

Rejoice in the Lord always! Meditating on Philippians

True Christians

Philippians 3:1-16

Faith Church of Linden

By Daniel Patz on October 12, 2025

The following notes are a draft of my sermon. These are not my pulpit notes or a manuscript I use to preach with but something I type up before writing out my "pulpit notes". I hope they are helpful.

Scripture Reading

Philippians 3:1-16 ESV 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. (12) Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (13) Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (15) Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. (16) Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

INTRODUCTION

This week I watched a short clip of President Trump sitting at the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office. He said:

"If a country doesn't have religion, doesn't have faith, doesn't have God, it's going to be very hard to be a good country. You know, there's no reason to be good. I want to be

good because you want to prove to God that you're good so you go to that next step, right?"

He's partly right — our nation *does* need faith, it does need God! Without true Christianity, our culture cannot remain good for long. People may behave morally for a time, but without hearts transformed by grace, morality eventually rots.

But that phrase — “*you want to prove to God that you're good so you can go to the next step*” — that's exactly the misunderstanding Paul confronts here. That is not Christianity; that is moralism dressed up in religious clothing.

Philippians 3 is deeply personal for Paul — it's his **testimony**. He opens up his own story so that we can better understand the gospel and imitate his thinking.

This morning, I want us to see three movements:

1. **The Mark of a True Christian (vv. 1–3)**
2. **The Math of a True Christian (vv. 4–11)**
3. **The Motion of a True Christian (vv. 12–16)**

This is crucial.

👉 *Are you a true Christian?*

👉 *Do you understand what that means — what God has done in you, and what He calls you to?*

I. THE MARK OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN (Philippians 3:1–3)

Paul begins:

“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.” (v. 1)

This marks a new section in Philippians. After urging unity and humility — modeled by Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus — Paul now identifies the **true people of God**.

“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.” (v. 2)

He warns against false teachers — Judaizers — who insisted that faith in Christ wasn't enough. They said believers must also keep the Mosaic Law and be circumcised.

So with biting irony, Paul turns their language back on them: He calls *them* “dogs,” *them* “evildoers,” *them* “mutilators of the flesh.”

Then he declares:

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” (v. 3)

Here is the **mark of a true Christian** — not external ritual but internal transformation.

The True Circumcision — From God, Not Man

Physical circumcision was the outward sign of belonging to God’s covenant people, but it pointed to a deeper reality: the circumcision of the heart.

Deuteronomy 30:6 (ESV)

“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

Jeremiah 9:25–26 (ESV)

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh... and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.”

Romans 2:28–29 (ESV)

“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.”

Colossians 2:11–12 (ESV)

“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God.”

Marks of the True Believer (v 3)

1. They Worship by the Spirit of God

True worship is not ritual but spiritual — a heart alive to God.

John 4:23–24 — “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”
Question: When you worship, is it the overflow of the Spirit within you, or just outward form?

2. **They Glory (Boast) in Christ Jesus**

The believer’s pride is not in what we do but in who Christ is and what He has done.

Galatians 6:14 — “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Jeremiah 9:23–24 — “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom... but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me.”

Question: What do you find yourself boasting in — your goodness, your accomplishments, your faithfulness... or your Savior?

3. **They Put No Confidence in the Flesh**

True Christians reject self-righteousness and self-reliance.
Salvation is entirely God’s work from beginning to end.

Summary truth:

➡ The true Christian life begins with God’s inward work, producing worship, humility, and Christ-centered confidence.

Question: Has your heart been circumcised? Has God changed what you love, what you boast in, and where you find your confidence?

II. THE MATH OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN (Philippians 3:4–11)

Paul moves from the **mark** to the **math** — the spiritual accounting of the Christian life.

“Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” (v. 7)

Before Christ, Paul’s résumé was unmatched:

Circumcised on the eighth day, of Israel, tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, zealous persecutor, outwardly blameless.

But now he says — *all of it is loss compared to Christ.*

When conversion happens, the Holy Spirit changes your value system.

A. A Relationship with Him (v. 8)

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

This is personal — *“my Lord.”*
Not cold theology but warm relationship.

Like falling in love: once you know the treasure of that person, everything else fades.
So it is with Christ — *all I want is Him!*

Question: Is Jesus your surpassing worth? Or merely one part of your busy life?

B. A Righteousness from Him (v. 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.”

This is **justification by faith alone**.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Illustration: Picture your sin as a wallet in your hand. You hand it to Christ — He takes it and gives you His righteousness. That’s the great exchange of grace.

Question: Are you trusting your righteousness, or His?

C. A Resurrection through Him (vv. 10–11)

“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.”

The power of the resurrection means victory over sin now, and glory with Christ later.

Matthew 13:44 (ESV)

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field... in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

Paul says, “Jesus is that treasure. Everything else is rubbish.”

Summary truth:

➡ The Christian counts as gain what the world calls loss, because knowing Christ is of surpassing worth.

III. THE MOTION OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN (Philippians 3:12–16)

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” (v. 12)

The gospel changes not only what you value but **how you live**.

A. Humble Realism (v. 12)

Paul confesses he hasn’t arrived.

Maturity is honest humility — *I still have far to go, but grace keeps me moving.*

He presses on not to earn grace, but *because* grace has already claimed him.

Question: Do you live like someone who’s been captured by Christ’s love?

B. Forgetting and Straining (vv. 13–14)

“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

The Christian life is not passive — it’s pursuit.

Forget what’s behind — both past failures and past successes.

Strain toward what’s ahead — the upward call, the prize, *Christ Himself*.

Question: Are you pressing forward spiritually, or coasting on yesterday’s growth?

C. Follow My Example (vv. 15–16)

“Let those of us who are mature think this way... Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”

Paul's call: Think maturely. Stay true. Keep walking.
Hold fast to the gospel you've already received.

Summary truth:

➡ The Christian life moves forward with perseverance, humility, and confidence — knowing Christ will finish what He began. (Phil 1:6)

CONCLUSION

The Mark: Spirit-born worship, Christ-centered boasting, no confidence in the flesh.

The Math: Everything loss compared to knowing Christ.

The Motion: Pressing forward because He has made us His own.

Therefore —

“Rejoice in the Lord.” (v. 1)

He is both your **confidence** and your **prize**.

Final Appeals

Do you know Him? Do you have the mark of a true Christian?

Are you *in* Christ?

Has your heart been circumcised by the Spirit?

Do you glory in Christ Jesus?

Oh, that you would say today:

“He is my glory! He is my joy! If I lose everything else, I still have everything that matters — Christ Himself.”

No, Mr. President — you cannot prove yourself good enough for God.

But you *can* be accepted through Christ alone.

God gave His Son — crucified, risen, reigning — the source of unsearchable riches, wisdom, and life.

He offers righteousness to all who trust Him.

He is our Shepherd, Friend, Savior, Redeemer, Priest, Mediator, and King.

He alone is our righteousness.

And one day we shall share His resurrection glory.

But for now, we press on — knowing Him, sharing His sufferings, and rejoicing that *He has made us His own*.