

An Outline of Philippians Chapter 3

When taking up a chapter in the Word of God it is appropriate to remind ourselves of the character and broad construction of the book in which it is found. In doing this we provide the contextual framework in which to study the chapter and present our meditations upon it.

The Epistle in general

There are four things that give this Epistle its particular character:

1. It is a **prison** epistle. It was written by Paul during dark days of imprisonment in Rome - and yet, against the deprivation and demoralisation that was intended by incarceration, a glorious theme emerges and is magnified *-rejoice* in the Lord always – and again I say rejoice. As others have noted – Paul was never a prisoner *of* Rome; he was a prisoner *of Christ* in Rome.
2. It is a deeply **personal** epistle. It contains reflections by Paul concerning his Christian life and its many challenges. We learn more of the man – the son of Benjamin who was born out of due season, a chosen vessel unto Christ who said of Paul “I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” (Acts 9:16).
3. It is a valuable **pastoral** and **practical** epistle because it offers loving advice through exhortations and entreaties.
4. It is also a **princely** epistle because it presents the supreme glories of Christ and his work.

Outline of the Epistle – key themes

Chapter 1: Christ as the **principle** for our *conduct* – Christ our Exemplar
Chapter 2: Christ the **pattern** for our *conscience* and its *consecration* – Christ our Example
Chapter 3: Christ the **prize** in our *calling* – Christ for our exhortation
Chapter 4: Christ the **power** and **provider** for our *contentment* – Christ for our energy and encouragement

Outline of chapter 3

The expression “finally” in verse 1 of Chapter 3 marks the start of Paul’s concluding message to the saints at Philippi. We may summarize his message accordingly.

Verses 1-3: Paul’s **warning** against the flesh
Verses 4-7: Paul’s **witness** against the flesh
Verses 8-14: Paul’s **witness** according to the Spirit
Verses 15-21: Paul’s **will** according to the Spirit

Paul’s warning against the flesh – Verses 1-3

“Finally [as to the rest], 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. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the *flesh*.”

We are to have no confidence (trust) in the flesh – that which belongs to the “old man.” It is vital to note the believer is no longer regarded as being “in the flesh” (Rom 7:5). However, as part of our fallen nature the flesh is still in us. It is the “flesh” that lusts against the “spirit.” Paul begins by identifying those people who are in the flesh and who are governed by it – the unregenerate.

The verb “beware” – to be on guard - is used three times. On each occasion it is associated with the article and a distinctive descriptor. As such it identifies in each case a separate group among the unregenerate, who by their natures are motivated by the flesh.

- First – beware of the **dogs**, which refer to the unregenerate Gentiles. The expression marks the unclean and carnal character of the unsaved Gentile to the Jew. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles had first-hand knowledge of this as a prisoner. “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (Eph 3:1). The term “dogs” is used prophetically of the Gentiles in Psalm 22 in regard to the Lord’s crucifixion. “For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps 22:16).
- Then we have the warning to beware of the **evil workers** – the “enemies of the cross of Christ” (v 18). It would refer to all who seek to undermine the Gospel of Christ though the propagation of hostile doctrine. Now we are careful to observe that it is not simply a warning about the enemies of Christ – but the enemies of the *cross* of Christ. This is very specific and relates to the *doctrine of the Cross*. In the light of the imperative mood of this passage, it is incumbent upon us to put three questions to all who come to us professing Christ. Their answers determine whether they are friends or foes of the cross of Christ.
 - Who was it that was on the cross?
 - What did He do on the cross?
 - Why did He do it?

The first relates to Christ as the eternal Son of God in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily – His deity and humanity. The second relates to the fact that He voluntarily entered into death as the perfect sacrifice for sin. The third – why He did so, brings before us the truth that it was to vindicate a thrice holy God and to taste death for every man.

- Third, there are those of the **concision** which doubtless refers to the unregenerate Jews – specifically those who hold that the doctrine of circumcision of the flesh is the rite of passage to divine grace and blessing. The unregenerate Jew is also seen in Psalm 22 in their persecution of the Lord. The “strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round” (Ps 22:12).¹

Paul’s witness against the flesh - Verses 4-7

“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: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”

The flesh does have its gain. Paul states what that gain was for him – and, may note that his gain – that of the flesh, was found **inside the camp** i.e., inside Judaism and all that it typifies today - man’s religious institutions and systems of theology. There are four things that Paul according to the flesh had confidence in and brought him gain:

- His **lineage**
- His **law** - note the pronoun – “his” law, that is, Paul’s personal Judaist view of it.²
- His **loyalty** to it. “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the

¹ Bashan was the stronghold of Manasseh, the apostate son of good Hezekiah (2 Kings 10:33).

² The “Law” is holy and good and a “schoolmaster” that brings us to Christ.

Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal 1:14).

- His **longing** through it.

We see all this woven together in his venerated Judaic pedigree. He had it:

- **nationally** as one who was of the stock of God's favoured people – His firstborn nation, Israel;³
- **tribally** as of the seed of Benjamin - the son of my right hand;
- **sholastically** and **socially** as a Hebrew of Hebrews, as one who sat at the feet of the revered Gamaliel;
- **religiously** as touching the law a Pharisee and in his zealous persecution of Christ. Paul then Saul, like his namesake and other son of Benjamin, stood in the flesh head and shoulders above all. Such is the witness of Paul against the flesh. He sought his gain within the camp and outside the veil. That is where the flesh is satisfied.

Paul's witness according to the Spirit - Verses 8-14:

"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, 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: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 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, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Paul now presents his new-found gain which is grounded in the righteousness which is of God by faith. What we have here defines Paul's Damascus conversion *positionally*. He stands justified before God not in his own withering righteousness, but in the righteousness of God which is Christ – the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21). It is also a gain found in the infinite wealth in the knowledge of Christ – His Person and work – the Gospel. The excellency or supremacy of this knowledge, enabled him to suffer the loss of all things – the gain that was according to the flesh, his lineage, his law and his loyalty to it - and count them as dung and gain Christ.

Let us mark the distinction carefully. Previously Paul's gain was found within the camp and outside the veil and measured by the death of the saint in Christ. Now he seeks his gain outside the camp and within the veil - and his gain is now measured in his own death. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philipp 1:21). Here Paul defines the *practical* value of his Damascus road conversion. It reflects the truth that he has gained a new lineage and a new loyalty which is apart from and superior to the law – both *his* law and *the* Law. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17). So we see in Paul:

- His new *lineage* is **in Christ** – which he has gained by having the righteousness of God through faith and not according to the law which is of works.
- His new *loyalty* is **to Christ** as seen in his desire to know Christ – to know Him according to two things, both of which lie outside the camp - the power of His resurrection and the

³It is not here Abraham's seed as in Roman 11, because here it is to do with the gain according to the flesh. In Romans 11 it is gain in regard to the covenants.

fellowship of His sufferings. We see such power outside the tomb on that first resurrection morn. He like Mary Magdalene became a student in the school of the risen Christ.

- His new *longing* is a longing **after Christ**, not coveting to be a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” complying with the precepts of the Pharisee, but one who is conformed unto the death of Christ.

Do we appreciate our new lineage? Are we of Christ or of some denominational camp? Where do our loyalties really lie? Are they singular? What are our longings? Are they after world and its glories? These things must be attended to if we seek to walk according to the Spirit of God as a person who has been *converted* and led by the Spirit and not the flesh.

Christ's death and resurrection – practicalities - Christ in our calling

“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death” (v 10).

Three things we need to know in regard to our calling in Christ.

1. First – to know Him – the **Person**. The thought conveyed by the Greek word “know” is to apprehend Christ not merely through a learned exegesis *of* Him, but through a living experience *with* Him. May we note carefully that the former is a prerequisite for the latter. Our practical knowledge and living for Christ begins with the mind – “Let this mind be in you” says Paul. A proper living experience of Christ must begin with the right idea about the Person of Christ. This is the endemic failure within the professing church. There is much done in the name of Christ – even rejoicing, but sadly with little or no apprehension of the Person of Christ. It is reflected in irreverent dialogue and errant doctrine that breed within the camp. We are entitled to ask of any, “who is this Jesus you name and proclaim?” “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:2). But where do we come to know Christ? It is outside the camp. The man of John 9 whose blindness was cured by the Lord knew Him as “a prophet.” The Pharisees – the spiritually blind cast Him out of the synagogue – outside the camp. It was *there* the Lord sought him and *there* He revealed His Person as the Son of God. “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him” (Jn 9:35-38).
2. Second, to know the power of Christ's resurrection. The word power is the Greek *dunamis* which has the sense of “might.” We get our word “dynamite” from it. What is this “power?” We must first ask “What does Christ's resurrection mean? It signifies the vindication of God through His shed blood and the justification of the believer because of it. “[Christ] Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom 4:25). Surely this is the core of Paul's confidence in Romans 1:16? “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.” The Gospel is the power (*dunamis*) of God unto salvation because it is grounded on the vindicating work of Christ testified to by His resurrection. To know the power of Christ's resurrection then is to live in the knowledge of what it meant to God and the assurance this gives to us. It defines the powerful *professional* aspect of Paul's conversion on that Damascus road – Paul the evangelist! Where then do we come to know the power of His resurrection? Outside the camp! It was so for Mary Magdalene outside the tomb and for those along the Emmaus road.

3. The fellowship of His sufferings. That is, a practical partnership in the sufferings of Christ – His rejection, unjust accusation and humiliation. Again Paul takes us to the place where he once saw no gain but now it is a place of great blessing to him - outside the camp, the place of Christ's reproach. "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb 13:13-14).

Sin offering

Outside the camp was the place where the sin offering was burned. It was the sin offering that enabled entry into the holiest of all. And so we come again to the grand provision peculiar to this dispensation. This son of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews found his gain in Christ not only outside the camp but also *inside the veil*. If Paul was to speak of "gain" to those within the camp, he would have to begin with the altar of sacrifice. But here as elsewhere in Scripture, there is never a mention of such an altar when the believer in Christ is in view. This because our "gains" are all to be had within the veil wherein there was never an altar of sacrifice. How sad – how spiritually unenlightened and unnecessary it is today to attempt to bring the sacrificial altar of the camp within the veil. We see it in the erroneous doctrine of Rome - transubstantiation, in the erroneous doctrine of the Reformation - consubstantiation and in every doctrine in which the celebration of the Lord's Supper is said to impart spiritual virtue to the participant.

To what end must we know these things?

1. Conformity unto the death of Christ. That is, conformity to what that it means practically. What is this except sacrificial obedience? Surely Paul wants us to defer to chapter 2 and revisit the character of the mind of Christ, through which He was obedient – even unto the death of the cross!
2. To attain unto the resurrection of the dead. The word is *exanastasis* – which is used only here in the NT and refers to an "out resurrection." The context is moral and temporal – not physical and eternal. The expression refers to living a life consistent with the power and glory of the resurrected Christ (v 10).⁴ Paul looks ahead and sees his glorification in his resurrection and seeks to live in the light of it. It is this practical moral completeness which he seeks to attain. So says John. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He [Christ] is pure" (1 Jn 3:2-3). "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom 6:4-6).
3. To press toward the mark for (*unto*) the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. This prize refers to the reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ, a prize associated with the high calling of God in Christ.

Paul's will according to the Spirit - Verses 15-21:

"Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and

⁴ This verse has been wrongly used to support the unbiblical idea of a "partial rapture" – that is, a believer must live a morally acceptable life to qualify to be among those taken to be with Christ when he comes to the air for His Bride.

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.) 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.”

This section tells the saints at Philippi and indeed all who are “perfect” – complete in Christ, what Paul will have them do in the light of all that has been mentioned before. The expression “as many as be perfect” is a descriptive statement of all who belong to Christ - positionally complete in Him, a standing “whereto we have already attained [rather - obtained],” through faith.⁵ Paul’s will is that in the light of this positional truth they will consider the practicalities associated with it. That is, they:

1. Are united in mind and walk. Paul’s exhortation to unity is again noted and once more he focuses on the “mind.” There are seven explicit exhortations relating to the conduct of our mind in this epistle. They are circumscribed by the “mind of Christ.”
 - A *lowliness* of mind – the humility of Christ
 - A *loyalty* of mind – the integrity of Christ
 - A *largeness* of mind – the sympathy of Christ
2. Follow Paul’s spiritual example and that of his fellow apostles.
3. Are familiar with the example shown by him and the other apostles.
4. Discern between the example of the apostles and that shown by the enemies of the cross of Christ.
5. To look for the Saviour – i.e., in waiting anticipation, and exercise these responsibilities until the Day of Christ –the day when our vile bodies shall be fashioned like unto His glorious body. It is the day that follows the rapture – the coming of the Lord to the air for His saints. In this we have the Damascus conversion of Paul defined in regard to its eternal *prospect*.

⁵ Note the contrast in the personal pronouns. It is “ye” in regard to the practical truths but “we” in regard to the positional truth of perfection (completeness) in Christ.