

### Philippians 3—Contrast of True Faith vs. Legalism

In Philippians 1, Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi about his circumstances as a prisoner in Rome. They were to rejoice in his sufferings as Paul was rejoicing because by God's providence it had resulted in the "greater progress of the Gospel of Jesus Christ". In fact he exhorted the church to have joy in the midst of all circumstances knowing that our Sovereign God was at work causing all things to work together for good. In Phil. 2, Paul then turned to the circumstances in the church. The important thing was for the church to be unified in Christ, but of course with the fallen human race that is very hard. We all have our pride, our agenda, and natural selfishness to deal with. Therefore Paul encouraged them to "make my joy complete" by being unselfish, loving, and humble. In Phil. 2:5-11, Paul used the perfect example of Jesus Christ as the way the church was to conduct itself. Jesus preexisted in heaven as God with all the glory and worship and perfection as God, but out of love, He gave all that up willingly to save us. In fact, that humility and sacrifice actually resulted in His great exaltation. In the same way, the church should conduct itself as humble servants with the perspective that other's interests are more important than our own. How does a believer grow to the point that he can actually do that? Paul said to "work out your salvation with the fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you". Therefore two things are at work in our spiritual growth—First we show up and dedicate ourselves to act like the saved people in Christ that we are, and secondly and more important, God is at work in our heart changing us supernaturally so that we become progressively more like Christ.

### Philippians 3—Danger Within the Church of legalistic religion

In Phil 3:2-4, Paul warns the church of the false teachers within the church who would mislead them and divide them. In his description of these false teachers as "dogs" Paul will contrast their doctrine of salvation by works versus the true doctrine of grace. Paul will then give his own testimony of his previous life in self righteousness versus his new life in God righteousness in v.4-14. The Greek word for dogs here is literally curs, which would be the wild packs of street dogs that lived in the back alleys eating trash and small animals in those days—very derisive description of these legalists. He was so critical of them because of the damage they could do in a church. They had positions of authority, but taught a false message, and they were divisive. In v. 2, Paul calls them the "false circumcision" which tells us they were the Jews in the first century church who were still teaching that Jesus is our

Savior but you also had to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses (see Acts 15:5). Using the same imagery of the cutting away of circumcision, Paul wrote that the true circumcision was an inner one of the heart causing our heart to change and worship in the Spirit according to the truth.

In Phil. 3:4-14, Paul uses his own before and after Christ experience to make his point. If anyone could have been saved by perfectly keeping the 10 Commandments and all the other 600 some odd commands of Moses, it would have been Paul. He was the perfect keeper of the traditions and laws of Judaism in the eyes of men. By obedience to the laws and traditions from his very birth from a prestigious tribe, he was a special Hebrew Jew not tainted by the Hellenism of the predominant Greek culture. He was even a well educated member of the elite sect of Pharisees. He had been so zealous about his religion he was willing to persecute the church, and in the eyes of religious men Paul was righteous and blameless. Imagine the pride he used to have strutting around with all his diplomas and honors and held in high esteem by all his peers! The question we must answer, was it worth it to give all that up and even go to prison for Christ?

In Phil. 3:7-11, Paul delivers a beautiful before and after contrast of the far surpassing value of having a personal relationship with Christ and the difference He had made in Paul's life. We can find here in this passage at least five matchless gains of having Christ as your Savior instead of counting on your own self righteousness: 1. Knowing Christ Jesus my Lord- this knowledge is an intimate personal relationship with Jesus and "knowing" Him to be his Savior and Lord. Knowing and experiencing the love of God is a wonderful fulfilling thing-so great that in comparison, all the worldly honors are counted as losses in view of "the surpassing value of knowing Christ". 2. God views our bond in Christ as transferring or imputing Christ's righteousness to us. It's a wonderful exchange where repentant sinners have their sin imputed to Jesus, and His righteousness is imputed to us. 3. Believers are promised the life giving power that raised Jesus from the dead, and therefore we have the assurance of our own resurrection unto eternal life (v.10). 4. The fellowship of His sufferings in the sense that Christ suffered all the pain, beatings, rejection, and humiliations and ultimately physical death-just as we will. It all came with a greater purpose in the providence of God just as ours will. 5. Promise of glorification- Christ was taken up after the resurrection to be exalted and glorified in heaven and so we also will be glorified with Him (see Rom.8:17).

## The Already but Not Yet Perspective

In Phil. 3:12-14, Paul admits that even though all those benefits and promises are guaranteed by God and so are done deals, we have not completely experienced them yet. We still have to live in these fallen bodies for a time corrupted by a depraved fallen world. Paul makes it clear in this passage that even though his life has dramatically changed being in Christ, he is far from perfect (see 1 Cor.15:9-10). He sees his progressive spiritual growth as a sports metaphor, “I press on (in the race) so that I may receive the prize for which Christ died for me to have”. Paul’s point is his passionate concern for spiritual progress and growth. I think Peter also said this well about the Christian’s current life as a lifelong process of “growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18, Col. 1:9-10). We are not yet what we will be, but this life is to be fully used to live for Christ and glorify Him now, while we wait for completion.

## Paul’s Exhortation and Admonishment to the Church

Paul has already said he is not perfect so in verse 15 we should understand his use of “perfect” here as better translated “mature”, or that in Christ we have imputed righteousness. We who are in Christ should have the attitude that Paul has now—that we should be living our life for Christ and not ourselves. In v.17, he lays out a contrast of true believers versus only professing believers who live for themselves. Jesus said that people were either all in as believers, or else they oppose Him—you can’t have it both ways. Paul says these counterfeit Christians “set their minds on worldly things” to the extent that their end is destruction. Paul began this chapter 3 by saying “Beware of the dogs, the evil workers”. These dogs were the friendly professing Christians within the church, but they were deceptive, and in reality were wolves in sheep’s clothing with their own private agenda. These false teachers were marked by four shames—doomed to destruction, driven by sensual desires like lust and greed, self exaltation, and they live only for the present love of the world (3:18-19). Their earthly focus proved that the “dogs” we’re not saved. James 4:4 says that friendship with the (fallen) world is hostility toward God, and 1 John 2:15 says “If anyone loves this world the love of God is not in him”. In contrast to these counterfeit Christians, Paul lays out our true identity, true hope, and true destination in Christ.

## Our Citizenship is in Heaven—Philippians 3:20

Our purpose for living, our motivation for holy living, and our focus on our future is all wrapped up in our eternal destination. We all know deep in our hearts that this world is not right, it is lacking, incomplete, and that we were made for something way better. Remember what awaits us in heaven—our names are in God’s roll call book, our Savior is there, our fellow beloved believers are there, our inheritance is there, our rewards are there, and our treasure is there. The “dogs” lived for the here and now, but Paul and his disciples believed their true citizenship was in heaven and as soon as Jesus comes back He will make that a reality. Therefore Paul lived each day for that day. Jesus is there in heaven right now at the right hand of God Almighty, and at God’s appointed time Jesus will come back for us. Whether we are physically dead in the grave or still alive, Jesus will transform these earthly bodies into “conformity with the body of His glory”. Meaning that He who created all the atoms that form our molecules into cells that make up this body also has the power to remake our body into a perfect heavenly body suited for eternity in glory. A recap of vs.17-21 might say, “Look to godly examples, look out for worldly examples, and focus on the glorious hope of the resurrection.” We are citizens of heaven already, but we must live here now, nevertheless we are expected to live like the heavenly citizen we are.

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