

Philippians

Chapter 3

Characteristics of True and False Belief - Philippians 3:1-3

A. Introduction - Philippians 3:1

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.

Some commentators think that Philippians actually ends in the middle of this verse by taking Paul's "Finally, my brethren" as his last words in the letter. However, this is not really founded since there is no indication that the early church believed the letter ends here. Instead of taking this as referring to the end of the letter, it is better to understand it as a transition from what Paul was talking about in chapter two to the new subject in chapter three.

Before Paul launches into his discussion regarding true and false belief, he reminds his Philippian readers that this is something he has already taught them. As a result, it is no bother for him to write them again, and in fact, it is safe and even beneficial for the Philippian believers to hear the information again.

One of the biggest dangers faced by Paul in his journeys was the Judaizers. This was a group of "believers" who said that in order to be truly saved one must believe on Christ as well as adhere to the Mosaic law, specifically the rites of circumcision and ceremonial practices. In other words, this group mixed law and grace. In fact, Paul wrote an entire book dealing with this subject which we know as Galatians. In Galatians, Paul puts this issue on the lower shelf by writing in 3:3, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" In other words, having begun our new life by faith do we now keep it by works. No way. Whenever law is mixed with grace, grace is no more grace (Romans 10:3).

This issue, that of mixing law and grace, was no small issue in Paul's day. In fact, it is this very issue that precipitated the first church council, known as the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. The argument faced by the Apostles at that time stemmed from some Jewish believers who thought that circumcision and the dietary laws were binding on Christians. There was a confusion about the New Covenant. As a result, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem by the church in Antioch to seek a solution to this issue. As a result, the Jerusalem Council decided in favor of grace and as a result repudiated the doctrines of the Judaizers. Unfortunately, that did not stop the Judaizers from continuing to cause trouble, and they dogged Paul's every step bringing in their own teachings to the new churches founded by Paul almost immediately after Paul left town. It is this issue that Paul faces in the next few verses of Philippians.

B. The Characteristics of False Belief - Philippians 3:2

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

In this verse, Paul lists three characteristics of false believers. This is in contrast to the three characteristics of true believers that follow. In each case,

Paul uses the emphatic *blepetai*, beware.¹ He is telling the Philippians believers to be on the lookout, to be alert, and to be ready. Why? Because the false believers are coming and their goal is to overthrow the faith of true believers.

1. Beware of Dogs - Philippians 3:2a

Paul's first warning is to beware of dogs. The word for "dogs" is *kuon*. This is in distinction to *kunarion*. *Kuon* refers to the wild dogs that roamed the streets in those days, scavenging for food and spreading disease. On the other hand, *kunarion* refers to the little pet dogs that some of the wealthy people had in those days. In using this word, Paul points out the rapacious nature of these false believers and the fact that they spread their disease to others.

The term "dog" was often used to refer to Gentiles by the Jews. We are reminded of Psalm 22:16, "*for dogs have surrounded me*" in reference to the crucifixion of Christ. Christ himself used this term in Matthew 7:6 to refer to those who are spiritually insensitive to God's treasures and in Matthew 15:26 to refer to Gentiles. In Revelation 22:15 we find that without the walls of the New Jerusalem are "dogs." As a result, we are led to believe that the term "dog" is used to refer to those who are spiritually insensitive to God's truth and who have no understanding of true righteousness. Many people mix law with grace and as a result come up with something far short of grace. Paul calls them "dogs."

Elements Added to Grace

1. **Church Attendance.**
2. **Human works of merit.**
3. **Observance of the law.**
4. **Penance.**
5. **Outward ceremonies and rituals.**

We can further understand this reference by comparing it to the characteristic of true belief in verse three. When we do so, we find that dogs are those who do not worship God by the Spirit (Holy Spirit) but worship according to their own understanding of worship. As a result, they miss the righteousness of God and wind up with their own righteousness, a righteousness that cannot save.

2. Beware of Evil Workers - Philippians 3:2b

Paul's second characterization of false believers is that of evil workers. This can be taken as a reference to the character of the false believer or to the conduct of the false believer. If we compare this to verse three, we are led to believe this is in reference to the conduct of the false believer. Whereas the true believer makes their boast of Christ, the false believer makes their boast of the flesh. Since the flesh is the enemy of God, the works that they do are evil. Isaiah 64:6 tells us that our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. The reference Isaiah is using is that of dirty menstrual cloths, which are good for nothing but to be burned. The very best that

¹ Peter T. O'Brien, *NIGCT: The Epistle to the Philippians*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 353-54.

man can do apart from the Holy Spirit is to produce works that are compared to bloody, vile menstrual cloths.

3. Beware of the False Circumcision - Philippians 3:2c

One of the things that the Jew prided himself in the most is the rite of circumcision. In fact, Jewish Rabbis taught that Abraham stood at the gates of hell and would not let a circumcised Jew to enter. As a result, Jews considered their circumcision as a necessary rite for them to enter heaven, and furthermore, as a rite that guaranteed their entrance into heaven.

Paul lays this concept waste in Romans. In Romans chapter two, Paul lists three things that will not help a Jew: their nationality, their possession of the law, and their outward sign of circumcision. In Romans 2:28 Paul wraps up his argument by saying, *“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”* This indicates that true circumcision is something of the heart and not just an outward act of surgery. Circumcision is only a sign of an internal covenant with God, and as a result, one can have the external sign with no inner covenant.

Paul’s choice of words for these false believers is interesting. It is the word *katatoman*, mutilation.² This is in distinction to *peritoman*, circumcision. What Paul is driving at is if one has the external rite of circumcision performed but lacks an internal relationship with God, all that person has succeeded in doing to mutilate themselves. The external act means nothing!

Things That Do NOT Indicate the Existence Of True Saving Faith

1. **A memory of a past event where a decision for Christ has been made. An example of this is Simon Magus in Acts 8.**
2. **A good, moral life. An example of this is the rich, young ruler in Matthew 19.**
3. **A knowledge of the truth. An example of this is Judas.**
4. **A religiously active life. An example is the five virgins in Matthew 25.**
5. **A life of service in the name of Christ. An example are the false teachers in Matthew 7.**

C. The Characteristics of True Belief - Philippians 3:3

1. A True Believer Worships God by the Spirit - Philippians 3:3a.

Philippians 3:3a For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit...

² O’Brien, pp. 356-57.

We need only to be reminded of John 4 where we read the account of the Woman at the Well in Samaria. After Christ exposes her sin and need of salvation, she asks him a pointed question, "Where should we worship? Is it this mountain (Gerezim) or in Jerusalem (Zion)." Christ's answer is most revealing, "*The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.*" Christ was pointing out that there was coming a time when true worship will be done everywhere, not in a single location. Furthermore, this worship will be done in Spirit (that is, under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit) and in truth (that is, according to the way God has prescribed.) One of the primary marks of true believers is that they are worshippers of God.

Three Characteristics of True Worship

- 1. A true worshipper has a deep love for Christ (LOVE).**
- 2. A true worshipper has a deep delight in Christ (JOY).**
- 3. A true worshipper has a deep confidence in Christ (PEACE).**

2. A True Believer Rejoices in Christ Jesus - Philippians 3:3b.

Philippians 3:3b ...and rejoice in Christ Jesus..

The word "rejoice" is *kaukamenoi*. It means an exultant, exuberant boast. Paul loved this word, using it thirty-five times. Paul is telling us that the second mark of true belief is a boast in Christ Jesus, not a boast in oneself.

Too often Christians and professing believers boast in their own accomplishments and their own abilities. Not the true believer. One who is truly saved realizes their total bankruptcy apart from Christ. Paul's boast was in the Lord, not in himself.

Marks of a Christ-Centered Believer

- 1. A Christ-centered person longs to be in his presence.**
- 2. A Christ-centered person sees themselves as objects of God's grace, not justice.**
- 3. A Christ-centered person is aware of their helplessness apart from the power of God in them.**
- 4. A Christ-centered person longs to exhibit behavior in keeping with their place in Christ.**
- 5. A Christ-centered person longs to obey his commandments.**

3. A True Believer Exhibits True Humility - Philippians 3:3c.

Philippians 3:3c ...and have no confidence in the flesh.

The final characteristic and mark of a true believer is that of a proper humility. The boast of a true believer is in Christ, not their own flesh.

Unfortunately, the world is full of people whose confidence is not in Christ, but in themselves. Instead of seeing themselves as objects of God's mercy

and forgiveness, they see themselves as deserving recipients of God's favor and grace. They base their eternal destiny on their own works of righteousness and their own credentials, not the finished work of Christ on the cross. It is to this that Paul turns in the next section where he shows that those things that were formerly of great value to him are now manure in his sight for the excellency of knowing Christ.

How Close A Person Can Be to Being A Christian and Yet Lost

*Distilled from Thomas Manton, **The Almost Christian***

- 1. A man may have much knowledge about Christ, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 2. A man may have a great and immanent gift, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 3. A man may have a high profession of religion, he may be much in external duties of goodness, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 4. A man may go far in opposing his own sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 5. A man may hate sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 6. A man may make great vows, strong purposes and resolutions against his sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 7. A man may maintain a strife and combat against sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 8. A man may be a member of the Church, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 9. A man may have great hopes of heaven, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 10. A man may be under visible changes, and altered life, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 11. A man may be very zealous in matters of religion, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 12. A man may be much in prayers, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 13. A man may even suffer for Christ, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 14. A man may outwardly obey the commandments, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 15. A man may perform external worship, and yet be but almost a Christian.**
- 16. A man may have faith, and yet be but almost a Christian.**

Religious Credentials That Do Not Please God - Philippians 3:4-6

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:

Immediately after warning the Philippians about true and false belief, Paul turns to a real-life example of someone who put their faith in those things that do not please God, himself. One of the greatest marks that separate true possessors from false professors is the understanding of what does and does not please God. Judaism puts its faith in human, external works. Christianity puts its faith in a person, Jesus Christ.

Paul starts out this section with a challenge. His challenge is this, "If we want to sit down and compare external religious credentials, I can do better than any of you." In other words, if only external issues of religiosity mattered, Paul could whip anyone. What were those things that Paul could have placed confidence in? He lists them in the next two verses. They are The Sign of the Covenant, A National Identity, An Exalted Pedigree, Racial Purity, A Zeal for the Law, A Zeal for Religious Purity, and Legal Blamelessness. Before he met Christ, all of these credentials were of extreme value to Paul. However, when he saw Christ, he realized that all of his accumulated credentials meant nothing compared to the privilege of knowing Christ. This realization is summed up in Philippians 3:7, "*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*"

A. The Sign of the Covenant - Philippians 3:5a

Philippians 3:5 Circumcised the eighth day...

The first credential that Paul placed extreme value on prior to his salvation was the sign of circumcision. It is important to understand that circumcision was of such primary importance to the Jew, that many rabbis taught that it could of itself prevent one from going to hades. Instead of seeing circumcision as a mark of the covenant, as it was originally given, the Jews made it equal to the covenant itself, and even ascribed salvific power to the rite regardless of the condition of one's heart.

In order to succinctly understand circumcision, let us look at Romans 4:11a, "*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised...*" This verse is a commentary on the entire meaning of circumcision. In fact, it is an explanation of Genesis 17:11:

And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.

Paul is saying that the entire reason God gave the rite of circumcision was for the express purpose of reminding Abraham and his descendants of the covenant He made with Abraham. Note Paul's words, "*he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet uncircumcised.*" The word translated "sign" is the Greek word *sumion* which can be understood as a mark, token, or pledge. The word translated "seal" is *sphragida* which means signet, seal, official mark. Circumcision is only an external sign of an internal condition, righteousness. The problem is that the Jews of Paul's day had elevated the rite of circumcision to a requirement of salvation, something God never intended. In fact the following rabbinical quotes show us how circumcision was viewed:

“Circumcision saves from hell” *Jalkut Rubem* (num. 1)

“God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to hell” *Midrash Millim* (fol. 7, col. 2)

“Abraham sits before the gate of hell, and does not allow that any circumcised Israelite should enter there” *Akedah Jizehak* (fol. 54, col. 2)

When Paul was still in the bondage of Judaism, he saw circumcision as a necessary mark of his right relationship with God. He did not see it as merely an external sign of an internal relationship. He missed the passages out of the Old Testament that talked about the circumcision of the heart. God never intended circumcision to become an external mark only.

Jeremiah 9:26 Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.

Ezekiel 44:9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.

Acts 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Circumcision Today

Although we do not have those who see circumcision as a necessary mark of a covenant with God today, we have those who have substituted something else, baptism. Many protestant denominations view baptism with the same importance as the New Testament and Old Testament Jews viewed circumcision. In fact, the Catholic Church teaches that anyone who dies unbaptized cannot get to heaven. Babies who die unbaptized cannot go to heaven, but rather go to a place called Limbo.

B. A National Identity - Philippians 3:5b

Philippians 3:5 ...of the stock of Israel...

The second credential Paul placed his trust in was that of his nationality. Many Jews believed that merely being an Israelite guaranteed one's salvation. Some of the rabbis even taught that God created the Gentiles as fuel for hell, and Jews as those who would live in heaven.

Christ confronted this issue in John 8 with the Pharisees. In that passage we see Christ arguing with the Pharisees who insisted they were Abraham's seed. Christ told them that if they were truly Abraham's seed, they would not seek to kill him. In John 8:39 we read, *"They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham."* Note that the Pharisee's placed great pride in their national identity, even accusing Christ a little later in the same passage of being born out of wedlock thus accusing him of not even being a Jew. By identifying with Abraham, the Pharisee's were self-assured that they were righteous regardless of their internal heart attitude.

John the Baptist had a similar encounter with the Pharisees. In Luke 3:7-8 we find the Pharisees coming out to the Jordan to see what John was doing. His greeting, a direct confrontation of their hypocrisy, was *"O you generation of snakes, Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"* He then tells them not to say *"We are Abraham's seed"* since God can turn stones into children of Abraham. The point is that the Pharisees never saw themselves under the judgment of God because of their nationality. When Paul lived his life as a Pharisee, he had a similar viewpoint.

Of Course I Am A Christian!

Many people today, when asked whether they are a Christian or not, reply, "Of course I am a Christian, I am an American and my parents were Christians!" The point is that there are a lot of people who assume they are Christian because they happen to be Americans, or may have been raised in a particular denomination, or may have had parents that were Christians. They fail to realize that being a true Christian requires a personal choice, a choice everyone must make on their own.

C. An Exalted Pedigree - Philippians 3:5c

Philippians 3:5 ...of the tribe of Benjamin...

Paul's third credential was his tribal pedigree. One of the most important things to a Jew, besides their nationality, was their tribal heritage. Paul makes no bones about his tribal heritage by stating that he is of the tribe of Benjamin. Note the following facts about this tribe:

1. Benjamin was the only son of Jacob that was born in the promised land - Genesis 35:18.
2. Benjamin was the second son of Jacob's most beloved wife Rachel - Genesis 35:24.
3. Benjamin was the tribe in which the city of Jerusalem was located - Joshua 18:28.

- 4. Benjamin gave Israel it's first King - 1 Samuel 9:21.
- 5. Benjamin remained faithful to the tribe of Judah when the other ten tribes split away after the death of Solomon - 1 Kings 12:21.
- 6. Benjamin is often mentioned with the tribe of Judah as being the faithful remnant in the Old Testament.

By identifying himself as being from the tribe of Benjamin, Paul is stating that of all Jews, he is from one of the most prestigious and honored tribes. He is not just any Jew, but an honored one.

D. Racial Purity - Philippians 3:5d

Philippians 3:5 ...an Hebrew of the Hebrews...

The fourth religious credential valued by Paul before he met Christ was his racial purity. Not only was he an Israelite, and not only was he from one of the most honored tribes, but he was the Jewish son of Jewish parents. He was no half-breed. There were no intermarriages with Gentiles in his line! He was 100% Jewish unlike some of the dogs that we label as Heinz 57 (since they have 57 different variety of dogs in their ancestry.) Paul was a pure Jew.

E. A Zeal for the Law - Philippians 3:5e

Philippians 3:5 ...as touching the law, a Pharisee;

Fifthly, Paul listed his zeal for the Law as one of his most valued credentials. Not only was he an Israelite, not only was he part of one of the most honored tribes, not only was he a pure Jew, but he was a Pharisee.

In New Testament times there were basically three religious sects: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The Essenes were monastic, and lived down near the Dead Sea. They had very little impact on the New Testament. The other two sects, however, did. The following chart compares these two sects as to some of their fundamental beliefs:

Issue	Sadducees	Pharisees
Scripture	Held to the Books of Moses alone.	Recognized all of the Old Testament as Scripture.
Tradition	Did not honor any religious tradition.	Elevated religious tradition to the level of Scripture.
Afterlife	Did not believe in a resurrection.	Believed in a resurrection.
Economic	Very wealthy - ran the Temple - High Priests were Sadducees.	Mostly very poor.
Initiation	Inherited from parents.	Could choose to become a Pharisee.

From the chart, we see that one of the fundamental marks of the Pharisees was their zeal for the law. Not only did they ascribe to the Mosaic law, but they also revered the rest of the Old Testament (sometimes the entire Old Testament was known as the "law", see Psalm 119), and they also elevated their many traditions to the level of Scripture as well. In fact, Christ's major battles with the religious establishment was over tradition.

When Paul lists his identification as a Pharisee as one of his religious credentials, he is saying that he was devoted to the law as a way of life. Being a Pharisee was no part-time task, but took one's full attention as the number of laws observed by the Pharisee's easily numbered into the hundreds, and the traditions surrounding these laws filled many volumes of commentaries.

Modern Pharisees

Many people today pride themselves on their religious knowledge. It is not uncommon for someone to devote their entire life to learning about religion, only to miss God. Mere knowledge of truth does not mean one has found truth. Many very religious people today place their eternal destiny in the fact that they know the Bible or some other religious book. True belief is the knowledge of a person, not a book.

F. A Zeal for Religious Purity - Philippians 3:6a

Philippians 3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church...

Paul's sixth credential was his zeal for the purity of the Jewish faith. When Christianity first began, it was seen as an aberration in the Jewish faith. A good modern-day comparison could be that of a cult. Since Paul was so jealous of the law, and had such a high regard for the truth as he understood it in Old Testament terms, he saw this new "cult" as something to be destroyed.

We read of Paul's zeal in Acts 9:1-2, "*And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*" Note the vitriolic attitude Paul had against Christians, he breathed out threatenings. The picture is of one who is so consumed by hatred that their breath is like that of a charging bull. Paul was not content to just leave Christianity alone or to refute it through the law, but he wanted to stamp it out. In fact, Paul was so anti-Christian that the only one who could present the Gospel to him was the exalted Christ himself!

G. Legal Blamelessness - Philippians 3:6b

Philippians 3:6 ...touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Paul's final credential was that of his supposed legal blamelessness. According to the Pharisees, they could become perfect and holy by keeping all of the external laws they had concocted over the years regardless of their internal attitudes. Paul says that as far as the Pharisaical legal code was concerned, he was blameless. If salvation could ever have been obtained by external observance of the law, Paul would be the first one in heaven.

Note that there are two righteousnesses mentioned in the New Testament. There is the righteousness which is by the law, and there is the righteousness which is apart from the law. Only that righteousness which is apart from the law, and is obtained by placing one's faith in Christ, is the kind of righteousness that allows entrance into heaven.

The Great Exchange - Philippians 3:7-11

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

After Paul listed what would be impressive credentials to the religious leaders of his day, he summarized his assessment of them in light of Christ by saying that what he thought was gain, was in fact loss. The words used for gain and loss, *kerda* and *zamian*, are accounting terms used in commercial transactions of that day.³ Everything Paul worked for in his life prior to his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road immediately became loss. His gain column became his loss column.

That is the way it is when we find Christ. In Matthew 13:44-46 Christ relates two parables illustrating this concept. In the first parable, a man accidentally finds a valuable treasure in a field in which he is working. He immediately goes and sells everything he owns for the money to buy the field. In the second parable, a man is a merchant in fine pearls. When he finds the most beautiful pearl he has ever seen, he immediately liquidates his entire fortune for the funds required to buy the pearl. In both cases, the man sells all. In the same way, when we see Christ for who he really is, we make a great exchange: all that we are, for all that he is. Although salvation cannot be earned, it costs us all that we are.

In Philippians 3:8-11 we find five great exchanges Paul made when he met Christ.

- A. Paul Exchanged the Knowledge of the Law for the Knowledge of Christ - Philippians 3:8.

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,

If there was anyone of Paul's day who had a deep understanding of the Mosaic Law, it was Paul. Trained under the greatest teacher of the day, Gamaliel, Paul excelled in his comprehension of the traditions and interpretations of the rabbis. If Paul had not been saved by God, no doubt he would have been one of the leading rabbis of his time.

However, when Paul met Christ, he traded his knowledge of tradition and legal interpretations for the knowledge of a person. Christianity is not a religion characterized by adherence to a set of rules, but a life characterized by a relationship to a person.

- B. Paul Exchanged the Righteousness of the Law for the Righteousness of Christ - Philippians 3:9

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:

Secondly, Paul exchanged the righteousness obtained by the law for the righteousness obtained by faith in Jesus Christ. This one point was the major stumblingblock to the Jews, who were convinced that they could obtain God's favor by their lawkeeping. The law cannot save, it can only condemn. Only the righteousness of God, obtained by faith, can enable one to stand unblemished and holy in the presence of God.

Romans 3:20-22 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God {which is} by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

³ O'Brien, pp. 383-84.

- C. Paul Exchanged the Powerlessness of the Law Which Cannot Save for the Power of Christ Who Can Save - Philippians 3:10a

Philippians 3:10a That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection...

Another side to the great law debate is the fact that not only does the law not save, but it cannot save. It is powerless to grant the kind of righteousness required by God in order for one to stand in his presence. This is exactly the message we read in Romans 8:3-4. In that passage we read that the law was “*weak through the flesh.*” This means that in the flesh, it is not possible to keep the demands of the law. As a result God sent Christ to die as a substitute for sin, and for those who place their faith in Christ, “*the righteousness of the law*” is fulfilled in them.

Romans 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Why The Law Cannot Save

- 1. The law demands that we do things contrary to our nature.**
- 2. The law demands that we do impossible things that we cannot do.**
- 3. The law requires perfect performance.**
- 4. The law refuses to accept good intentions or effort.**
- 5. The law has no payback plan to erase past sins.**
- 6. The law is an unrelenting taskmaster. It never allows one to take a “day off.”**
- 7. The law shatters happiness.**
- 8. The law always requires the ultimate penalty, hell with no parole.**
- 9. The law only demands, it never helps.**
- 10. The law has no plan of salvation.**
- 11. The law isn’t interested in one’s repentance.**
- 12. The law offers no forgiveness.**
- 13. The law offers no hope.**
- 14. The law stirs up sin.**
- 15. The law curses because it reveals one’s sin.**

- D. Paul Exchanged the Cold Severity of the Law for the Warm Fellowship of Christ - Philippians 3:10b

Philippians 3:10b ...and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Fourthly, Paul exchanged the coldness of the law for the fellowship of Christ, specifically, the fellowship of his death. It is interesting that the most intimate times of fellowship with Christ are often found in the most difficult times of our lives. There is a grace of God which becomes evident as we endure suffering that is not there in the pleasant times. If any man alive knew this, it was Paul. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 he talked about the power of Christ being made evident in earthen vessels of clay as that power is manifested through trials and suffering.

When one goes through suffering under the dominance of a legal code, there is no assurance or comfort since the one who is suffering will always be wondering if their trial is as a result of them breaking the legal code. The guilt of a possible infraction makes joy impossible. On the other hand, if one is consumed by their relationship with a person, then they can say with Paul, *“All things work for good to them that are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)*

- E. Paul Exchanged the Fading Glory of the Law for the Eternal Glory of Christ - Philippians 3:11.

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

In 2 Corinthians 3 we read of the contrast between the Old and New Covenants. One of those contrasts is the fading glory of the Old as opposed to the eternal glory of the new. In developing this contrast, Paul refers to the veil Moses put over his face after being in the presence of God. According to Exodus 34:28-35, Moses' face glowed with the glory of God as he received the Old Covenant on Sinai. However, although Moses had a glory, it faded over time. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3 that that is exactly the way it is with the Old Covenant, it fades over time. However, with the New Covenant, there is remaining an eternal glory that will never fade. This glory will be ours when we are raised incorruptible and undefiled at the coming of our Lord.

Paul's use of terms here for the resurrection is interesting. It is *exanastasin*, which means “out resurrection.” All of the dead will be resurrected someday, but Paul is looking for that “out resurrection,” the one unto eternal glory.

Reaching For the Prize - Philippians 3:12-16.

After listing his religious credentials, and his great exchange, some may say to Paul “Well, I guess you have spiritually arrived. There's nothing more for you to do.” In answer to those who think that he may have arrived spiritually, Paul emphatically stresses the point that he has not arrived, but is in fact striving to reach for the prize, the goal of Christlikeness.

Modern Notions Regarding Spiritual Growth

1. **The notion that spiritual growth is dependent on finding some secret method which will immediately catapult the finder to Christlikeness - Pragmatism.**
2. **The notion that spiritual growth is not important at all - Antinomianism.**

3. **The notion that spiritual growth is completely dependent on our own effort - Pietism.**
4. **The notion that spiritual growth is completely dependent on God - Quietism.**
5. **The notion that spiritual growth is the result of a divine zap - Charismaticism.**
6. **The notion that spiritual growth is predicated on self-introspection and a study of one's personal behavior - Psychologism.**
7. **The notion that spiritual growth is dependent on a list of rules which must be followed - Legalism.**
8. **The notion that spiritual growth is dependent on secret knowledge - Gnosticism.**

A. The Awareness of the Need to Pursue a Better Condition - Philippians 3:12a

Philippians 3:12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after...

In answer to those who may think that Paul has reached some ultimate level of spiritual perfection, Paul emphatically states that he has not attained perfection, but is in fact stretching out to reach the prize. There are those that think that once they make the great exchange, their spiritual life becomes one of ease as they coast on into heaven. Not so! The Christian life is a constant struggle with self, Satan, and the world. The life of a pilgrim is a hard life, and many, if not all, of the rewards are not obtained on earth, but in heaven.

On the other hand, there are those who fail to expend maximum effort in order to win the prize. They feel that since they are now saved, and no longer in danger of hell, that the life of a Christian is too hard. As a result, they live in carnality. The danger in this kind of thinking is two-fold. One, those who never grow in their spiritual lives exhibit the behaviour of those who are unredeemed, and in many cases they themselves may not be redeemed at all. Secondly, God will not allow a Christian to exist in a continual state of carnality without bringing in the board of chastening. To not grow in one's spiritual life depicts lack of salvation or invites the chastening hand of God. Thus, the life of a pilgrim is not optional for the true believer.

Paul's imagery in this verse is drawn from the running games of his day. "Follow after" is the word *dioko*, which was used to refer to a running stretching every muscle in his body in pursuit of the finish line. Paul is saying that he is not jogging through the Christian life, but is making every effort possible in order that he might finish the race and receive the price.

Paul - A First Century Sports Fan

1. **Paul likens the Christian life to a race - Philippians 3:12-15; 1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 2:5; 4:7-8.**
2. **Paul likens the Christian life to a boxing match - 1 Corinthians 9:25-27.**
3. **Paul likens the Judgment Seat of Christ to the *bema* seat of the Isthmian games of his day - Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10.**

Why Grow as a Christian?

- 1. Spiritual Growth Glorifies God.**
- 2. Spiritual Growth Verifies Regeneration.**
- 3. Spiritual Growth Adorns the Truth.**
- 4. Spiritual Growth Grants Assurance of Salvation.**
- 5. Spiritual Growth Protects the Cause of Christ from Reproach.**
- 6. Spiritual Growth Produces Joy and Usefulness in One's Life**
- 7. Spiritual Growth Enhances Our Witness to a Lost World**

- B. The Need to Expend Maximum Effort for a Better Condition - Philippians 3:12b

Philippians 3:12 ...if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

The second requirement in pursuing the prize is that of the need to expend maximum effort for a better condition. Paul states very clearly that he is trying to apprehend that for which Christ apprehended him for. And what is that? It is Christlikeness. In Philippians 1:6 we read that *"he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ,"* and in Romans 8:29 we read that those whom God chose, he predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ. Thus, the ultimate goal of the Christian life is Christlikeness.

Unfortunately, try as we might, we will never ultimately reach the goal of Christlikeness in this life. However, that does not invalidate the pursuit. Although spiritual perfection is unattainable in this life, we are nevertheless commanded to run in order to win the prize. Perfection is not possible, but a life that exhibits a great deal of Christlikeness is.

The reason for this pursuit is given by Paul as being the very purpose God saved us in the first place. Put succinctly, God saved us in order to be holy and to be like Christ. When we fail to pursue that goal, we are failing to pursue the very reason for our salvation. Those that do not strive for Christlikeness will be chastened by God as he attempts to bring that transformation about in their lives.

- C. The Requirement of a Focused Attention in Pursuing a Better Condition - Philippians 3:13

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,

Not only must we recognize the need to pursue a better condition as well as the fact that this pursuit required maximum effort, but we must also have a focused attention. If one wants to be like Christ, then of necessity other things must take a back seat. It is not always possible to be holy, and...

Unfortunately, most believers are so busy trying to be Christlike while at the same time worldly that they never really get around to pursuing the prize. Paul

makes the point that this pursuit is his ONE goal. Paul did not have two, or twenty goals, but only ONE goal, and that ONE goal was to be like Christ.

We read a similar idea in Hebrews 12:1-2:

Hebrews 12:1-2 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Note that the runner in these two verses is enjoined to divest himself of weights and sins. Many times it is not the overt sin that slows us down in our spiritual lives, but it is the weights. These are things that are not sins in and of themselves, but become sins when we spend too much time focused on them. If we are to really run the race as we should, then we need to get rid of those things that slow down our spiritual lives. We need to become focused on ONE thing, and that ONE thing is to be like Christ.

How did Paul focus his attention on ONE thing? First, he forgot the past. This means that he forgot about his past failures and past accomplishments. It does a runner no good to tell a fellow competitor in a big race about all his past wins. Those mean nothing. What really matters is the race at hand. On the other hand, it does no good to relive all of one's past failures in a race. Just because past races were lost does not insure that this one will be lost as well. Secondly, Paul focused on the future. He realized that past accomplishments did not insure future victory. The only way to win in the future, was to focus maximum effort towards that goal. In fact, the word, "reaching forth" is *epektineis*, and was used to refer to a runner who was stretching every muscle in order to reach the finish line.

D. The Spiritual Motivation to Pursue a Better Condition - Philippians 3:14

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

What motivates us to pursue the prize? It is the realization of our high calling. Someday we will be like Christ when we die or are taken to heaven at Christ's return. When that happens, we do not want to be ashamed, but want to be able to stand unashamed as we did everything in our effort in order to be Christlike. Again, just because we will become Christlike instantaneously when we get to heaven does not mean we can coast here on earth! The motivation to be Christlike is the realization that He is coming soon and we want to be ready. We should live so that we can say with Paul, "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*" (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

E. A Recognition of Divine Resources in Pursuing a Better Condition - Philippians 3:15

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.

In spite of our best intentions, we do not always strive for the prize as we should. Furthermore, it is often the case that we do not see our lack of striving or those things that may weight us down in the race. As a result, we must depend on the revelation of God as he shows us those things in our lives.

Paul's use of the word "perfect" here cannot be practical perfection, as that flies in the face of everything he has stated to this point. Rather, it is a reference to "positional" perfection. In other words, we stand positionally perfect before God. Because of this positional perfection, we should want to be practically perfect to the extent that we can.

F. The Conformity Required to Pursue a Better Condition - Philippians 3:16

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

This verse may appear a little confusing at first, but basically Paul is saying that the pursuit of the prize requires continual effort on our part. A runner in a race will never win unless they run the entire race. One cannot run part of the race, walk another part of the race, take a nap, and then complete the race and yet have any hope of winning. In the same way, we will never pursue the prize as we should if we do not continually expend effort towards that goal. The word used to translate "walk by" means "to stand in line." In other words, don't get out of line, don't deviate from the right path. If we get serious about spiritual growth for three months, then mess around for six, and then get back into the Word, we will never reach the level of spiritual maturity we could have obtained if we had applied continual effort towards that task.

Four Ingredients to Help in Pursuing the Prize

1. **The Word**
2. **Prayer**
3. **Following an Example**
4. **Sufficient Trials to Shape Life**

Practical Helps in Pursuing the Prize - Philippians 3:17-21

After stressing the importance of pursuing the prize, Paul now turns to practical helps for those who wish to pursue the prize. He lists three of them in this section, Follow an Example, Flee Enemies, and Fix Our Eyes on the Eternal.

A. Follow an Example - Philippians 3:17

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

If we were to ask who our ultimate model and example as believers is, we would of course answer Christ. Christ alone is held up as the perfect model and perfect example to follow. However, he is just that, a perfect example. Although we do not want to downplay the significance of Christ's sinless life, we must realize that we cannot ultimately live as he lived. We have fallen flesh to deal with whereas Christ never had the flesh to contend with. As a result, he is an example of what we should be, but not an example of how a person encumbered by the flesh can live a godly life.

As a result, it is necessary for us to look to others who have made the pilgrimage and have been successful. It is one thing to look at Christ as our perfect model, and something quite different to look at a person as weak as ourselves and yet who has been able to achieve spiritual success. Paul is such a man. He holds himself up as a model in this verse by telling the Philippian people to follow him, even as he follows Christ.

It is sobering to realize that Paul could say such a thing. Too often we tell people, "Do as I say, not as I do." Such a concept is really foreign to the New Testament. We should be able to tell people, "Do as I do, since what I do is to follow Christ." This is not a mark of spiritual pride, but a mark of a true discipler. The goal of discipleship is not to produce educated Christians, but effective Christians. As Howard Hendricks often says, "The average Christian is educated beyond his obedience." We all must admit that we often know more than we do.

As a result, it is important for us to find a good example as we pursue the prize. We need to find someone with "skin on" that can serve as a model of godly character. We need someone with all the frailties of humanness to show us that living the Christian life is possible. And finally, we need to strive to be such a model to others so that they may follow us, even as we follow Christ.

B. Flee Enemies - Philippians 3:18-19

Philippians 3:18-19 (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: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

Positively, we need to find a godly example to follow as we pursue the prize. Negatively, we need to avoid bad examples. Many Christians find themselves shipwrecked when they pick the wrong person to follow. We are reminded of Hymeneus and Alexander who "shipwrecked the faith of some (1 Timothy 1:19-20)" Just because a person claims to be a model does not mean that he is one.

One of the most important things Paul taught the churches that he founded was the existence of false teachers who would creep in and lead the church astray. In Acts 20:29-30 Paul tells the Ephesian elders at Miletus, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." Paul's greatest concern was the arrival of false teachers who would lead the Church away from the truth into error.

Just as Paul warned the Ephesian elders with tears, so now he warns the Philippian church with tears. Interestingly enough, this is the only passage in the New Testament where we find Paul stating that he is crying even as he writes. Why? It is because this is such an important issue.

Note Paul's characterization of these false teachers. He calls them "the enemies of the cross of Christ." These men (and women) are not mixed up, they are not deceived, they are not naive, they are enemies. Why? It is because they lead believers from the truth into error and compromise. In fact, Paul lists four basic characteristics of these examples to avoid.

1. Their end is destruction.

First of all, the ultimate end of these false examples is destruction. Destruction refers to eternal and final destruction. God may allow these men to live for a short time, but there is coming a pay day. A parallel passage on this is 2 Peter 2:1-9.

2. Their god is sensuality.

The phrase "god is their belly" refers to the fact that these false examples are sensual. They are interested in carnal delights and pleasures. We read in 2 Peter 2:10 that they "*walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness.*" Their entire character is one of unabated lust and sensuality. Although they may cover it for a short time, ultimately it will become evident.

3. They glory in sin.

Instead of seeing sin as something to be avoided, these false examples take glory in that very sin. More often than not, they just redefine sin in order to justify their own ungodly lifestyle. Instead of speaking against greed, they tell us that Christians are to be wealthy. Instead of calling adultery sin, they flaunt their liberty in Christ. Peter says in 2 Peter 2:13-14, "*Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings whil they feast with you. Having eyes full of adulteries, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: a heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children.*"

4. They mind earthly things.

The focus of these false examples is that of this world, not of the world to come. Often they are covetousness and preach a gospel of wealth and prosperity, little realizing that true wealth is stored in heaven, not on the earth.

How False Teachers Creep In

1. **Doctrine is seen as something for the leadership to be concerned with, not the average church member. It is more important for the church member to know the practical aspects of Christianity as opposed to the foundational reasons for it.**
2. **Doctrine is relegated to the back burner in favor of relationships. It is still taught, but it is taught in a non-divisive and non-confrontive way.**
3. **After a while, doctrine becomes less and less of an issue whereas relationships become more and more important. Those who take a stand on doctrinal issues are seen as troublemakers, meddlers, and hair-splitters.**
4. **Soon, it is more important to keep the peace than it is to stand firm for doctrine. New believers coming into the Church are not taught the importance of doctrine, but are instead taught the importance of unity and peace with other believers.**
5. **Finally, doctrine is forgotten. When a false teacher arrives, it is impossible to tell since the standard has been lost. Those who still try to teach doctrine are seen as malcontents and are usually forced out of the church.**

Questions To Ask When Choosing an Example

1. **Is this person a follower of Christ or of himself - Philippians 2:19-21; 3:18.**
2. **Does this person exalt Christ or does he exalt himself - 2 Peter 2:1.**
3. **Does this person focus on the eternal or on the temporal - 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.**
4. **Is this person laying up treasure in heaven or treasure on the earth - 2 Peter 2:2-3; 1 Peter 5:1-4.**
5. **Is this person's life an example of godliness or does he walk disorderly - 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12; 1 Timothy 4:12.**
6. **Does this person love the truth or does he refuse to hear and heed the truth - 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.**
7. **Does this person model goodness or evil - 3 John 11.**

C. Fix Our Eyes on the Eternal - Philippians 3:20-21

Philippians 3:20-21 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: 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.

Not only are we to find a good example, not only are we to avoid the enemies of the Cross, but we finally need to keep our eyes focused on the finish line. Many races have been lost by taking one's eyes off the finish line and looking back.

What is the finish line? It is our eternal reward in heaven. It is the ultimate realization of our salvation when we are glorified to be like Christ. We must focus our attention on that day so that we may patiently and consistently run the race before us.

Note that Paul couches the description of this finish line as being that of our real home. The word "conversation" refers to citizenship. Our real home is heaven, earth is only a temporary abode. Peter tells us that we should "*pass the time of our sojourning here in fear (1 Peter 1:17)*" and calls us "*strangers and pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11)*." The true believer sees himself as an exile and alien on earth, since his true home is elsewhere. By focusing on the eternal, it helps us run the race in the temporal.

Heaven Is Where Our Treasure Is

1. **The Father is in Heaven - Matthew 5:16; 5:49; 10:33**
2. **The Son is in Heaven - John 17; 3:13**
3. **The Holy Angels are in Heaven - Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25; 13:32**
4. **Our Reward is in Heaven - 2 Corinthians 4:16ff; Matthew 6:20; 1 Peter 1:4**

- 5. Our Names are Written in Heaven - Revelation 17:8; 13:8; Luke 10:20**
- 6. Our Home is in Heaven - John 14:1ff; Hebrews 11:13-16**
- 7. Our Eternal Family is in Heaven - Ephesians 3:15; Hebrews 12:23**
- 8. Our Citizenship is in Heaven - Philippians 3:20**
- 9. Our Hope is in Heaven - Colossians 1:5**
- 10. The True Temple is in Heaven - Revelation 14:7; 11:19**