

Gems from Philippians

3 – What Really Counts (Phil 3.2 - 5.1)

v.2-3: Paul has been opposed by some Jewish Christian missionaries who taught that all male gentile believers should be circumcised. Christians could enter God's kingdom only through the Jewish gate. These people followed Paul in his journeys and challenged his teaching. He felt they were like a pack of dogs yapping at his heels.

v.4-7: Paul says he had all the religious qualifications the Jews could possibly have and much more than most but none of them was worth a button beside knowing and belonging to Jesus. What these Jewish teachers valued so highly (and Paul had once valued), he now sees only as a loss and liability compared to walking with Christ.

v.8-10: "To share in His sufferings": The early Christians suffered much pressure and persecution and often death for their faith. (Cf. 2 Cor. 4.8-11)

v.12-14: Paul says we have never "arrived". No matter who or where we are we still have so much more to learn of Christ, so much more of His Spirit to receive, so much more to grow into and do for Him. He likens the Christian life to a race in which we keep our eyes on the goal and press toward it. (Cf. Hebrews 12.1-2).

v.17: "Imitate me" says Paul. He is not setting himself up as perfect or as a hero but simply as a follower and servant of Jesus Christ.

v.20: "Our citizenship is in heaven" or "You are a colony of heaven", Philippi was a Roman colony and many of its citizens were Romans. They wore Roman dress and lived as Romans although they lived in Philippi. Paul says we Christians are a colony of heaven. That is where our real citizenship is and our way of life and conduct ought to show that plainly in all we say and do.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever met people who said it was not enough to trust in Christ and to follow Him but you had to belong to their sect and obey the rules of their sect in order to get to heaven? Tell us about them.
2. In Paul's pre-conversion days he did everything in his power to prove himself a keen man of God. Why is he so rejecting of it now? Have you known people as religious as Paul and yet far from being Christian or Christ-like? Share.
3. What does Paul mean by "sharing the sufferings of Christ"? Does he mean that the suffering of Christ upon the cross is insufficient without our adding to it? Or does he mean that all the suffering of Christians (intense and common in those days) is felt by Christ Who stands with them? What do you think?
4. Is there ever a time when we have "arrived" in the Christian faith and are now perfect? Have you grown since conversion? How? How are you growing now? Share.
5. "Imitate me" says Paul. Who has influenced you most in your Christian growth? Why and how? Do you realise that you influence others?
6. Does your way of life show you are a Christian, part of the colony of heaven, on earth? Is that true of our church?
7. v.19 speaks of those whose minds are set on earthly things. What does he mean? Does he want us to be "so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use"? Or what?
8. "Stand firm in the Lord" says Paul. What helps you to stand firm for Christ in your life today?