

## **Essays in Philippians- Faith Matters the Most**

Phil. 3:7

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The third chapter of Philippians is a warning about Judaizing teachers. They demanded adherence to the Law of Moses. They thought the law gave them an advantage over the rest of the world. This misperception caused them to become self-righteous. They thought their membership in God's kingdom was based on who they were and what they had accomplished by keeping the law. In reality, this attitude was excluding them from the kingdom.

Of course, no one could relate to this misconception better than Paul. He once thought just like this. He offers his Jewish credentials in this text to highlight his past struggles with self-righteousness: "...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" (Phil. 3:4-6).

Paul was an accomplished Jew. Yet, none of his achievements mattered. They did not elevate his status before God. His false sense of accomplishment had hindered him from the kingdom. Paul writes about changing his attitude towards these accolades: "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 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).

God's accomplishments of defeating death by raising Jesus from the dead taught Paul a vital lesson about the human experience. His achievements in life would never equate, compare, or surpass what God achieved through the Messiah. He could not claim membership in God's family based on his righteousness. His resume could not forgive his sins. All that mattered was his faith in God's achievement in Jesus.

Paul's change of perspective is astonishing. From the standpoint of the world, he had everything to gain: power, wealth, and the respect of his peers. As a believer in the Messiah, he sacrificed all of this. Paul's transformation was the powerful result of his faith in the Gospel. Today, his conversion continues to give credibility to his testimony of the resurrected Jesus. Only God knows how many have been persuaded to believe the Gospel through the example and teaching of the apostle Paul.

### **Faith Matters Most**

In this part of the letter, Paul explains why he sacrificed everything he had previously gained. Rather than just stating faith as the reason, he uses the phrase, "the surpassing worth of

knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Paul knew Jesus as Lord because he witnessed His resurrected form. As a result, Paul began to discern the consequences of Jesus being the Messiah. He properly recognized that his only hope for salvation was to humbly obey Jesus, the Lord. He began to obediently live by faith.

Paul is a helpful example to us in our efforts to serve God. We would be wise to consider if our self-perceived accomplishments are hindering us from the kingdom. What is the source of our confidence? Often, our confidence is misplaced. We may trust in our family background. We may think that since our parents and grandparents were Christians, we will be saved on their merits. We may put our confidence in our material wealth. Throughout history, people have been deceived into thinking their blessings are evidence of their goodness. Today, we increasingly put confidence in technological progress. We expect technology to enhance our world and, ultimately, save us from death.

These are examples of how the self-righteous and self-reliant think. Some think they are owed salvation. Others think they can save themselves. As Paul indicated at the beginning of the chapter, some put their confidence in the flesh. Instead, we are to put our faith entirely in God. He alone has the power over sin and death. His power has been proven by raising Jesus from the dead. Therefore, faith in God is what matters most.

### **Sacrificing for Faith**

Paul’s sacrifices are both surprising and impressive. People continue to be amazed by how he became a believer despite having nothing to gain and everything to lose. In reality, however, this is a misperception of Paul’s conversion. By giving everything up, he had everything to gain. He gained the forgiveness of sins. At the end of his life, he was comforted by the hope of eternal life (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

The Gospel calls us to sacrifice. However, God does not call us to do anything He has not already done. By sending Jesus, God proved His self-giving love for us. Faith in this love will transform us and enable us to sacrifice selfishness. Paul stated this to the Corinthians when he wrote, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

### **Conclusion**

Faith is believing, trusting, and obeying. This is what Paul demonstrated by his conversion and what he labored to teach the self-righteous Judaizing teachers. Paul came to understand the futility of his accomplishments. What could his family background or zeal give him? Could those things forgive his sin and save him from eternal death? Of course, not!

We must never underestimate faith. Paul, in effect, states that faith cannot be overestimated. The worth of faith is surpassing. Faith puts us into Christ. Faith declares us to be in the right before God. Faith matters the most.