

CONCERNING THE WAY

January 23, 2013

LESSON 150: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS



Chapter 3

In this chapter Paul warns about false teachers who were perverting the true gospel message of grace, who had faith in themselves that they could earn salvation by doing good works. Instead Paul encourages the Philippians to trust in the righteousness of Christ, not their own.

Philippians 3:1 So then, my brothers, keep on rejoicing in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you; indeed, it is for your safety.

- Again Paul tells the Philippians to keep on rejoicing “in the Lord”. He repeats this several times in this letter, which tells us it must have been an issue in this church. Repetition is how we learn. No matter what our circumstances are, we can rejoice that we have salvation and an inheritance in Christ and that He’s always with us and knows what’s best for us.

Philippians 3:2-4 Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil workers! Beware of the mutilators! (3) For it is we who are the circumcision—we who worship in the Spirit of God and find our joy in the Messiah Jesus. We have not placed any confidence in the flesh, (4) although I could have confidence in the flesh. If anyone thinks he can place confidence in the flesh, I have more reason to think so.

- Sometimes Jews referred to Gentiles as “dogs”, but the Philippian church was almost completely Gentile, Paul couldn’t be using it that way here. He was speaking about the “Judaizers”, false teachers who taught that grace by faith in Christ wasn’t enough to be saved, but you had to also obey the Mosaic Law. Paul considered these guys to be very dangerous, distorting the gospel like they did, and he warns the church to watch out for them, calling them “dogs”, “evil workers”, and “mutilators”. Are there any groups today that would be similar to the “Judaizers”?
- One of the things the Judaizers insisted on is that a man must be circumcised to be saved. But Paul says it is we who trust in Christ alone, Jews and Gentiles, who are the real circumcised people. The “true circumcision” is the Body of Christ, the church in this age, those who do the following three things:
 - We worship in the Spirit of God – constant worship is part of our daily behavior, and we worship God through the Holy Spirit (John 4:24).
 - We find our joy in Jesus Christ – we always find joy in what Christ accomplished for us on the cross. It also means we recognize that Jesus is Jehovah God (Jeremiah 9:23-24, 1 Corinthians 1:29-31)
 - We do not put any confidence in our flesh, our own efforts, to save us. We know we are not good enough to get into heaven. In what ways do people today put “confidence in the flesh”?
- Any who think that works need to be added to faith for salvation are the “false circumcision”, those who trust in their own flesh to gain them favor with God. This is why he calls the Judaizers “mutilators”, because they cut themselves to be right with God. It’s also probable that these men were advocating more cutting than circumcision, even castration (a pagan practice), in their misguided zeal to become righteous by their own efforts.
- The Old Testament ritual of physical circumcision was not only a sign of being in a covenant relationship

with God, but it was also intended to be a spiritual circumcision of the heart (see Deuteronomy 30:6). This was a major problem with the Jews; many of them came to believe that they were chosen by God just because they were circumcised. These Judaizers were insisting that the Gentile believers be circumcised; it was just a ritual for them. Circumcision had nothing to do with Gentiles. Paul spoke of this in more detail in Galatians 5:1-6, 11-13, 6:12-15.

Philippians 3:5-7 **Having been circumcised on the eighth day, I am of the nation of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. As far as the Law is concerned, I was a Pharisee. (6) As for my zeal, I was a persecutor of the church. As far as righteousness in the Law is concerned, I was blameless. (7) But whatever things were assets to me, these I now consider a loss for the sake of the Messiah.**

- If anyone had reason to trust in himself for his salvation, it would be Paul. He lists the things that he used to think were so important, but now realized are worthless. He had the right genetic credentials, and obeyed the Law as well as anyone. He was almost a perfect Jew, but that didn't gain him any favor with God. He considers all these things "loss", which in the original language has the connotation of "damaged goods". When he compared himself to Christ, he knew that all his "righteousness" was like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).
- These verses are probably the clearest and strongest passage of the Bible that refutes human effort as a way to gain favor with God.

Philippians 3:8-9 **What is more, I continue to consider all these things to be a loss for the sake of what is far more valuable, knowing the Messiah Jesus, my Lord. It is because of him that I have experienced the loss of all those things. Indeed, I consider them rubbish in order to gain the Messiah (9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but one that comes through the faithfulness of the Messiah, the righteousness that comes from God and that depends on faith.**

- A wonderful statement of salvation – justification with God by faith in Christ alone. Justification is God declaring us righteous. Paul says all these things – being a Jew, circumcision, and obeying the Law, were worthless compared to knowing Jesus. He used to think they gained him credit with God, but when He met Christ personally on the road to Damascus, he realized they were garbage. He lost himself but gained Christ. Do people "suffer loss" of anything today when they trust Christ for salvation?
- Those who "gain Christ" by faith are those found in Him (v. 9). Christ is in the believer and the believer is in Christ. When a person responds in faith to the Holy Spirit's call in his heart, he is clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:24-26). In this position he is "accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). Because he is robed in Christ, the believer stands complete in Christ. God sees that person as already in heaven. At the return of Christ everyone will either be found in Christ which means eternal life or found "in Adam" which means condemnation.
- What's the difference between spiritual position and spiritual practice? Which is more important?
- "Far more valuable" - that is, the knowledge of Christ as Savior and Lord is higher than all the secular and religious knowledge Paul had learned in his training as a Pharisee. For us, it is higher than any knowledge we could ever gain from modern science or philosophy, or from any other worldly knowledge.

Philippians 3:10-12 **I want to know the Messiah—what his resurrection power is like and what it means to share in his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, (11) though I hope to experience the resurrection from the dead. (12) It's not that I have already reached this goal or have already become perfect. But I keep pursuing it, hoping somehow to embrace it just as I have been embraced by the Messiah Jesus.**

- Paul already knew Christ as his Savior. But he wanted to know Him more intimately as his Lord. This is “sanctification”, the process of becoming like Christ. A person must be justified (in Christ) before they can know Him. Getting saved is like getting married. It’s just the beginning of a growing, knowing, and sharing relationship. To know (v. 10) means “to know by experience”.
- We as believers will experience Christ’s full resurrection power when He returns for us and changes us into His likeness. But that resurrection power is ours today in our lives because we have been “raised with Christ” (Colossians 3:1). The Greek word for “power” here is literally “the ability to overcome resistance”. His power is available to us to give us victory over sin, but we have to get ourselves out of the way and allow Him to work in us and through us. Many believers do not experience victory over sin in their lives. Why is this and what can they do to get there?
- “share in His sufferings by becoming like Him in His death” - I don’t think Paul meant that he expected to die on a cross like Christ – it could never be the same anyway because Christ suffered far more from the sins of the world being put on Him than anything the Romans did to Him. Paul knew that he couldn’t share in that. But he could and did suffer much for Christ, and considered it a privilege (Romans 8:36, 2 Corinthians 4:10). The Greek word translated “becoming like Him” means “being conformed inwardly in one’s experience to something” – in this case, Christ’s death. As Christ died *for* sin, we have died *to* sin (Romans 6:2, 6-7; Colossians 3:3). A believer should daily set himself apart from sin (Romans 6:1-4, 11-14) and live a new life by Christ’s resurrection power (Romans 6:4, Galatians 2:20).
- In verse 12 Paul, a spiritual giant in the Philippians’ (and our) eyes, makes it clear that he had not reached spiritual maturity, he had not arrived at perfection in his Christian life, but he was still in the race (pursuing it). This flies in the face of Arminian doctrine of “Entire sanctification”. We will never “arrive” in our Christian lives; we can always grow and become more like Christ. But we will only be perfect when we are resurrected from the dead or changed at the return of Christ.
- How can we come to know Christ more? How can a local church help with this?

Philippians 3:13-14 Brothers, I do not consider myself to have embraced it yet. But this one thing I do: Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, (14) I keep pursuing the goal to win the prize of God's heavenly call in the Messiah Jesus.

- “One thing I do” – this is a single Greek word, expressing determination. Paul’s attitude is an example for us, forgetting our old life and the failures of the past, and “straining forward”, or pressing on to what lies ahead. For believers, the best is yet to come. We should face the future with joy and anticipation.
- “the goal” in the Greek actually means “watch”, meaning watching for the end of the race.
- “The prize” is God’s “crown of righteousness”, which He will award those who have kept the faith and finished the course (2 Timothy 4:7-8).
- “God’s heavenly call” can only be referring to the rapture at the end of the age, when the Lord says: “Come up here” (Revelation 4:1), and we are “caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Philippians 3:15-17 Therefore, those of us who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will show you how to think. (16) However, we should live up to what we have achieved so far. (17) Join together in imitating me, brothers, and pay close attention to those who live by the example we have set for you.

- Think what way? Pursuing the goal of becoming Christ like. And Paul says if you disagree with him, God will

show you how to think! This is a good thing to ask for when we pray – Lord, show me how to think.

- Then in verse 16 he says we should live up to what we already have in Christ. We already have a righteous position in Christ, and we should always seek to live up to that. Most of us fall far short of that, but we should be maturing as we walk with the Lord over time. All believers should say to each other, "Please be patient with me, God is not finished with me yet." Maturity generally involves three things:
 - Recognizing that there is something in your Christian walk that is missing or needs correction.
 - Recognizing your weaknesses and working to strengthen them.
 - Recognizing where you are ignorant and seeking to learn more about that area.
- Paul has told us that he was not perfect, but he tells us that we should imitate his example in pursuing Christlikeness.

Philippians 3:18-19 For I have often told you, and now tell you even with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of the Messiah. (19) Their destiny is destruction, their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame. Their minds are set on worldly things.

- Speaking of the false teachers, these verses give the reasons for following Paul's example: many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Believers should be able to determine truth from error (see 1 John 4:6).
- Those who do not trust in Christ for their salvation are enemies of the cross of Christ. They are not children of God, so they are headed for destruction, which is the opposite of salvation. The Greek word for destruction does not mean annihilation but destruction by being forever separated from the presence of God in eternal judgment.
- It's not wrong for a child of God to care about their earthly lives, but those who base their whole lives in pursuit of worldly things for their own pride to the point that they have made gods out of them show that they don't really belong to God. These false teachers apparently lived to eat good food, and took pride in what they had done instead of giving glory to God.

Philippians 3:20-21 Our citizenship, however, is in heaven, and it is from there that we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. (21) He will change our unassuming bodies and make them like his glorious body through the power that enables him to bring everything under his authority.

- This is an exciting promise for every believer – we are already citizens of heaven. Notice he said IS, not will be or can be. This citizenship belongs to believers and cannot be taken away. Paul has already said in previous chapters that we should live like it! We actually have dual citizenship, because as long as we are alive we are still citizens of our country, like Paul was a citizen of the Roman Empire and recognized that fact. But heaven is where our heart should be, and we should have the attitude that we are like ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20) to the citizens of the earth.
- If we truly are living with this in mind, we will be eagerly waiting for Christ to return for us. At the Rapture of the church, Christ will transform our earthly bodies so that they will be like (the Greek word means "identical in essential character") His glorious body. Then every child of God will be made like the Son of God (1 John 3:2), that is, all Christians will receive glorified bodies like His. We won't have the limitations we now experience in these bodies, which are prone to disease and sin, weariness and decay. Our

resurrected bodies will be like Christ's, and our sanctification (perfection) will be completed.

- Well, if you are a citizen, that means that you live in a specific place, doesn't it? It's also true of being a citizen of heaven. Our residency will be in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2, 10). People of faith, like Abraham, have always looked for this city built by God (Hebrews 11:10). Jesus Christ has prepared rooms for believers in this city (John 14:2-3, Hebrews 11:16).

Chapter 4

Philippians 4:1-3 **Therefore, my dear brothers whom I long for, my joy and my victor's crown, this is how you must stand firm in the Lord, dear friends. (2) I urge Euodia and Syntyche to have the same attitude in the Lord. (3) Yes, I also ask you, my true partner, to help these women. They have worked hard with me to advance the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.**

- Apparently two women, Euodia and Syntyche, did not live up to the meanings of their names. "Euodia" means a "prosperous journey." "Syntyche" means a "pleasant acquaintance." Since Paul urged these two to agree with each other (have the same attitude) in the Lord, they must have been causing dissension in the church. This helps explain Paul's earlier appeal for unity (2:1-4). They had worked with Paul before, but now were causing trouble.
- This was really the only problem in the church Paul had to mention. Other than that they were a great example of what a local church should be.
- The "Book of Life" is where God has written all the names of people who have been redeemed, those who have trusted in Christ for salvation.

Philippians 4:4 **Keep on rejoicing in the Lord at all times. I will say it again: Keep on rejoicing!**

- Just like the beginning of the last chapter, Paul reminds them to keep on rejoicing! Sometimes the pressures of this life make it almost impossible to be happy. But Paul isn't telling them to be happy. He tells us to rejoice "in the Lord". We can always rejoice in the Lord and delight in Him. Rejoicing gives us strength. Paul is a good example for us. So many "bad" things happened to him – physical persecution, imprisonment, the threat of death, etc. But he was always rejoicing.

Philippians 4:5 **Let your gracious attitude be known to all people. The Lord is near:**

- "The Lord is near" could mean that Paul thought that Christ's return was near, or that He is near to us at all times, no matter what is happening, which makes sense considering the next verse:

Philippians 4:6-7 **Never worry about anything. Instead, in every situation let your petitions be made known to God through prayers and requests, with thanksgiving. (7) Then God's peace, which goes far beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your hearts and minds in union with the Messiah Jesus.**

- We shouldn't worry about anything, instead we should pray for everything! Our prayers should always be with thanksgiving. Paul isn't saying we shouldn't care about anything. To care and be genuinely concerned is one thing. To worry is another. Jesus also warned against worrying (Matthew 6:25-33). Worrying gets in the way of our relationship with God and keeps us from trusting Him.

- Paul uses four distinct words here to describe a believer's communication with God.
 - Prayer is a believer's approach to God. It includes adoration, devotion, and worship.
 - Petition is asking for an answer to a specific need, sometimes it is a cry for help.
 - Requests are definite and specific things asked for.
 - Thanksgiving is an attitude of the heart which should be in our prayers. We should thank him for the answers in advance, and for His concern for us, and for the access we have to Him.
- The practice of prayer will give us God's peace which is unlike any other kind of peace, and can help you through anything this life can throw at you. And notice that this peace will guard our hearts and minds! And the more we pray, the more our emotions and thoughts line up with God's.
- Read Isaiah 26:3. No matter what is happening around us, we find this peace by keeping our minds focused on the strength of God, on what He says, what is true.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is fair, whatever is pure, whatever is acceptable, whatever is commendable, if there is anything of excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—keep thinking about these things.

- Paul is about to finish his letter, and now gives his final exhortations. Here he is talking about our thought lives, which is just as important to God as our physical actions. There are six types of things we are to spend our time thinking about, as opposed to the opposite of them.
 - Think about things that are true – not dishonest or unreliable things.
 - Think about honorable things – worthy of respect, instead of immoral, improper things
 - Think about fair or lovely things, which mean things that lead to peace and not things which lead to conflict.
 - Think about pure things – things that are wholesome, not morally impure things that will contaminate you.
 - Think about right or acceptable things, things that conform to God's standards
 - Think about admirable, commendable things – things that are positive and constructive – not things that are negative and destructive.
 - Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise by others.
- This can relate to anything we allow to come into our eyes, ears, and minds on a daily basis, including music, television, books, the internet, etc. How do these things affect how we feel and think? Do believers need to censure themselves from certain forms of entertainment?

Philippians 4:9 Likewise, keep practicing these things: what you have learned, received, heard, and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.

- Paul again asks us to use him as an example. We are to practice the things we have learned from Paul, things that we are learning as we study his letters.

Philippians 4:10-11 Now I rejoice in the Lord greatly, because once again you have shown your concern for me. Of course, you were concerned for me but you did not have

an opportunity to show it. (11) I am not saying this because I am in any need, for I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am in.

- Paul did not beg God's people to help him in his work. He just put the need out there to them and trusted God to meet it. Also, he had learned the lesson of contentment. Many believers have not learned this lesson, but always want more worldly things.

Philippians 4:12-13 I know how to be humble, and I know how to prosper. In each and every situation I have learned the secret of being full and of going hungry, of having too much and of having too little. (13) I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

- Another great passage we should all memorize and use. Changing circumstances did not affect Paul's inner contentment. The Greek word for content means "self-sufficient." The Stoics used this word to mean human self-reliance and strength, being calm and accepting life's pressures. But Paul used it to refer to a sufficiency that is given to us by God, in every situation.
- Verse 13 is not bragging that he can do anything, but boasting in the strength of Christ. This is always important for believers to remember. Sometimes we feel that we just aren't capable of some things, but God may call us to do something we don't think we can do. When we trust in His strength, we can do literally anything he calls us to do.

Philippians 4:14-18 Nevertheless, it was kind of you to share my troubles. (15) You Philippians also know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church participated with me in the matter of giving and receiving except for you. (16) Even while I was in Thessalonica, you provided for my needs not once, but twice. (17) It is not that I am looking for a gift. No, I want to see that you receive the fruit that increases to your benefit. (18) I have been paid in full and have more than enough. I am fully supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus what you sent—a fragrant aroma, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

- Even though the Philippian church was poor, they gave Paul gifts to help support him. This is a sacrifice that pleases God.

Philippians 4:19-20 And my God will fully supply your every need according to his glorious riches in the Messiah Jesus. (20) Glory belongs to our God and Father forever and ever! Amen.

- Those who freely give will also receive (like the Philippians)—not necessarily all their wants, but all they need for their service for Christ. What a wonderful promise to remember!

Philippians 4:21-23 Greet every saint who is in union with the Messiah Jesus. The brothers who are with me send their greetings to you. (22) All the saints, especially those of the emperor's household, greet you. (23) May the grace of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, be with your spirit! Amen.

- Those who belong to the Emperor's (Caesar's) household were probably those who had come to Christ as a result of Paul's house arrest. They probably included soldiers and relatives of Caesar's household. No wonder Paul could say that what had happened to him had advanced the gospel (1:12).
- As he usually did, Paul ended his letter stressing Christ's wonderful grace.