

## Text: Philippians 3.1-21

Chapter 2 was about Christian unity through humility, adopting the mind of Christ.

Chapter 3 is about steadfastness in the face of opposition, a topic introduced in chapter 1:

Phil 1.27-30 ¶ Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are **standing firm** in one spirit, with one mind **striving together** for the faith of the gospel;<sup>28</sup> **in no way alarmed by your opponents** — which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God.<sup>29</sup> For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,<sup>30</sup> experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

### I. Exhortation to joy (1)

- Many blessings can be cause for joy, but Christians *always* have the Lord, the chief object of joy
- As a prelude to what follows, Paul explains that he is not wearied by talking about false teachers (see following), rather it is safe for them

### II. Warning about Judaizers (2-4a)

#### A. Verse 2

- Beware – 3x — urgent warning
- “Dogs” = Judaizers
  - Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs
  - Ancient world did not have pet dogs – dogs were unclean, vicious threats
- Evil workers – points to character
- False circumcision – clearly identifies who Paul is talking about, those circumcised for the wrong reason (for justification)

#### B. Verse 3

- The true circumcision
  - Those who worship in the Spirit
  - Those who glory in Christ

- Those who put no confidence in the flesh
- No confidence in the flesh means we do not rely on any outward rite for justification — we can do nothing to make ourselves acceptable to God

#### C. Verse 4a

- Paul makes this warning against confidence in the flesh, even though he “qualified” according to the Judaizers, *i.e.* Paul was a circumcised Jew

### III. Paul’s view of his privileges (4b-7)

#### A. Verse 4b-5

- Paul has more grounds to have confidence in the flesh than these challengers
- Pedigree: a circumcised Jew who knew his ancestry all the way back to Benjamin
- “Hebrew of the Hebrews” — as Jewish as you can get, not lax in any of his practices
- A Pharisee by upbringing and choice

#### B. Verse 6

- A persecutor of the church
- Blameless under the Law
  - Not sinless, blameless

“Like most ‘religious’ people today, Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven! It was not bad things that kept Paul away from Jesus—it was good things! He had to lose his ‘religion’ to find salvation.”<sup>1</sup>

#### C. Verse 7

- Paul once counted all these features of his life as spiritual “gain”
- Now he sees them as “loss” — they profited him nothing

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996), 84.

## IV. The greater goal (8-11)

### A. Verse 8

- Paul had advantages over other people that might count something to his status before God (apostleship, personal connection with Christ, the apostles, etc)
- Paul counts all his advantages as loss (useless for salvation)
- The value is in a personal relationship with Christ
- For Christ, Paul has given up everything

“rubbish” a very strong word: “Its derivation is uncertain, but it appears to have referred to excrement, food gone bad, scraps left over after a meal, and refuse. In extrabiblical Greek it describes a half-eaten corpse and lumps of manure.”<sup>2</sup>

### B. Verse 8e-11

- Paul’s object: gain Christ
- Paul’s objective: to be in Christ (at the judgement)
  - Not based on self-righteousness
  - Based on Christ’s righteousness through faith
- Paul’s personal devotion: knowing Christ (10)
  - “power of his resurrection” = the power that conquers death within (the flesh) [he knew he would eventually experience literal resurrection]
  - “fellowship of his sufferings” = partnership, partaking in the very sufferings of Christ (Christ’s sufferings continue in his body, the church)
  - “conformed to His death ... to ... attain to the resurrection” = willing to die for Christ, with a view to rise with Christ
- These phrases mark a total commitment to identification with Christ

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Phil 3.8.

## V. Paul's persistent zeal (12-17)

### A. Verse 12-14

- Conscious that there is more to know and experience of Christ
- Consequence: pressing on to reach the goal for which Christ reached out to him "lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of"
- Therefore: he forgets what is behind, presses forward to what lies ahead (13)
- The goal: the prize of the upward call (14)

"In my own pastoral experience I have discovered that many Christians find it hard to move ahead toward greater spiritual maturity because they keep looking at their past. Sometimes the memory of past successes makes them feel that they have attained sufficient spiritual growth and so they do not press on to greater maturity. More often the memory of past failures tends to discourage other believers from trusting God for present and future victories. As believers we need to be forward-looking and not dwell on what we have experienced but rather on what the Lord still wants us to experience."<sup>3</sup>

### B. Verse 15

- Exhortation: everyone should adopt this attitude
- Everyone should look for God to show us our deficiencies in this attitude

### C. Verse 16

- Exhortation: everyone should avoid falling back from our present spiritual relationship with God

### D. Verse 17

- Follow Paul's example
- Observe [and follow] those who do follow Paul's example

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<sup>3</sup> Constable, Phil 3.13.

## VI. The final contrast (18-21)

### A. Many walk away (18-19)

- There are many who are “enemies of the cross”
- Their end is destruction

Not clear if he means destruction of final judgement or spiritual shipwreck in this life

- Their characteristics
  - Follow their appetites [sensuality dominates]
  - Glory in shame [love shameful things]
  - Set on earthly things [low value on spiritual things]

### B. You look ahead (20-21)

- Citizenship is in heaven: Philippians were citizens of Rome, this is better
- We eagerly await our Saviour from heaven, the Lord Jesus
- When he comes, all those earthly aspects of life that are so distracting will change as we are transformed
- Christ will do this under his authority over all creation