

Let's Be Clear

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- [0 : 00] Do you have a joyful, confident relationship with God? And I want you to think, your relationship with God, is there joy in it?
- And are you confident that He is your Heavenly Father? If you don't, I pray that you will by the time you leave this service today.
- That God will show you what needs to take place in your life. That you'll sense Him calling you, enabling you to make that kind of commitment. But if you do, what are you basing your confidence on?
- You know, it's one thing to be confident. I mean, there's times when I'm confident. I could outrun Jake Alexander back there.
- I mean, I think that sometimes. But that's a stupid thing to think. So sometimes we can be confident about things that's not true.
- [1 : 09] That's not real. There's no basis for it. And so as we go through this message, think about, if you say, I am confident about my relationship with God, is it a solid confidence?
- Is there a reason for it? A God-given, God-accepting confidence? I want you to turn with me back to the book of Philippians.
- We continue our study. I was off last week, and Ralph Carter did a great job. Lisa and I watched the service, and he just did a great job.
- I enjoyed the message, powerful message, and I appreciate him coming and preaching. But this morning, I want us to go back to where we were, beginning a new chapter, chapter 3.
- And I want us to see in this some things we need to be clear about. That we can leave here this morning knowing that we do have a joyful, confident relationship with God for the right reason, that he approves.
- [2 : 25] Philippians 3.1 Finally, brothers, rejoice in the Lord. 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, in ourselves.
- In what we do. 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 of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
- 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.
- [3 : 47] For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, comes from obeying the law, but that 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 is going to point out some things to help us to be clear and confident about our relationship with the Lord. Let's look at it.

Let's be clear about where we find Christian joy. Look at verse one again. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. We'll stop there. The word finally is used here to make a transition.

Paul is not like someone who might give a speech or a sermon and about halfway through or three quarters through will say finally. And you think it's about over, but it's not.

[5 : 13] He is just, that's just his way using that word here in this context. It could be translated then or furthermore, because he's got a lot more to say in this letter.

He begins this section by calling attention to joy. We're going to define it a little bit later, but it's Christian joy. And that's one of the main themes of this letter.

We have seen in earlier studies one of the things Paul repeats over and over again about there is joy to be found in a right relationship with Jesus.

We as Christians, of all people in this world, we have a lot to rejoice about. He talked about his own joy and about the Philippians, the members of this church, their joy.

Now, I want to remind you of something we looked at when we first began this study. There is a difference between Christian joy and the emotion of happiness.

[6 : 13] Happiness is an emotion that mostly occurs. We're happy when things are going our way, when we have good health, when people are treating us in a good way, a positive way.

Well, when people don't treat us well and things are not going our way, we are not happy, are we? And that's just life. That's just who we are as human beings.

Sometimes we're happy, usually based on our circumstances. Sometimes we're not because of our circumstances. Happiness comes and goes in everyone's life. Christian joy is different now.

It's really a part of the fruit of the Spirit. As Christians, with the Spirit of God living within us, He works in us to develop our character and joy is really a character quality.

It's also an attitude. But Christian joy is not without emotion. There is pleasure in Christian joy when you understand that pleasure basically means to be pleased.

[7 : 18] The word pleasure uses the noun means to be pleased. So as Christians, in our relationship with the Lord, there should be a lot that pleases us.

A similar word to this idea of Christian joy is contentment or having peace in your soul or a sense of peace, rightness with God. And this kind of joy is not really dependent on our circumstances.

You know, you can be going through a hard time, strained relationships with somebody maybe, sickness, a lot of uncertainty in your life. And you know, you're not just excited about it, thrilled about it, you're not happy about it, but you can, as you draw close to the Lord, sort of be at peace with it.

Be content in terms of you're able to deal with it. And the idea that you're going to approach that situation seeking to please the Lord regardless of how you actually feel.

That's what we're talking about. Now Paul explains the source of such joy in verse three as he says, rejoice in the Lord. That's the first time he has said rejoice in the Lord. He's talked about joy or rejoice nine times up to this point.

[8 : 39] This is the first time he says rejoice in the Lord. Knowing Jesus is our Savior and Lord gives us reason to rejoice, to be pleased, to be content.

Doesn't it? You know, most of us in this room, we have at least one close relationship with someone that it just pleases us to be with them.

Now I hope that's your spouse if you're married. But it could be, could be your child, unless they're a teenager.

It could be a friend. There's just somebody in your life, hopefully, and you may have more than one, that having a relationship with them just makes you more content, even in hard times when, you know, difficult times goes on.

You know, I've thought about that. Brian's my friend. And I truly, there's a lot of times I have joy, it pleases me to spend time with him.

[9 : 54] But when life's hard, if I'm sick or I'm just in turmoil, I don't really care if he's around. I want Lisa there.

I'm serious. Lisa makes everything better. Don't you, I hope you have somebody in your life that just having them there makes everything better.

Well, that's how the Lord should be if we're Christians. We should have such a relationship with him, we're able to talk to him, we sense his presence, and just knowing that he's promised to never leave us nor forsake us, no matter what, knowing him gives us a sense of joy.

It pleases us. It makes things right. Now, having a relationship with the Lord does have other benefits. Your sins have been forgiven.

The guilt should be gone. No Christian should live in guilt. You are an actual child of God. The Lord has promised to always be with you throughout your life here on earth, and when you die, he's going to take you into heaven.

[11 : 10] He's going to walk with you into paradise. And so, there's a lot of reasons why we should be able to rejoice in the Lord.

Now, I want you to note, Paul says, to write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

I'm taking that to mean that Paul has talked to these people a lot about joy. When he was with them earlier in this letter, he could have even written another letter we have no, you know, we don't know about that he talked about joy.

He talked about joy a lot with them and it never got old to him. And he doesn't want it to get old to them either.

He talks about at the end there. It is no trouble to me and it is safe for you. Rejoicing in the Lord, focusing on him like we're talking about, is good for our spiritual health, our spiritual well-being, our spiritual safety even.

[12 : 20] You say, how will that be? Well, it would help us to stay off the emotional roller coaster that occurs when we allow our circumstances to dictate our mood, our emotions.

And some people do that more than others. I mean, some people in here, you know, you're sort of like a flag in the wind. Whatever the situation is, it gets you down, it gets you up. You're just dependent on what is happening around you to determine your mood, your emotional status or stability.

And that's not healthy. We need to rejoice in the Lord, focus on him, find peace, rest, contentment in him, and that will help us, protect us, our sanity, our emotional stability, as well as our spiritual stability.

Now, what could you do that would help you to rejoice more in the Lord, to focus more on him on a daily basis?

You know, one thing would be to begin each day talking to him. Spend some time in prayer. Spend some time reading God's word. Focusing on the Lord as you begin the day or at some point during the day.

[13 : 43] A lot of people in this room, you spend a lot of time on the road, mornings and afternoons going to work, going to school. What do you do during that time?

Could you maybe turn off the radio, iPod, or whatever it is you listen to? Could you maybe have some quiet time as you drive and just talk to the Lord?

Focus on him? Could you maybe listen to some Christian music or some Christian teaching that would help you to focus more on him?

or even to grow in your relationship with him, in your knowledge of God's word? Find ways that you will be able to focus more on the Lord throughout a day because that's what it's going to take for us to really be able to rejoice in the Lord and find safety or stability just on a regular basis.

Now the next verse helps us see that rejoicing in the Lord doesn't make us immune from the harsh realities of life nor the negative emotions of being human.

[14 : 58] Look at number two. Let's be clear about who we can trust to teach the Bible. Paul warns the Philippians, this church, about false teachers in a very strong way.

Look at this verse two. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. You think Paul was smiling when he wrote those words?

You think he was in a happy mood? He was angry. I think he was red-faced. I think you could hear it in his voice. He was angry as he thought about these people, these false teachers.

Here's who they were. If you're familiar with the book of Acts or you've read some of Paul's letters, you know that Paul's sort of plan of action.

He went to a place, he preached the gospel, people were saved, he started a church, he did his best to get them off on the right foot, doctrinally, practically, trying to help them to understand who they were in Christ and how to grow.

[16 : 06] But after Paul left, in many of his churches, there was a group that came in. They were Jews who also claimed to be Christians.

Bible commentators refer to them as Judaizers. They were trying to make Jews out of Christians. And they would come in and say, yeah, what Paul preached was okay, it is important to trust in Jesus, but that's not the whole story.

Their goal was to make Jews out of those Christians. They would say, Paul didn't tell you the whole story, the full gospel. What they would say is you've got to obey the Old Testament law.

You've got to keep the law. You've got to practice the Old Testament circumcision. That's important for you to do. And as a faithful Jew obeying the law and trusting Christ, you will be okay.

So they were Jews, false teachers, telling the Gentiles they've got to become a Jew. And that just incensed Paul because it was a lie.

[17 : 19] They were undermining the truth that he had been teaching them. And Paul made it clear in his letter to the Galatians that these Judaizers were preaching a different gospel than he preached, not completing his, a different gospel, which meant it was no gospel at all.

Look at what he says. Galatians chapter 1 verses 6 to 8. In Philippians, his anger is toward the false teachers, not these people.

In Galatians, he's angry about everybody. The false teachers who are coming in behind him and undermining him and these very church members who are embracing that, believing that, being led astray.

Look at it. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you, let him be accursed. Let him be eternally condemned.

[18 : 32] That's how strongly he felt about the purity of the gospel, preserving it and going after those who would try to dilute it or undermine it or change it.

Look at how Paul describes them. Let's look back in the verse. Dogs. Now don't think about your pet at home. That is not the kind of dog Paul had in mind.

That is our dog, Molly. She's a good dog. Let me say this. I do not believe in reincarnation.

That is heresy. That is moronic. But if reincarnation is real, you want to come back as Lisa Stone's dog. You'll have the best dog life that a dog could have.

That's a fine dog. But that's not who Paul is calling these false teachers. Look next. That vicious, wild, scavenger kind of dog that roamed the streets of the day, nobody's pet.

[19 : 50] when Paul called these people dogs, it was a hateful term of scorn. It was about as strong an insult as he could say.

Jews in Paul's day condescendingly often called Gentiles dogs. dogs. And a lot of times Gentiles returned to favor.

Then Paul next calls them evildoers. He considered what they were doing, undermining the gospel, leading people astray as doing evil.

And then those who mutilate the flesh, that's what Paul thought of circumcision if it's added to the gospel. It's nothing spiritual. These false teachers taught a salvation by works is what they were doing.

It was a man made religion, a man made salvation. But Paul tells us here, salvation is work of the Spirit of God. Salvation is work of the Holy Spirit who indwells us as Christians.

[21 : 03] The gospel calls everyone look to Jesus Christ for your salvation. There's nothing you can add to it.

Don't even try. Look at this, verse 3. For we are the circumcision. He's talking about spiritually here. He's talking about how in Romans it says it this way, the Holy Spirit circumcises our heart.

He's just talking about how God does the work of salvation in these kind of terms. For we're the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

our good works, our keeping the law and all these kinds of things. Paul wants to make sure that the Philippians understand I know what I'm talking about.

Paul wants them to understand that if anyone could be right with God by doing what these false teachers say, I could and I would.

[22 : 10] Look at how he describes his heritage and his good works. He says, 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.

It's like one of the greatest Jewish resumes that a Jewish leader could have. Look at this. 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.

Paul was a Jew's Jew from birth. And as he grew up, as he went through his adult life until he came to Christ, he never wavered.

Now, I want us to pause here and think about what Paul is saying because the idea here, the concept here is a matter of life and death. It's a matter of spending eternity in heaven or hell.

In Paul's day, many Jews thought they could score points with God because they were born a Jew. They tried to keep the Ten Commandments and that's what the false teachers were teaching.

[23 : 34] today, in this community, maybe in this church, some people think along that same line, what about you?

Think with me. Were you born into a Christian home? Did you have godly parents? Have you been to church basically all your life?

Well, those things are great in that they gave you the advantage of having Christian role models right there in your home. You had the advantage of being taught the Word of God and you still know a lot that you learned even at a very young age.

But I want you to understand, your parents' faith and your Bible knowledge and your church attendance has absolutely nothing to do with your personal salvation.

In fact, our exposure to Christian role models like in our homes, our exposure to biblical teaching, God expects us more accountable.

[25 : 06] God expects more of you and me if we grew up in a Christian home and been taught the Word of God more than someone who was a pagan, an ungodly home and never even heard anything that was in the Bible.

You say, I don't know about that. Look at what Jesus said in one of his parables. Everyone to whom much was given of him, much will be required.

That's the principle of life. Even as a Christian right now, if God has given you spiritual gifts and talents and abilities, I mean, you're sharp.

By the grace of God, you are a sharp Christian, talented, a lot of abilities. God expects you to be using them for his glory and the good of the people around you, including this church.

We are accountable for what God brings into our life, what God gives us. Think about this. Have you behaved yourself pretty good most of your life?

[26 : 10] I mean, there's a lot of people in this room, not Mike Sterling-Kinney, but there's a lot of people in this room who've been good people most of their lives. You listened to your parents.

You weren't defiant, rebellious. You have tried to obey the laws of God and man. In fact, there may be a lot of people in this room that you've sort of lived a Andy Taylor of Mayberry kind of life.

You've just been good. But I want you to understand, your good works may and probably have made your life in this world better.

But God is not impressed. And you have not earned anything before God by your good life and good works.

Unless you have lived an absolutely perfect life and never sinned, you, no matter where you came from or what you've done, you are not acceptable to God on your own.

[27 : 25] You're not. You may be a whole lot better than the person sitting beside you in the pew. You may be a lot better than a lot of people that you know. That's part of our problem.

We like to compare ourselves. You know? I would never compare myself with Rudy Gray sitting over there. You know, I just couldn't, I couldn't measure up.

But I can compare myself to Mike Sterling Kenny, okay. So you shouldn't sit on the front row with a suit on. That just gets my attention. You see what I'm talking about?

You think to yourself, I am a pretty good guy and maybe you are in this community, comparatively speaking. But before God and his perfect, righteous, holy standards, you are a sinner.

You can do nothing to change that. You can do nothing to overcome that on your own. We need to understand this as Paul points out next.

[28 : 33] Look at this quickly. Let's be clear about what ultimately matters. Verses 7 and 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. I want you to look at what Paul called his previous religious resume, his assets, rubbish.

R.C. Sproul explains what he meant by that. Look, some scholars contend the Greek word for rubbish is actually the ordinary slang term for dung or may refer to garbage thrown out to dogs.

This stuff had value before Christ but now it is to be flushed away. Christ is now the only thing that counts and Paul put everything else away.

Everything that Paul the Jew, everything that Paul the good guy in his day thought was important, his heritage, his good works, was really worth nothing, I mean absolutely nothing in terms of securing God's favor.

[29 : 55] Do you really understand that? Everything that you think makes you special or that gives you some kind of special standing before God like your family, your church attendance, maybe your talents, your gifts, your education.

It's worthless, absolutely meaningless in terms of gaining God's favor. And anyone who tells you otherwise is a false teacher.

Anyone who tells you otherwise, they're a dog, a scavenger dog. They are evil doers. Don't listen to anyone who denies or ignores the fact that you are a sinner, totally dependent upon God's grace and Jesus' righteousness for your salvation.

I want you to hang on to your hats on this. Whoever tells you otherwise is a false teacher, even if that's your parents or your grandparents or Joel Osteen or anyone else who denies the clear teaching of the Bible that we're all sinners, we cannot save ourselves, we cannot earn our salvation.

But don't think I'm being overly harsh or hard. I'm just preaching what Paul in Galatians said.

[31 : 44] Look again, but even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the ones we preach to you, let him be accursed.

That's how strong it is. That's how important it is that you not be misled by any human being in this world when it comes to how you are right with God.

Last thing, let's be clear about how we become right with God. Let's look at verses 9 and 10. 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.

Let's stop there. Paul describes salvation as having a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Now what does he mean?

Well the word righteousness simply means to be declared right with God. Don't stumble over it, sort of a, look at that word, what does that exactly mean? It means to be right with God, or to be declared right with God by God.

[32 : 53] God declares us to be right with him, when we put our faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We will never be right with God by obeying God's law, by doing our best, by trying harder.

The good news of this passage is that God sent his son into this world to be our Savior. Jesus perfectly obeyed God's law.

And when we put our faith in Jesus and trust him, we become one with him, then his obedience is credited to us. Jesus took the punishment that we deserve because we've broken God's laws when he died on the cross.

And so when you trust Jesus, you become one with him, and his death on the cross counts as your death to sin. If you don't have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus right now, I want to encourage you to turn to Christ in faith.

It may be that you came into this room this morning, never thought about it like this before, but you are really trying to work your way to heaven. You're trying to balance the scales of being good here and doing a little bit more when you're bad there.

[34 : 12] You're really thinking God's going to accept me based on what I do, the good I can do. But that's totally wrong. The only way God's going to accept you is to admit you are a sinner, you cannot save yourself, repent, change your mind about living this way, put your trust in Jesus and Him alone.

Call upon Him to save you. Surrender control of your life to Him as your Lord. I want to ask you, if you died today, this day, and you stood before God and He asked you, why should I let you into heaven?

What would you say? Think about it for just a moment. You died today. And all of a sudden, you stand before God. He looks at you and says, why should I let you into heaven?

What would you say? Would your answer include anything about who you are, who your family is, or what you have done to earn your place in heaven?

If you're going to answer like that, you're trying to save yourself. And you'll never get in. The only acceptable answer is that I am trusting in Jesus and Him alone for my salvation.

[35 : 46] when we come to God, be very clear about this. When we come to God, it doesn't matter who we are, where we're from, or what we've done.

All that matters is that we come to Him by trusting Jesus. And that is the only way that He will ever accept anyone when we're united to Jesus by faith.

Let's pray together. Father, show us now if we have reason to have confidence in our relationship with You.

But Lord, make it crystal clear that anyone here who is trusting in themselves and who they are, what they are, what they've done, they fall short.

They can't save themselves. But Lord, help us all to see, to be reminded, to be encouraged, that if we'll just admit our sin, our failure, and hate it and turn from it, and trust Jesus and rest in Jesus.

[37 : 15] We will be forgiven because He died for our sins. We will be righteous because we have His right standing. So help us, dear God, to make the kind of commitment or to just simply say thank you so that we can all leave here this morning with joyful confidence that we have a right and good relationship with you.

Let's just pray and listen to the Lord and respond to Him as He wants us to during this time. Thank you.