

Philippians Chapter 3

Philippians 3:1 "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed [is] not grievous, but for you [it is] safe."

The word, "finally" here, indicates that this is summing up the things he had said to them in the last chapter. This is a translation point, not a conclusion, since 44 verses remain in this book.

He sent Epaphroditus, and wanted to send Timothy to them to keep them instructed in the ways he had started them in. He is saying this letter of instruction is not hard to write, because he loves them and they know that he loves them.

Anything he would say, would be well received, because they know what he would say would be in the way of instruction, not to criticize them, but to help them.

This has been Paul's familiar theme throughout the epistle which has already been heard (in chapters 1 and 2). Now he adds, rejoice in the Lord which is the first time he has added this, signifying the sphere in which the believers joy exists. A sphere unrelated to the circumstances of life, but related to an unassailable, unchanging relationship to the sovereign Lord.

"The same things": What he is about to teach them in the verses that follow, he had previously given them instruction in, regarding their opponents. "It is safe" is a warning to protect the Philippians from succumbing to the false teachers.

Philippians 3:2 "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision."

"Dogs" is not speaking of an animal, but of the lost Gentile world. During the first century, dogs roamed the streets and were essentially wild scavengers. Because dogs were such filthy animals, the Jews loved to refer to Gentiles as dogs. Yet here Paul refers to Jews, specifically the Judaizers, as dogs to describe their sinful, vicious and uncontrolled character.

"Evil Workers": The Judaizers prided themselves on being workers of righteousness. Yet Paul described their works as evil, since any attempt to please God by one's own efforts and draw attention away from Christ's accomplished redemption is the worst kind of wickedness.

"Concision": The apostle refuses to call Judaizers "the circumcision." The very expression applied (in verse 3), to genuine Christians. Instead he calls them "the concision," meaning, those who mutilate or cut the flesh.

Judaizers mutilated the flesh by imposing circumcision on their converts, believing the ritual to be necessary for salvation. But the true "circumcision" consists of those circumcised of the heart, not of the body, recognizing the ritual to have been abrogated by Christ. Circumcision of the body no longer had spiritual value and significance.

The main thing that Paul is warning them against in these things is the Judaizers who were trying to put them back under the law. They appear in the natural to be believers in Christ, when, in fact, they have not given up Judaism.

Paul is saying; do not get back into the flesh religion. Christianity is of the spirit, not the flesh.

Philippians 3:3 "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

“Worship God in the spirit”: The first characteristic Paul uses to define a true believer. The Greek word for “worship” means to render respectful spiritual service. The word “Spirit” should have a small “s,” to indicate the inner person.

The circumcision or true people of God are described here in three ways:

- (1) They are those who worship God in the spirit. Their worship of God is prompted, directed and enabled by the Holy Spirit.
- (2) Real Christians also rejoice in Christ. They boast and take pride in Him, not in themselves.
- (3) They have no confidence in the flesh. “Flesh” here means one’s earthly privileges, human attainments and religious accomplishments. God’s people refuse to depend on such things for their salvation; instead, they rely upon Christ to obtain favor with God.

The circumcision of Christians is of the heart. This circumcision is not of the flesh, but the cutting away of the lust of the flesh from around the heart. God is a Spirit, and those that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. The true people of God do not possess merely a symbol of the need for a clean heart; they actually have been cleansed of sin by God. Flesh religion is pertaining to the ordinances of the law.

Jesus fulfilled the law completely, when He gave His body and blood on the cross in full payment. We are no longer under the law. Christians are living in the grace of God. Christ in us is our hope of glory.

The Greek word for glory means to boast with exultant joy. The true Christian gives all the credit for all that he is to Christ. The only rejoicing a Christian has is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“No confidence in the flesh”: By flesh Paul is referring to man’s unredeemed humanness, his own ability and achievements apart from God. The Jews placed their confidence in being circumcised, being descendants of Abraham, and performing the external ceremonies and duties of the Mosaic Law, things that could not save them.

The true believer views his flesh as sinful, without any capacity to merit salvation or please God.

Verses 4-7 To counteract the Judaizers' claim that certain ceremonies and rituals of Judaism were necessary for salvation, Paul described his own lofty attainments as a Jew, which were greater than those his opponents could claim, but were of no benefit for salvation.

Philippians 3:4 "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:"

Paul had been a man of the law. He had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He had confidence in the fact that he had been circumcised the eighth day, and had lived by the Law of Moses. God brought a greater than Moses, when He brought His only Son to bring us grace from the law.

“Any other man” refers to Paul’s religious opponent, the Judaizer. Having just stated that Christians do not confide in human merit and religious achievements (verse 3), the apostle now shows that as far as one might do this, he himself could but does not. Paul draws back the curtain on his past Jewish life, lists his religious credentials, places himself on the Judaizers’ ground. And adopting their language, speaks of himself as having that very thing, the flesh, or human and religious merit, which he in fact has rejected.

He does this for two reasons:

- (1) to prevent his adversaries from alleging that his refusal to trust in religious credentials and accomplishments is due to his lack of them; and
- (2) to refute the Judaizers’ doctrine of there being any saving value in such human achievements.

The law is not done away with, just fulfilled. Paul is saying here, if the flesh could save you, I would have been saved by the flesh. He learned better on the road to Damascus.

Galatians 2:21 “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness [come] by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

Hebrews 10:1 "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, [and] not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."

The law was fulfilled in Jesus' crucifixion.

Philippians 3:5 "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;"

Paul is telling them that he had been more of a Jew than any of them, but he realized that was not the way to salvation. All of the things Paul said (in verse 5), were true, but that was still not the way to heaven.

“On the eighth day”. Paul was circumcised on the prescribed day of which was on the 8th day.

“Of Israel”: All true Jews were direct descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul’s Jewish heritage was pure.

“Of the tribe of Benjamin: Benjamin was the second son of Rachel and one of the elite tribes of Israel, who along with Judah, remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty and formed the southern kingdom.

“Hebrew of Hebrews”: Paul was born to a Hebrew parent his mother was Jewish and his father Roman, and maintained the Hebrew tradition and language, even while living in a pagan city.

“A Pharisee” The legalistic fundamentalists of Judaism, whose zeal to apply the Old Testament Scriptures directly to life, led to a complex system of tradition and works righteousness. Paul may have come from a line of Pharisees.

Philippians 3:6 "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

“Zeal, persecuting the church”: To the Jew, “zeal” was the highest single virtue of religion. It combines love and hate; because Paul loved Judaism, he hated whatever might threaten it.

Paul had kept the very letter of the Mosaic Law. He thought he was doing God a favor when he persecuted the Christians. Paul was so sincere in what he was doing, that Jesus appeared to Paul in a very bright Light, so that Paul would believe Him.

“The righteousness which is in the Law”: The standard of righteous living advocated by God’s law. Paul outwardly kept this, so that no one could accuse him of violation. Obviously, his heart was sinful and self-righteous. He was an Old Testament believer, but a proud and lost legalist.

But then Paul believed and changed completely. Now he is saying, that these who were promoting Judaism must change too, if they desire to be saved. The old way is not the true way to God.

Philippians 3:7 "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."

The word for “gain” in the Greek, is an accounting term meaning profit. The Greek word for “loss” also is an accounting term, used to describe a business loss. Paul used the language of business to describe the spiritual transaction that occurred when Christ redeemed him.

All his Jewish religious credentials that he thought were in his profit column, were worthless and damning. Thus, he put them in his loss column when he saw the glories of Christ.

Paul is saying, that he gave all of his position and former beliefs up to follow Christ. At one time, Paul had thought all of those things to be important, but now he has learned a better way.

Philippians 3:8 "Yea doubtless, and I count all things [but] loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them [but] dung, that I may win Christ,"

Paul was willing to turn his back on all the things he had been taught as a youth. He did not count anything in this world valuable enough to keep him from Christ. The Light of the world had shined in the heart of Paul, and he would never be the same again. Things of this world meant absolutely nothing to Paul, in comparison with Christ.

Paul had expanded his seven credentials listed (in verses 5 & 6), which were actually detriments or liabilities. Trusting in all these religious privileges and human attainments for salvation had not brought him closer to God, but farther away from Him.

Not only does Paul view those now as loss, but expanding on this idea he also regards all things, (i.e., any such human works and religious attainments on which one might depend to secure a place in heaven), as dung or excrement. As one rids himself of his body waste, so did the apostle rid himself of his "gains" upon realizing that they cut him off from God.

"I have suffered the loss", or I have forfeited, meaning Paul willingly renounced all his earthly advantages and Jewish privileges as a means of attaining salvation.

"That I may win Christ", that is, divine righteousness is imputed to the repentant sinner through his believing in Christ and depending on Him alone and not on his good works for salvation. One cannot be saved if he confides in his own efforts and accomplishments; these must be renounced before he can believe in Christ as Savior.

The greatest possession any person can have is Jesus Christ. Paul appreciated the greatness of being allowed to know Jesus Christ in reality.

Philippians 3:9 "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:"

Until Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he depended on his keeping the law to make him righteous before God. When the great Light of Jesus Christ shined on Paul, it made him see more clearly that he would never be righteous enough in himself to please God. Paul received the righteousness of Christ as a free gift.

Paul originally had a proud self-righteousness of external morality, religious ritual and ceremony, and good works. It is the righteousness produced by the flesh, which cannot save from sin.

Paul now was "In Christ". His union with Christ was possible only because God imputed Christ's righteousness to him so that it was reckoned by God as his own.

Faith is the confident, continuous confession of total dependence on and trust in Jesus Christ for the necessary requirement to enter God's kingdom. And that requirement is the righteousness of Christ, which God imputes to every believer.

The righteousness of Christ, through the washing in the blood of Jesus Christ, is the only righteousness that will put us in right standing with the Father God. Jesus took our sin and clothed us in His righteousness, if we are truly Christians.

Philippians 3:10 "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"

This verse may also be paraphrased: "in order that I may personally know Him, that I might both experience His resurrection power and share in His sufferings, and thus I will be more and more conformed to His death."

Paul wants "the righteousness of God" (verse 9), so that he can obtain a personal relationship with Jesus in actual day to day experience. This knowledge of Christ is obtained by experiencing in daily problems, needs, ministry and so forth, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Knowing Christ also entails participating in His sufferings.

Paul desires to share in the Lord's sufferings because they bring him into a deeper and more meaningful relation with Him, companionship in sorrow establishes the most intimate and lasting of ties, as afflicted hearts cling to each other.

The result of participating in Christ's sufferings is that Paul is being made like Him in death. This word "death" has double meaning here, including inward and outward, ethical and physical death.

As Jesus died in regard to sin on the cross, so Paul is doing more and more in his daily life. As Jesus was bodily slain, so the apostle, should Caesar's verdict go against him, is prepared to be slain.

The eyes of his understanding had been opened, and he could see clearly the Lord Jesus Christ. To know Him is to believe in Him. The following Scriptures are how we must know Him.

Romans 10:9-10 "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

With His blood, He has saved us and with His power He has raised us. Because Jesus rose from the grave, we will rise, if we believe.

Very few know the fellowship of His suffering. Paul thought it a privilege to suffer for Christ. To be able to share in His resurrection, we must share in His death. The flesh must die for the Spirit to live. Jesus is the Quickening Spirit, which makes all believers alive.

Philippians 3:11 "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

Paul is humbly stating that his hope, as the hope of all believers, is the resurrection. Because Jesus lives, we shall live also.

Reflecting his humility, he didn't care how God brought it to pass, but longed for death and for the fulfillment of his salvation in his resurrection body.

“The resurrection of the dead”: Literally “the resurrection out from the corpses.” This is a reference to the resurrection which accompanies the rapture of the church.

In (verses 12-14), Paul uses the analogy of a runner to describe the Christian's spiritual growth. The believer has not reached his goal of Christlikeness, but like the runner in a race, he must continue to pursue it. That this is the goal for every believer is also clear from (Roman 8:29, 2 Thess. 2:13-14 and 1 John 3:2).

Philippians 3:12 "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."

Paul denies that he has already attained his objective of (verses 10-11). That objective is to know Christ and all that is included in the knowledge, that is, experiencing His power, sharing His sufferings, being made like Jesus in death, and experiencing resurrection from the dead. At this point in his life, the apostle does know Christ, but not to the full extent possible. He has experienced His power, but not to the degree he desires.

He has been made like Jesus in His death, but he can die still more to sin and self. He does “walk in newness of life,” but there is room for improvement.

Either we're already perfect: Unlike the perfectionists who claim to be sinless in this life, Paul admits that he is not. If the chief of the apostles does not feel he has “arrived” spiritually, then neither should we.

I follow after Christ Jesus: Christ “laid hold of” Paul on the Damascus road for the very objective mentioned (in verses 10 and 11): to “know him”. Paul concedes that he has not yet realized this goal to the full extent possible, but he is in hot pursuit of it.

Paul now realizes, that by his own efforts, he could not reach heaven. Everlasting life is a gift bestowed on all who believe.

We see in the next Scripture what Paul is attempting to do.

2 Peter 3:18: "But grow in grace, and [in] the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him [be] glory both now and for ever. Amen."

Philippians 3:13 "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but [this] one thing [I do], forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,"

“Those things which are behind”, refers both to his religious credentials (verses 5-6), now counted as “loss” (verse 7), and to his past Christian achievements and successes. In ever pursuing his goal to know Christ (verse 10), he refuses to let past guilt pull him down or to rest on past laurels. Either could spell spiritual disaster.

“Those things which are before”, refers to his goal of knowing Christ, with all that implies. experiencing His power and participating in His suffering, becoming more like Him in death (verse 10), and experiencing the resurrected life (verse 11).

Paul was like many of us. When he looked back to what he had done against the Christians, and in turn against Christ, it was a great sorrow to him. He had to forget about the past and do all he could do that was good in the future. Not any of us can change the past. It is useless to look back, unless we use it as a lesson.

Start with this day and live for Jesus. We can look forward and try to do all we can that it is good. The Lord Jesus wiped the slate clean, when He forgave us of all of our sins. It is as if that part of our life never happened. We become a new creature in Christ.

Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Philippians 3:14 "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

The mark is the objective of (verses 10 and 11; i.e. knowing Christ). The prize is the joyful personal satisfaction of having attained it, as well as the divine commendation and reward to be granted in heaven for having reached this goal on earth. The high calling of God is the divine summons extended to the believer for salvation.

God is calling everyone to a better life in the heavens. The calling of God here, is speaking of the work Paul would do to bring the gospel of the Lord to the Gentile world. We are like Paul, in the fact that we cannot fulfill the call on our life within ourselves.

The only way we can live the life God would have us to live is let the Lord Jesus live through us. Christ in us is the hope of glory. The Holy Spirit must lead and guide us for this to become a reality.

Philippians 3:15 "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."

Since the spiritual perfection of Christlikeness is possible only when the believer receives the upward call, Paul is referring here to mature spirituality. He could be referring to the mature believers who were like minded with him in the pursuit or he may also have used "mature" here to refer sarcastically to the Judaizers, who thought they had reached perfection.

"Be thus minded" meaning that believers are to have the attitude of pursuing the prize of Christlikeness. To be otherwise minded speaks of those who continue to dwell on the past and make no progress toward the goal.

"God shall reveal": The Greek word for reveal means to "uncover" or "unveil". Paul left in God's hands those who were not pursuing spiritual perfection. He knew God would reveal the truth to them eventually, even if it meant chastening.

We were reading in the verse above how Paul would grow in the Lord. This, then is saying, if he is to be a mature (perfect) Christian, he must be guided by the mind of Christ. Jesus (the Light), will brighten the path that we are to walk for us.

He will lead us down this path that leads to everlasting life. If we stumble and fall, He will help us up, and we will walk again. If you are truly interested in serving God, He will show you the way.

Seek, and you shall find God. Ask, and it shall be given unto you. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. Jesus is the door we must go through to reach our heavenly home.

Philippians 3:16 "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

Whereto we have already attained refers to whatever level of Christian knowledge and spiritual maturity the Philippians have attained since conversion. They are to walk by the same rule, that is, live in accord with this same level of knowledge and maturity, if God is going to give them further light. Fidelity to truth possessed is a condition for receiving more.

In just a few words, this is saying, walk in the salvation you have received. Walk the narrow path of righteousness.

Philippians 3:17 "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example."

Paul tells them here, that he is walking that path. If they need someone to go with, just follow him.

Paul asks the Philippians to imitate him. Due to his absence, they cannot observe him, so he tells them to imitate those among them who live as he does.

Since all believers are imperfect, they need examples of less imperfect people who know how to deal with imperfection and who can model the process of pursuing the goal of Christlikeness. Paul was that model.

The Philippian believers were to focus on other godly examples, such as Timothy and Epaphroditus, and see how they conducted themselves in service to Christ.

Philippians 3:18 "(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ:"

Apparently, Paul had warned the Philippians on numerous occasions about the dangers of false teachers, just as he did the Ephesians.

“Weeping”: Paul had a similar response as he warned the Ephesian elders about the dangers of false teachers.

“Enemies of the cross of Jesus”: Implied in Paul’s language is that these men did not claim to oppose Christ, His work on the cross, or salvation by grace alone through faith alone. But they did not pursue Christlikeness in manifest godliness. Apparently, they were posing as friends of Christ, and possibly had even reached positions of leadership in the church.

There are two very different paths a person may choose to walk in this life. The straight and narrow path leads to everlasting life in God. The broad path leads to destruction. The sad thing is that many who profess to know Christ walk too broad a path.

Philippians 3:19 "Whose end [is] destruction, whose God [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame, who mind earthly things.)"

These enemies of the cross could have been either Jews (the Judaizers; verse 2), or Gentile Libertines, precursors of Gnosticism, who maintained a dualistic philosophy that tended toward antinomianism, which is a discarding of any moral law.

“End is destruction”: The Greek word for “end” refers to one’s ultimate destiny. The Judaizers were headed for eternal damnation because they depended on their works to save them. The Gentile libertines were headed for the same destiny because they trusted in their human wisdom and denied the transforming power of the gospel.

“God is their belly or appetite”: This may refer to the Judaizers’ fleshly accomplishments, which were mainly religious works. It could also refer to their observance of the dietary laws they believed were necessary for salvation. If the Gentile libertines are in view, it could easily refer to their sensual desires and fleshly appetites. As always, false teachers are evident by their wickedness.

“Glory ... shame”: The Judaizers boasted of their self effort, but even the best of their accomplishments was no better than filthy rags or dung. The Gentile libertines boasted about their sin and abused Christian liberty to defend their behavior.

“Earthly things”: The Judaizers were preoccupied with ceremonies, feasts, sacrifices, and other kinds of physical observances. The Gentile libertines simply loved the world itself and all the things in it.

The broad path that leads to destruction is a path pleasing to the flesh of man. The flesh of man must be crucified, so that the spirit of man can follow God on the narrow path. In these lessons, I have explained what I believe about mankind.

We are a spirit which dwells in a house of flesh. Our soul will either be ruled by the flesh and its desires, or it will be ruled by our spirit which wants to worship God.

Romans 8:13 "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

Philippians 3:20 "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ:"

“Our conversation” is really translated “our citizenship” The Greek term refers to a colony of foreigners. In one secular source, it was used to describe a capital city that kept the names of its citizens on a register.

“In heaven”, is the place where God dwells and where Christ is present. It is the believers’ home where their names are registered (Luke 10:20), and their inheritance awaits (1 Peter 1:4), other believers are there (Heb. 12:23). We belong to the kingdom under the rule of our heavenly king and obey heaven’s laws.

“We look” or eagerly wait. The Greek verb is found in most passages dealing with the second coming and expresses the idea of waiting patiently, but with great expectation.

The true Christian cares very little for the things of the earth. He is laying up treasures in heaven. This is just saying that believers in Christ are to live a heavenly minded life here on the earth. We watch the eastern sky for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ our Lord.

Philippians 3:21 "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

The word “change” means “transform”. The Greek word for “transform” gives us the word “schematic,” which is an internal design of something. Those who are already dead in Christ, but alive with Him in spirit in heaven, will receive new bodies at the resurrection and rapture of the church, when those alive on earth will have their bodies transformed.

The believer’s new body will be like Christ’s after His resurrection, and will be redesigned and adapted for heaven. “Subdue” meaning to subject: The Greek word refers to arranging things in order of rank or managing something. Christ has the power both to providentially create natural laws and miraculously overrule them.

Thank goodness, we shed this old body of flesh which has caused us so much trouble, and take on a heavenly body. The best explanation of this I can give is in the following Scripture.

1 Corinthians 15:44 "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

Praise God this natural body will return to the dust that it came from and we will have a new heavenly body. Read all the rest of (1 Corinthians chapter 15 beginning with the 35th verse to get the full picture).

Philippians Chapter 3 Questions

1. Finally, my brethren, _____ in the Lord.
2. What does "finally" in verse 1 indicate?
3. Why had Paul wanted to send Timothy to these Philippians?
4. In verse 2, who did he warn them to beware of?
5. Who are the "dogs" in verse 2?
6. What was the real thing Paul was telling them to beware of?
7. Who are the true circumcision?
8. The circumcision of a Christian is of the _____.
9. What is our hope of glory?
10. The law is not done away with, but _____.
11. When did Paul learn better than to depend on the flesh?
12. The law was fulfilled in Jesus' _____.
13. Give the description of Paul from verse 5.
14. Had Paul kept the Mosaic Law?
15. What showed his zeal?
16. What did Paul give his position and former beliefs up for?
17. What had happened to Paul, so he would never be the same again?

18. What is the only righteousness God will accept?
19. What is the hope of the believers?
20. When we receive Jesus, the sin in our life is gone, as if it had never _____.
21. How is the only way to be perfect?
22. What is verse 16 saying?
23. What are the two different paths a person may choose to walk?
24. The _____ _____ cares very little for the things of this earth.