



## **Joy in Believing (Philippians 3:1-21)**

Have you ever believed something to be true when it wasn't? When my oldest daughter was in sixth grade, she played in her first organized school basketball game with her dad as the coach. All ten girls traveled around the court like an amoeba with a player occasionally emerging from the crowd with the ball. Then it happened, my daughter broke free from the mass of players and shot the rock with perfect form. It banked off the glass into the basket, scoring the first bucket of her career. Elated, she repeatedly jumped for joy, celebrating her accomplishment as if she had won the NCAA Final Four.

There was just one problem. She had scored at the other team's basket. After a teammate pointed out her dilemma, her joy turned into tears of embarrassment. I substituted her out of the game, pulled her close to me, and told her, "Now you know what it's like to score, so go out and shoot at the right basket."

The Apostle Paul taught that accomplishments become embarrassments when we shoot at the wrong goal (Philippians 3:1-21). Joy comes from believing in Christ, fully surrendering our lives to Him and discovering forgiveness from the penalty of sin and freedom from the power of sin (Philippians 3:1). However, if we think that we can earn our way to this salvation by keeping the law, we will be embarrassed at judgment.

## **Beware of Legalistic Accomplishments**

First, Paul warned his audience to *beware of legalistic accomplishments* (Philippians 3:1-6). Legalism believes that keeping the law will lead to salvation. It places confidence in our ability to save ourselves, which is religion. As a Hebrew Pharisee from the tribe of Benjamin, named after Israel's first king, Paul communicated that he had every right to boast about being faultless in his legalistic righteousness. When we operate in this fashion, we make rules greater than relationships. Jesus described this as straining out a gnat while swallowing a camel (Matthew 23:24). We follow the letter of the law only to miss the spirit of the law.

### *Street Smarts for the Restoration Road*

Do you ever strain out a gnat to swallow a camel? Keep a daily score card of the times you place rules over relationships. It might occur when you exit the parking lot of a concert or sporting event, preventing cars from exiting in front of you. It might happen in the express checkout line at the grocery, and you notice that the person in front of you has more than 12 items in her cart. It might unfold when you win an argument with your



spouse or when your child's playing time on his sports team doesn't meet your standard of fairness. Placing rules over relationships strains out gnats and swallows camels.

### **Legalistic Accomplishments Become Embarrassments**

Second, Paul tells us that *legalistic accomplishments become embarrassments* because we shoot at the wrong goal (Philippians 3:7-11). Paul considered all his legalistic fervor as rubbish compared to experiencing Christ (Philippians 3:8). Only Christ provides the righteousness required by God. His holiness is applied to our eternal score card when we fully surrender our lives to Him (Philippians 3:9).

#### *Street Smarts for the Restoration Road*

Surrender your legalistic score card to Christ each night, reciting Philippians 3:9. Experience freedom from the penalty and power of sin through faith in Him.

### **Humbly Turn Toward the Goal of Love**

Next, Paul invited believers to *humbly turn toward the goal of love* and press on toward the high calling of God in Christ who loved them first (Philippians 3:12-16). Rome's pagan culture communicated that particular religions completed citizens in such a way that made them flawless. Although Christ lives in us as believers, we are not flawless (Philippians 3:12). However, we are complete in Christ, who graciously matures us as works in progress pursuing the goal of love (Philippians 3:14-15). This progress on Restoration Road can be two steps forward and one step back.

#### *Street Smarts for the Restoration Road*

Forget the embarrassment of your past legalistic efforts and humbly turn toward the goal of love by praying that God would give you His perspective of grace. Seek ways to demonstrate to others that your relationship with them is more important to you than rules. Rather than correcting or condemning a friend who exercises a liberty you resist, accept him in Christ. Instead of criticizing someone for sinning against you, overlook the offense. Rather than repeating that matter to someone else, keep it confidential and surrender it to God.

### **Serve like Christ**



Finally, Paul invited the church at Philippi to join with others in community to humbly *serve like Christ* (Philippians 3:17). Paul noted that enemies of Christ have destruction as their destiny. Their god is their stomach; their glory is their shame; and their mind is on earthly things (Philippians 3:19). Contrastingly, as believers, our destiny is to be shaped like Christ. He is our God; our glory is in Him; and our minds are set on heavenly things (Philippians 3:20-21).

### *Street Smarts for the Restoration Road*

Join with other believers to humbly serve like Christ. Search for someone in need, even a past offender in your life, and recruit your small group or rally a few believing friends to meet that need. Avoid receiving benefit or credit. To find opportunities to serve, visit [www.nlfw.org](http://www.nlfw.org).

### **Conclusion**

Accomplishments become embarrassments when we shoot at the wrong goal. Joy comes from believing in Christ; however, if we think that we can earn our way to salvation by keeping the law, we will be embarrassed at judgment. When we become aware of our legalistic efforts, we are in a position to surrender them to Christ, who turns us toward the goal of love, so that we may serve in community.