

Philippians Chapter 3

Not having my own righteousness (Philippians 3:1-11)

Paul begins this chapter with the command to "rejoice in the Lord". He explains to the Philippians that writing the same things over and over again is not tedious, but rather it is better for them. Repetition is a means of emphasizing something so that we can remember it. This is what Paul is doing in order to instruct the church.

In verse 2 Paul tells the Philippians to beware of "dogs", "evil workers", and "the mutilation". He is not referring to three different types of people, but rather one group of people possessing each of these negative qualities. The NIV translation of verse 2 is much clearer, "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh."

Paul is describing a group of people who are opposers of the truth. He calls them "dogs", from a Greek word that literally or figuratively means "a dog". In this case, Paul is using the term figuratively. To call someone a dog was to insult them in the worst possible way. This was true in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. In 1 Samuel 17:43 we learn that when David came out of the Israelite camp to challenge Goliath, the giant said, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" Jesus also used this term in Matthew 7:6, and it is used in Revelation 22:15, where "dogs" are included in the list of those who remain outside the gates of the heavenly city.

These opposers are also described as "evil workers" and those of "the mutilation" which is a clear reference to the Jewish practice of circumcision. When the church was established on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, it was composed entirely of Jewish believers. These Jewish converts continued to observe the customs of the Law of Moses. This remained the case for several years until finally in Acts 10, the first Gentile converts were received into the church. Over time, more and more Gentiles became members of the church, until finally an issue arose over whether or not these Gentile Christians had to keep the Law of Moses in addition to manifesting faith in Christ.

In Acts 15:1 we find that "certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved". This was a serious problem for the early church. In Acts 15:6 it is recorded that the Apostles and elders came together in what has become known as the Jerusalem Conference to consider this matter. Acts 15:10-11 shows that circumcision was a "yoke on the neck" which even the Jews were not able to bear. Acts 15:19 records the decision of the Jerusalem Conference, "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God." This decision was communicated to the other churches in a letter from the Apostles and elders (see Acts 15:22-29, especially verses 24 and 28).

Paul also encountered a problem with these false teachers in Galatia and wrote his Epistle to the Galatians to combat their teachings (Galatians 5:11-14; 6:12-15). In Philippians 3:3 he states, "For we are the circumcision, who worship

God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

Paul understood and taught that the physical act of circumcision did not make a person a Christian. Only faith in Jesus and obedience to His commands could do that. A similar argument is made by Paul in Romans 2:28-29.

Christians are not to have confidence in "the flesh". The false teachers were placing all of their confidence in the fact that they had been circumcised, even more than their faith in Jesus. Paul attacks this confidence in verses 4-7.

To those who boast about their circumcision, Paul asks them to consider his "fleshly" credentials, a similar argument to what he makes in 2 Corinthians 11:18-33 and continued in 2 Corinthians 12:1-11. In the Philippian passage he simply says he has more reasons to boast than the false teachers did.

Paul states that he was "circumcised the eighth day" in accordance to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:3); he was "of the stock of Israel" (the name God gave to Jacob in Genesis 32:28); he was of "the tribe of Benjamin" (the same tribe as Saul, the first king of Israel, 1 Samuel 10:21). Paul further argues that he is "a Hebrew of the Hebrews"; a Pharisee (Acts 23:6); and, that he was so zealous for the Law of Moses that he actually persecuted the church (Acts 7:58; 8:1-4; 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-11). He sums up his argument by stating, "concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless". Certainly Paul had the credentials to boast about his fleshly accomplishments, if fleshly accomplishments meant anything.

In verse 7 Paul states that "what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." Paul gave up everything in order to follow Jesus (Matthew 13:44). He counted all things loss so that he might have the knowledge of Christ and "gain Christ (verse 8; see also Matthew 16:24-26)". He wanted to be "found in Him" (verse 9).

The only way to be found in Him was through faith in Jesus, not circumcision. Not by having his own righteousness which comes from the Law of Moses, but the righteousness from God that comes through faith in Christ (verse 9). This was the way for Paul to "know Him", that is Christ, and "the power of His resurrection" (Ephesians 1:18-20), and "the fellowship of His sufferings" by being "conformed to His death" (Romans 6:3-5). Following these steps would allow Paul to "attain to the resurrection from the dead" (verse 11; see also John 5:25-29).

Pressing on (Philippians 3:12-16)

In verse 12, Paul notes that he has not "attained" yet, nor is he "already perfected". The lack of attainment refers back to verse 11 and the resurrection from the dead. In 1 Timothy 6:12 and 6:19, Paul talks about laying hold on eternal life. What he is discussing in the Philippian passage is the need for Christians to be actively pursuing a closer walk with God in order to be able to attain eternal life and become perfected.

In response to not already attaining or being perfected, Paul states in verse 12 that he must "press on" that he may "lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus

has also laid hold of me". One way to look at this passage is to picture a runner devoting maximum effort to finish the race. A runner in this situation will ignore all else in pursuit of "one thing" (verse 13). Christ took hold of Paul (through grace). Paul, therefore pressed on, which was work responding to grace (see Philippians 2:13).

In verse 13 Paul also says that he does not count himself to have "apprehended". This, along with the fact that he had not "attained" or been "perfected" shows us that Christianity is a process, where a believer continues to grow each day.

Since Paul has not apprehended yet, he states that there is one thing he will do. This one thing is that he will forget those things which are behind (Luke 9:62) and will reach forward to those things that are ahead. He will press on toward the goal, the prize of the upward call of God! This is made possible only in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

In verse 15 Paul says that because of all these things, as many as are mature (in Christ) should have the same mind, that is they should agree with what Paul has written in the previous verses. If there are those who think otherwise (that is, the immature, those who do not have the same mind as Paul), God would reveal this to them, illustrating once again that Christianity is a process, not a one-time thing.

Either way, (whether one is mature or immature), Paul states in verse 16 that "to the degree that we have already attained" we should "walk by the same

rule" and "be of the same mind". The idea of walking refers to the Christian walk, that is, the way in which we conduct ourselves everyday (see Philippians 3:17-18). Christians should strive to be united and walk by the same rule (Galatians 6:16; Romans 12:16; 15:5). We should be of the same mind.

Our citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:17-21)

The writer of the book of Hebrews also refers to the fact that our citizenship is in heaven (Hebrews 11:13-16). In this passage Paul asks the Philippians to follow his example, to walk the same way he does. In fact, we are to "note those who so walk". Paul had set a good pattern for the Philippians to follow. He had also expected others to set a good example (Titus 2:7-8; 1 Timothy 4:12).

Unfortunately, there were some who called themselves Christians, but whose "walk" proved them to be "enemies of the cross of Christ" (verse 18). These false Christians had the following characteristics: their end is destruction, their god is their belly, their glory is in their shame, and they set their mind on earthly things. These things were so opposite of true Christianity that Paul needed to warn the Philippians. He was so concerned that he even wept as he wrote about this.

Setting your mind on earthly things is contrary to the Christian walk (Romans 8:5-8). If we do this we cannot be faithful to Jesus. We must acknowledge that our citizenship is in heaven (Ephesians 2:6), and order our life (our walk) to reflect this.

Jesus is currently in the heavenly realm. We eagerly wait for the time when He shall return to bring the Kingdom into completeness (Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 1:7). When Jesus returns He will transform our earthly bodies to conform to His glorious body (1 Corinthians 15:43-53; 1 John 3:2). Since this is the case, we must not set our mind on earthly things. Jesus will subdue all things to Himself (Ephesians 1:18-20; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).