

Trusting Only in Jesus to Save Us



SABBATH—JANUARY 31

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Philippians 3:1–6; John 9; Philippians 3:9–16; Galatians 2:20.

MEMORY VERSE: “I want to know Christ [Jesus] better. Yes, I want to know the power that raised him [woke him up] from the dead. I want to join him in his sufferings. I want to become like [much the same as] him by sharing in his death. Then by God's grace [love and forgiveness] I will rise [wake up] from the dead” (Philippians 3:10, 11, NIV).



After Jesus woke up from the dead, baptism replaced circumcision or cutting off the tip of the male sex parts.

DO YOU BELIEVE that God's love and forgiveness really saves you? Some people have a hard time believing this Bible truth. They believe that God's mercy isn't enough to save them. They think they must add their own good behavior to God's saving gift. In Paul's day, some Christians believed that they needed to be circumcised to be saved. To be circumcised means to cut off the tip of the skin at the end of the male sex parts. In Bible times, this act was a special sign that showed that the Jews belonged to God. After Jesus woke up from the dead, baptism replaced circumcision or cutting off the tip of the male sex parts. But some Jewish Christians had trouble accepting this idea. They continued to believe that they must cut off the skin for God to save them. With strong words, Paul argues against this false idea. He says, “But we are truly God's people. And it is not because someone has circumcised us. It is God's own Spirit that leads us to worship God. We thank God because of what Christ Jesus has done for us. We know that it is not human ideas that can save us” (Philippians 3:3, EASY).

REJOICING IN THE LORD (Philippians 3:1–3)

Read Philippians 3:1–3. What advice and warnings does Paul give in these verses? What does Paul say about the followers of Jesus?

In these verses, Paul talks about one of the most important topics in his letter: joy. Paul will give his readers many reasons for being happy. Most important, we must trust in Jesus, and not in ourselves: “We don’t trust in ourselves or anything we can do. We take [feel] pride only in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:3, ERV).

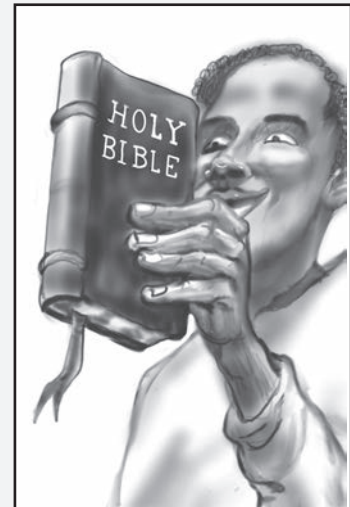
Paul also warns his readers to be careful. This warning is strong. We don’t read about this warning anywhere else in the Bible. The Philippians knew very well the danger that Paul was talking about. Do you see that Paul isn’t warning the Philippians about three separate things? Paul is warning them about one thing three different times. The warning is about a group of false teachers that Paul talks about in three different ways.

The Bible often named evil Israelites “dogs” (Philippians 3:2; compare Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 56:10; Matthew 7:6; 2 Peter 2:21, 22). False teachers were included in this group. Paul says these false teachers are evil workers. Paul warns the Philippians to “watch out for false teachers” (Philippians 3:2, NLV). Why? Because these teachers want the non-Jewish Christians to look and act the same as Jewish people. Paul’s words show us that these Jewish teachers tried to force the non-Jewish Christians to become circumcised to be members of the church. This teaching went against the Jerusalem Meeting (read Acts 15).

Paul told his readers to be happy in Jesus. Their joy would help them in their troubles. Joy also would put a stop to the false teachings (Philippians 3:1; compare Philippians 4:4).

God wants us to find joy in our lives. The Bible teaches us how to have true happiness and joy. We must (1) accept God’s mercy (Psalm 31:7); (2) trust in God (Psalm 5:11); (3) accept God’s blessings (Psalm 9:14); (4) obey His law (Psalm 119:14); (5) keep the Sabbath (Isaiah 58:13, 14); (6) believe the Bible, God’s Word (Psalm 119:162); and (7) teach our children to follow the Lord (Proverbs 23:24, 25).

What things can you rejoice about?



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how to have true
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PAUL'S PAST (Philippians 3:4–6)

Many Christians talk about their lives in two parts: life before and after they accepted Jesus. Paul does the same thing in Philippians 3. We may sometimes say that people who haven't accepted Jesus are "good people." In the eyes of most people, these non-Christians are good. But when we compare their lives to God's law, no one is good. Not even Christians.



Without Jesus, Paul understood that he was guilty of breaking the law.

In Philippians 3:4–6, Paul talks about many things in his old life. These things filled his heart with pride in the past. What are these things? What are the "good" things in your own life (now and in the past)?

Paul compares two groups of people: false teachers and non-Jewish Christians. The false teachers are teaching things that aren't true. The non-Jewish Christians trust fully in Jesus to save them. They don't trust in their own good behavior to earn God's forgiveness or favor (read Hebrews 6:1 and Hebrews 9:14; compare Romans 2:25–29). Paul's past was filled with honors. But none of those things saved him. Worse, they filled Paul's heart with pride. He was "blind" for a while to how much he needed Jesus.

Let's look at Paul's past. He was born a Jew. He was from the family group of Benjamin. Some of the most important cities in Israel belonged to this family group. Paul knew the Hebrew language. He also was a student of Gamaliel, a famous teacher (Acts 22:3; Acts 26:4, 5). Paul was a Pharisee or Jewish spiritual leader. So, Paul knew about the law and how Jewish people obeyed it.

Paul loved the law so much. So, he attacked Christians because he thought they didn't respect the Jewish law or way of life. Then Paul learned that the law had a deeper meaning. The law asked more from him than he could give. Without Jesus, Paul understood that he was guilty of breaking the law.

Compare Romans 7:7–12 with Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28. What do both Jesus and Paul say about the law? Why is faith in Jesus (Philippians 3:9), and not in the law, the only thing that makes us holy? Look at the question this way: How well do you keep the law? (At least, in the way that Jesus said we should keep it.) What should your answer tell you about why we need Jesus to save us?

THE THINGS THAT MATTER (John 9)

As we saw yesterday, Paul was filled with pride about many things. But these things made it hard for Paul to have faith. These things “blinded” Paul to his need for Jesus.

After Paul accepted Jesus, he saw things in a different light. He stopped feeling pride in his heart because he was a Jew. Now he was filled with pride that he was a member of God’s family in heaven.

Jesus “came down from heaven. So, He can talk to us about heaven. Jesus knows the spiritual danger we are in on this earth. He came to remove the sin from our hearts. He came to make us holy. Then we can sit next to Him on His throne in heaven. Jesus warns us about the danger of loving useless objects in this life. Jesus helps us to think about heaven and not the things on this earth. Then we won’t waste our time, talents, and life on things that are not important.”—Ellen G. White, in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 1, 1890, adapted.

During New Testament times, Paul became famous fast. But when Paul was on the road to Damascus, he saw Jesus (Acts 9). Jesus was covered with bright shining glory. When Paul saw Jesus, he became blind. When he was blind, that’s when Paul finally saw the truth about Jesus.

John 9 tells the story of another man who was blind and then saw Jesus clearly. Jesus says why He came to this earth: “ ‘I came so that those [people] who are blind may see. And I came so that those [people] who see may become blind’ ” (John 9:39, WE). What does Jesus mean in these verses? How may we obey this important rule in our lives?

What is more important than everlasting life? Nothing. Sad to say, the ideas and things of this life often make us blind to this Bible truth. The things of this life (Matthew 13:22; Luke 4:5, 6; 1 John 2:16) will fill our hearts and minds if we let them. So, we must fill our hearts and minds with the things that are worth much in God’s eyes. What are those things? We must become the same as Jesus in our hearts. We also must work with God to save people.

The things of this life can “blind” us to Bible truth and to what is really important. What will help us to keep our eyes on the things that really matter?



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THE FAITH OF JESUS (Philippians 3:9)

Paul had an amazing experience on the road to Damascus. He traded his old life for a new life in Jesus. “Yes, now that I know Christ Jesus as my Lord, that is the most valuable thing. Nothing else is important at all. I have thrown everything else away, so that I can serve Christ. All those other things are like [the same as] dirt to me. I think about them like that, so that I can have Christ. I want to be united [joined together] with him. Because I believe in Christ, God accepts me as right with him” (Philippians 3:8, 9, EASY).

Paul says “I want to be united with” Jesus. What do you think Paul means? Also read Ephesians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 2:9; and Galatians 2:20 for the answer.



From the start, God’s plan included His wish to join the family in heaven and the human family together.

Many people have tried to explain Paul’s words. The best explanation comes from Paul himself in his letter to the Ephesians. In this letter, Paul talks about God’s saving plan: “God will make that plan happen when the time is completely right. At that time, he will bring everything together so that Christ rules [controls] all of them. That includes the things that are in heaven, and the things that are on earth” (Ephesians 1:10, EASY). From the start, God’s plan included His wish to join the family in heaven and the human family together. Paul explains how that plan will happen: “Because we belong to Christ, God makes us right with himself. He makes us his own special people. He makes us free from the power of sin” (1 Corinthians 1:30, EASY).

What does it mean to be in Christ Jesus? When we are in Christ Jesus, we are born again. God makes us wise. He makes us holy. He gets us ready for heaven. Finally, at the Second Coming, Jesus will change our bodies. Jesus does everything for us and in us. When we accept Jesus into our hearts, we have everything we need.

Read Philippians 3:9. Paul compares two things in this verse. What are they? Why is this idea important to remember always?

Jesus gives us His saving faith. If we are in Jesus, He lives in us (Galatians 2:20) and helps us to obey. His faith gives us life because we believe in Him.

KNOWING JESUS (Philippians 3:10–16)

Read Philippians 3:10–16. What are some of the ideas that Paul talks about in these verses?

For sure, nothing is more important than our knowing Jesus. When we know Jesus, He will accept us (read Matthew 7:21–23). So, how do we know Him? We know Jesus because the Bible tells us about Him. When we read the Bible and live Bible truth, we know Jesus. We can't know Jesus face-to-face, as His followers did. But look what happened to them: they didn't understand His words. So, we need the Holy Spirit to help us to understand and lead us (read John 16:13). The more we know Jesus, the closer we become like Him. Jesus helps us to wake up from the dead (Philippians 3:10, 11). Then we live a new life in Him (Romans 6:4).

We also come close to Jesus in our hearts when we suffer as He suffered (Philippians 3:10). Every test, hard time, and painful experience helps us know what Jesus suffered for us. Then we better understand Jesus and His plan to save us.

Paul compares our experience with Jesus to a race. He says, “I am like [the same as] a runner who wants to reach the end of the race. I run straight towards that place, so that I can win God's gift. Because I belong to Christ Jesus, God has called me to live with him in heaven. That is God's gift to me at the end of the race” (Philippians 3:14, EASY). Jesus died, woke up from the dead, and went to heaven. In the same way, God invites us to accept the same reward: everlasting life.

Of course, we continue to wait for the day when Jesus will change us (Philippians 3:21). But when we know Him, we invite Him to live in our hearts every day. Then we will become the same as Jesus in every possible way that we can now. Paul wanted this experience more than anything else. If we want it, too, we must act the same as if we are in a race. Runners pay no attention to who is behind them or how many miles they've run already. They think only about the prize that waits for them at the end of the race.

Why is it important for you not to keep looking back at your mistakes and sins? Why must you look ahead to everything that God promises you right now in Jesus?



Runners think only about the prize that waits for them at the end of the race.



“The light of Jesus must shine in everything we do and say.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Do you want to look the same as Jesus? Do you want to live with God in your heart? If you want to serve God, you must give everything you have to Jesus. Everything you do, you must do to honor Him, too. Jesus won’t accept half of your heart. He wants the whole heart. You must learn what it means to give up everything for Him and to Him. Study the Bible. Learn what the Bible means. Obey its teachings. When you do these things, you may become an excellent Christian. Day after day, God works with you. He will make you holy and perfect. He will help you pass the final test at the end of time. Every day, each Christian is part of an amazing experiment. We show everyone in heaven and on earth what the Good News about Jesus can do for sinners.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 483, adapted.

“As we wait for Jesus to come back, we must tell everyone to look to Jesus. We must give the last message of God’s mercy to everyone on earth. This message will show people God’s love. As God’s children, our lives must show God’s glory. We show God’s glory when we show how God’s love and forgiveness saves us and changes us for the better.

“Jesus is the light. His light must shine in everything we do and say. Then our words and behavior will be holy.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 415, 416, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think some more about rejoicing in the Lord. Why is it so important to remember the love, saving power, and the good things God does for us? How can these things help you during the hard times in life?
- ② Without God’s love and forgiveness, we can’t obey Him. Why are these gifts so important as we wait for Jesus to come back? For sure, our good behavior doesn’t save us. At the same time, can we obey God if we don’t love His rules?

UNEXPECTED CHURCH VISIT

Gilbert Fimaka woke up on a Sunday and wanted to go to church.

Gilbert was a 22-year-old medical missionary in Zambia. A medical missionary is a Bible worker who teaches people about the Seventh-day Adventist health message and natural healing. Gilbert told his roommate what he wanted to do. Gilbert's roommate also was a medical missionary. Gilbert and his roommate just finished up a three-week trip to do medical missionary work out in the country in Zambia.

Gilbert said, "I want to visit a church here before we leave. I want to share the Bible with the church members and tell them about the seventh-day Sabbath."

Then Gilbert laughed at his plan. His roommate laughed, too. The idea was crazy! But in his heart, Gilbert wanted to go. So, he went. Gilbert went to the church nearest to the place where he lived. As he entered the church, he felt nervous. He knew he couldn't just announce, "Sunday is not the day of worship."

To Gilbert's surprise, the church members made him feel welcome. Many members knew Gilbert from this medical missionary work. They welcomed him with warm hearts. They gave him a seat of honor with the church leaders.

Then it was time for the sermon. To Gilbert's surprise, he was invited to preach. He got up to talk, but he was afraid to talk about the Sabbath. So, he opened his Bible to the book of Job.

As Gilbert preached, he heard a voice say in his heart, "Talk about the Sabbath." Gilbert didn't pay attention to the voice. He continued preaching. The voice told him the same thing again. When the voice talked to him a third time, Gilbert turned in his Bible to Leviticus 23:3. He read, "Work for six days, but the seventh day, the Sabbath, will be a special day of rest, a holy meeting. You must not do any work. It [the Sabbath] is a day of rest to honor the LORD in all your homes" (ERV). Then Gilbert read Matthew 28:1 and Genesis 2:1–3.

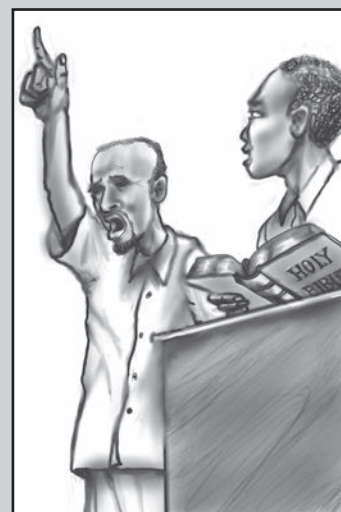
Gilbert said, "The seventh day is not Sunday, but Saturday. So, the real day of worship is Saturday, and not Sunday."

When Gilbert finished the sermon, a church leader stood up and announced, "I will stop worshipping on Sunday. From now on, I will worship only on Saturday."

On their way out of the church, many members talked about the sermon. Some members were crying. One member said, "We didn't know that we were worshipping on the wrong day." Someone else said, "From now on, we will worship on Saturday."

A short time later, the church leader got baptized in a Seventh-day Adventist church. Many other church members started to study the Bible so they, too, could get baptized.

INSIDE *Story*



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