

Philippians 3.1-4.1

v.1 Rejoice in the Lord (Fee: "he is both the basis and focus of joy")

- Rejoicing = an action, of praise and singing (not a mere feeling)

Paul reverses burden: no thought of it being burdensome for them, only for him! But happy to do it for their safety

v.2 Look out for the dogs (ironic: Gentiles = dogs, not Jews), the evildoers (ironic: the unrighteous under the Law, whose works they require), those who mutilate the flesh (ironic: those of the circumcision).

These people add their works to Christ's salvific work

Significance of circumcision for Jews:

1. Sign that are God's covenant people through Abrahamic covenant. See Gen 17.7 *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout the generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you*
2. As a result, "right with God", and assumes that will be Torah-observant. Became a source of pride/superiority for Jews (over Gentiles), esp. outward signs of circumcision, sabbath observance, food laws and ritual cleanliness.

Why would Gentile Christians be attracted/persuaded to circumcision?:

- fear that not children of God without it;
- corollary of circumcision that obey Torah: not justified/righteous before God under Torah if not circumcised (see Acts 15.1,5)

v.3 For we are the [true] circumcision...

- The true circumcision (i.e. those who are God's covenantal family/citizens of Heaven, are those who:
 - Worship by the Spirit of God (cf. Jn 4.23f.). Their hearts have been circumcised by the transforming work of the Spirit. Now "in Christ" and conformed to the cruciform life.

Motyer:

"Worshipping by the Spirit of God delivers from bondage to any special place and from the burden of obligatory animal offerings. Worshipping by the Spirit of God demands a heart that is right with him, a body that is a fit temple for the Holy Spirit. But worshipping by the Spirit of God also speaks of the agency of that divine Spirit, at work in us, at prayer for us, empowering worship

acceptable to God. Worship is a holy thing of the deepest and most satisfying reality, for we have here the promise that in worship we are acceptable to God as his priestly servants through the operation of his Spirit.”

- Glory in Christ Jesus (= boast about Jesus Christ), not in the Torah or Torah-observance. This = how others should perceive us.
- Put no confidence in the flesh (Jewish descent, or own righteousness). If glory in JC, no room for self-glorifying/glorification. Motyer: “*Flesh* sums up what a person is apart from the grace of Christ – the human being as yet unchanged by God’s redeeming and regenerating work.”

This then, is the cause of the true joy Paul has in Christ Jesus (v.1).

vv.4-6 Paul’s boast:

- If flesh were important/reason for confidence, Paul has more to be confident about than anyone
- 1st 4 were privileges given by birth; last 3 were Paul’s achievements
 - Circumcised on the 8th day
 - Of the people of Israel
 - of the tribe of Benjamin (Saul - 1st king – a Benjaminite, in whose territory = Jerusalem and temple)
 - Hebrew of Hebrews
 - As to the law, a Pharisee
 - As to zeal, a persecutor of the church
 - As to righteousness under the law, blameless
- Problem with righteousness under the law = that all determined by outward acts and observances. Could be totally corrupt within (cf. Jesus’ condemnation of Pharisees as whitened sepulchres – Matt 23.27-28).
- Life under Torah alone offers neither life nor fellowship with Christ
- NB. Paul’s description of himself in this poem mirrors Christ’s *kenosis* in that Paul gave up what the world considered a top position (Pharisee) to become a slave of Christ, imprisoned.
- But now counts everything as loss (because has lost everything for Christ)/ as rubbish in order that may gain Christ. NB. All his self-confidence shattered in Damascus Rd encounter: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”
NB. As a leading Pharisee Saul may have been considered to have “had it all” i.e. status/honour, security etc. (see Matt 23.1-7) He has exchanged all that for being persecuted, beaten, imprisoned...!
- Circumcision/being Jewish separated him from God and Gentiles.

- NB. anything ‘in the flesh’ will decay and not survive death => any confidence can only be temporary. Hence the need to have confidence beyond death.
- Knows, now that he is “in him”, that he has no righteousness of his own – from the law (which related to outward observable acts only), but only that which comes through faith in Christ. = changed STATUS – righteous/justified. Motyer: “We reach the goal not by the stairs but by the lift”.
- His desire is that he “may know him and...” (= CHANGE IN KNOWLEDGE: not knowing about, but knowing personally)
 - the power of his resurrection
 - share his sufferings (= CHANGED LIFESTYLE)
 - become like him in his death
 - attain the resurrection from the dead”
- THIS SHOULD BE GOOD NEWS FOR US ALL: FAITH ALONE cf. “In Christ Alone”

v.12

- recognises that has not yet obtained the resurrection, nor the perfection that will come with it (incl. transformation of earthly body, v.21), but presses on towards them, confident in what Christ has achieved for him. Christ Jesus “has seized me for his own” (12). He is now **Paul’s source of identity and object of affection.**
- ‘pressing on’ = forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. The Christian life is a journey towards a goal; it’s also a process of refinement – to become more like Christ. Either we grow closer to God or we drift further away.
- The prize = the upward call of God in Jesus Christ (in terms of 1 Thess 4.16f.?, but certainly to the resurrected life – ultimately back here on earth) . Many passages tell of the prize awaiting us: Luke 19.7; 2 Tim 4.8; 1 Peter 5.4; Rev 22.3f.; Rev 7.14; 1 Thess 4.17; 1 Cor 2.9.

Summary of vv. 4-14: Paul’s example

- Paul’s growing delight in “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”
- His reliance on Christ alone for salvation – the righteousness from God that depends on faith
- His determination to be like him and to do his will
- His single-minded pursuit of the prize – the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

v.15 Let those of us who are mature think this way... only let us hold true to what we have attained (i.e. keep focused on the things which will endure)

v.17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those...

(v's those who "walk as enemies of the cross of Christ, i.e. who have rejected God's grace and the cruciform lifestyle))

- Their end is destruction (cf. the "prize" Paul presses on towards)
- Their god is their belly (i.e. their own desires, not the Lord Jesus)
- They glory in their shame (cf. v.3 - Paul glories only in Christ Jesus)
- Minds set on earthly things (v's heaven, v.20)

NB. progression of desire (belly) -> will -> mind, cf. Augustine: "What the heart desires the will chooses and the mind justifies."

Paul weeps over those who have departed from the truth, who he describes as "enemies of the cross". Not a statement of judgment but of pastoral concern. They are destroying themselves. He doesn't want anyone else to go down this path, hence this warning.

Jesus described his enemies as those "who did not want me to reign over them" (Luke 19.27). They are also those who reject God's salvation through the cross. Can't have Christ's salvation without also submitting to his lordship.

v.20

- Our citizenship is in heaven... await a Saviour (1 Thess 4 again), Whereas the enemies of the cross glory in the corrupted things of this world, those in Christ look forward to Christ's return (perfect union with oohim) and the restoration of the world to what God intended at creation: a world under his reign, including transformed bodies.

4.1 stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved, whom:

- I love and long for
- My joy and crown

Paul's 5 key points:

- 1. Rejoice in the Lord (alone)**
- 2. Look out for those who would preach/model a false gospel**
- 3. Imitate and watch those (like Paul) who preach true Gospel**
- 4. Press on toward the goal (keep eyes fixed and energies focused)**
- 5. Stand firm as citizens of Heaven as await the Lord's return**

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What things do churches “add” to the Gospel today? Why do they do this?
2. In what ways do churches depart from the cruciform life of the Gospel today, driven by human desire, and/or glorying in what they should be ashamed of?
3. How do you express your “rejoicing in the Lord”?
4. Paul says to imitate him and “keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us”. Who might you imitate? Who might regard you as a person they should imitate (e.g. a son/daughter; nephew/niece; grandchild...)?
5. What is your greatest passion in life? How/to what extent does the upward call of God in Christ Jesus shape your life? What competes with this call on your life?
6. To what extent do you look forward to Christ’s return? What excites you most about it?