's 3-fold rebuke? He certainly did not mince words in describing these counterfeits. Who were they? These were false teachers called Judaizers who seemed to follow Paul everywhere, infiltrating the fledgling new churches and injecting false doctrines. These counterfeit Christians

claimed it was necessary to strictly adhere to Mosaic Laws with restrictions on food, clean and unclean utensils, the 613 rules in the Torah. These false teachers gloried in their Jewish circumcision (Paul calls "*mutilate the flesh*"), believing this mark gave them the privilege to be inheritors of God's promise. This outward mark is what they attach their spiritual hope in. Furthermore, they claim that unless Gentile believers became fully Jewish, as measured by circumcision and other Jewish rites, they were not truly saved. They placed the shackles of Law and of works and of flesh on the new Christians. They undermined the foundation of Grace and Freedom that Paul and other apostles have laid. No wonder Paul is so offended by them, by their false premise and false criteria of salvation. He repeatedly calls them out in many of his letters: Galatians, Romans, Colossians.

On the other hand, in verse 3, Paul says,

*"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".*

*"We are the circumcision"* refers to believers who have an inward cleansing of the heart, not an outward physical mark. True believers have been "circumcised" not by a sharp instrument, but by the power of the Holy Spirit from within. We read of this in Romans 2:28-29: *"For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew (child of Abraham) is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter."* What are the marks of the true circumcision, the true believer?

The answer is right here in verse 3:

*"worship by the Spirit of God", "glory in Christ Jesus", and "no confidence in the flesh".*

True worship is a **heart** overflowing with worship, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. More than singing our heart out to Him on Sunday, it's a whole **life** of worship, where we love Him with every fiber of our life, every waking moment and action is an act of love and worship. One mark of a true believer is a heart and a life of worship.

*"Glory in Christ"* means we delight in Jesus. He is our main focus, the center of our life. We love to spend time with Him, trusting Him. He gets all the credit and all the glory, not our own accomplishments. It's about putting Christ front and center and witnessing His glory. Complete devotion to Christ is a second mark of a true believer.

The counterfeits rely on and boast of their circumcision, an external mark. True believers do not put confidence in outward markings or facades. To *"put no confidence in the flesh"* means humility before the Lord. There is no self-reliance, no self-effort, no self-complacency. We do not boast of our own accomplishments; we're humble before Him. Humility is a third mark of a true believer. So, we see true believers have a heart of worship, they long to glorify Jesus, and they are humble before the Lord.

How can we respond when we face counterfeit teaching today that shackles us to anything other than faith in Christ? We go back to the fundamentals; we are **Saved by Grace Alone**. Look out that we do not slip into a works-based salvation; look out that we don't use merit to make ourselves acceptable in God's eyes. We aren't saved because we attend church or teach Sunday School or tithe or any other activity. Those are good,

but they are a *response* to our salvation, not a way to *earn* our salvation. Our salvation comes from faith in Jesus alone. Remember: there's nothing that we can **do** to make God love us any more. Christ has done it already. The Law says "**do**". Grace says it's "**done** by Christ". He is necessary and sufficient for our salvation, nothing less, and nothing more. So beware of Counterfeit teachings that seduce us otherwise.

Having confronted the Counterfeit Christians, now Paul addresses Confidence, specifically confidence in the flesh. Paul writes in verses 4-6,

*"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."* (Phil 3:3b-6)

These verses are remarkable; they are one of the most compact autobiographical passages in Paul's letters. Here Paul lays out his personal testimony of his pre-conversion life. It is Paul's resume describing his pedigree, prestige, privilege, and performance.

- His pedigree is a strict Jew by circumcision and lineage, from the tribe of Benjamin which gave Israel her first king - Saul, for whom he himself was named. A true Hebrew of Hebrews.
- For his privilege and prestige, he studied under the most famous teacher, the Pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). And Paul served as a prestigious Pharisee himself.
- As for achievements, he zealously tried to "cleanse" God's people by persecuting Christians.
- And his morality and social standing were spotless, as he performed perfectly, adhering to Jewish law, blameless in appearance.

He was the Reverend Professor Doctor Paul from University of Pharisaic Law, CEO of his synagogue, elder of his congregation, the "most interesting man in the world".

What are some of the modern-day equivalents of these things in which we may take confidence?

- We can boast of our heritage: we come from a good family, proud of our pedigree. With ancestry.com, we can find out we came over the Mayflower or a descendant of an ancient Chinese emperor.
- Training, education and position are the most oft-quoted areas of confidence: a PhD., founder of a non-profit. CEO of a startup.
- Performance: we boast of our community involvement, advocacy for social justice, leading bible study, number of people we've led to the Lord, preaching from the pulpit.
- Morality and ethical behavior. We can say, "I have not been convicted of any felonies... recently." This is the most insidious counterfeit confidence in my own life. I catch myself thinking, "I've been good. I haven't done anything bad that requires God to forgive me, so I don't need Jesus' cleansing. I can claim, "*with regard to righteousness, blameless*". Basically, my sin-management program is working well, or at least well-enough!

Perhaps you can identify with me in some of these areas. In this society, our degrees, positions, career achievements reign supreme. Even in our spiritual circles, we're not immune to this mentality: ministry accomplishments, knowing a biblical language or committing Scripture to memory. Now, understand that our heritage, education, career, ministry, ethical or moral standards are important and not bad in themselves. However, they can easily become a source of pride and confidence that is not rooted in our Lord. As long as we tightly hold on to these and gain full confidence from them, then we cannot fully trust Christ and His promises and provision. In order to lay hold of the better confidence, we must let go of the other. What is more valuable than our stellar resume? Where can true Confidence lie?

Paul answers this question in these next verses. The answer is loud and it is clear, the better, the only place to place our confidence is Christ, who is mentioned half a dozen times in three verses. *"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"* (Phil 3:7-9 ESV)

Let's examine these verses carefully.

We can place Paul's descriptions into two groups. In group A, we place all the worldly boasts, referring to pedigree, privilege, and performance. We have "gain", "everything", "all things", and "righteousness from law". These are the greatest things our flesh can hold on to and boast about.

In group B, we have Paul's post-conversion confidence: "for the sake of Christ", "knowing Jesus Christ my Lord", "gain Christ and be found in Him", and "righteousness from God that depends on faith". Let's see how the two groups stack up.

If Paul were an accountant, how would he balance the profit and loss columns?

In column A, the compilation of all his worldly confidence and boasts, Paul considers them "loss", "loss", "loss" and "rubbish". Paul doesn't value these things very much, you think? This last word "rubbish" - *skubalon* - is a unique word. Used only here in the New Testament, it means the dregs, lowest of lowest, detestable. Why are these so worthless? They are worthless when compared to what is in column B.

In column B, we have "*Christ, knowing Christ, gaining Christ and be found in Him, righteousness from faith in Christ*". Jesus is his all in all. Christ has **surpassing worth**. Jesus surpasses everything imaginable!

Knowing Christ is of such supreme value that we should be willing to give up everything to seek after Him. Remember Jesus' parable in Matthew 13? There was the man who found a treasure hidden in the field; he sold everything he had to buy the field. Then there's the merchant who found the pearl of great value, and he went and sold all that he had and bought that pearl. In these parables, the treasure and pearl are the

kingdom of God, which is Christ come to earth in the form of a man. He is of such **surpassing worth**, that we will get rid of all that we possess in order to receive Christ.

There's just no comparison between the very highest of high to the lowest of low. Compared to Christ, everything else is rubbish.

In society, especially here in this area, we have been conditioned to value position, possessions, and prestige. We've been trained to be self-reliant, to accomplish anything we set our minds to. And we're lauded for our accomplishments in column A. This emphasis on the material, the sense of self-confidence leads us to a place of pride, of puffing ourselves up to be like God. This is a virus which has infected mankind ever since our original sin in Adam, Cain, Lamech, Tower of Babel. All through history to today, this confidence has been plaguing everyone.

The correct attitude - viewing all of this as loss - requires a complete 180° reversal of values and way of thinking we've held all our lives. This is. It doesn't happen overnight when we accept Jesus; it may take years.

It probably took Paul decades to arrive at that reversal of thinking. Yes, he met the Lord on the road to Damascus and was converted in a flash. But what followed that conversion was 7 or more years of anonymity and silence. During that time, he was being taught by the Lord and transformed by the Spirit (Gal 1:16-17). By the time he wrote this letter 20 years after conversion, he was still not there yet, as he admits later in this chapter verses 12-13: *"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own... But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead"*. Paul admits he wasn't there yet; he is still straining for it. In verse 8, Paul uses the present tense *Indeed, I count everything as loss... I count everything as rubbish*. He says "I am counting", today, everything as loss. Day by day.

Our reversal of values will likely take years, and it's done by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit indwelling in us with our obedience and cooperation. As Paul did, we need to take it step by step, every day reminding ourselves to count everything as loss compared to gaining Christ and being found in Him.

Paul has warned us against Counterfeit Christianity, exhorted us to not misplace our Confidence, and now lands us in the surpassing worth of **knowing Christ** as Lord.

"Knowing Christ" is the goal of all believers - knowing Him and making Him known. We always teach that knowing Christ is different from knowing *about* Him; it's not just head knowledge. Knowing Christ is a relationship, a heart knowledge. Moreover, it is a **longing** for Jesus, a desire that compels us to spend time with Him, to seek Him in the Scriptures and prayer, to be loyal to Him and depend on His loyalty to us.

We've heard these teachings many times about loving, knowing and longing for Jesus. In our final verses for today Paul tells us an additional aspect of knowing Jesus: (v.10-11)

*"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."*

*“Sharing in sufferings and death”*. This is an aspect of knowing Jesus we’d rather not focus on, right? But they are part and parcel of knowing Jesus. It’s the other side of the coin to complete the picture: Love & Power. Suffering & Death.

Christ suffered and died not for himself, not because of any wrongdoing. He suffered and He died to benefit others, to save you, me, and all sinners everywhere for all time.

This takes suffering and death to a different place for us. Many of us do face suffering: losing a loved one or a job, facing injustice or discrimination. These are hard. But we may possibly plow through that suffering, grit our teeth and bear it. If we can achieve that attitude, then we’re good. Or are we? Is that the attitude Jesus had?

No, my friends, there’s more. *“to share in His sufferings and his death”* goes beyond gritting our teeth to bear injustice. It means to **willingly** give up everything **in order to benefit someone else**. That was Christ’s attitude. Die to self **in order** to save someone else. Even if that someone else is hard to love - **especially** if that someone else is hard to love.

Romans 8:6 & 8 say *“6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... 8 God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* That’s what it means to become like Him in His death - to die for an enemy of God, to die for a sinner. This is so hard! In my natural self, I cannot relinquish everything and give up my “rights”, moreover, to do it for someone else. This is such a high view of Christ and calling for me. I must confess I’m so far from that; I’m not there. And I need the Holy Spirit to teach me to follow Christ in this way, to *“share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”* This, too, is part of *“the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”*.

My friends, we’ve been on a journey today with Paul. We compared Counterfeit Christians to the marks of a true believer. We contrasted Confidence in the flesh versus Confidence in Christ. And finally, Paul led us to Christ - the surpassing worth of knowing Him and sharing in His suffering and death.

I want to close by looking at the final phrase in today’s passage in verse 11,

*“... that I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”*

*“Resurrection from the dead”* is a deep topic that we can spend many hours on. I just want to take Paul’s description of what this will be like in verse 21 of this chapter:

*“...our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body”*. That’s what our resurrection will be like. When Jesus returns from heaven, we will be resurrected from the dead and we will be given a glorious body, having the glory of Jesus Himself!

We will be in heaven and we’ll be able worship in the presence of God forever and ever.

That is the assurance we have if we are followers of Jesus. Do you have this assurance? If you have not yet given your life to Jesus; if you have sought after the confidences of the world via education, career, and status, but have come up empty, dissatisfied, and thirsty, I invite you to find out about Jesus. He is the true fountain of life, the true source of living water that quenches your thirst. He offers to you forgiveness of sin, purpose for life, and resurrected glorious body beyond death. Accept Him as your Savior and you will receive eternal life which you can experience both now and on the other side of death.

This invitation is for believers as well. Followers of Christ also need to hear the gospel. We need to hear Christ every day in order to counteract Counterfeit teachings, to refute the false Confidence of the world. We need the gospel invitation each day to point us to Christ. We learn to count everything else as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing our Lord. Knowing Jesus and making Him known.

To Jesus be all glory forever and ever. Amen.