



PHILIPPIANS 3 LAY HOLD OF YOUR RICHES IN CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Paul had begun his epistle on a note of joy. Even though he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel of Christ, he still had reason to rejoice. He rejoiced over the Philippians, he rejoiced because his imprisonment was promoting the preaching of the gospel, and he rejoiced because he lived for Christ and had full assurance that God was in control and would work all things out for good. He encouraged his readers to seize the same spirit of joy and strive together through their own sufferings to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Paul explained that Christ is the example of worthy living through His humility and selflessness. Believers are to adopt the mind of Christ as their own in order to work out their salvation and become lights in a crooked and perverse world. As believers learn from Christ and embrace His way of life, there is even more reason for rejoicing.

Now Paul goes on to show by his own example that Christ should be the very center of our lives. All of our rejoicing should be in Him as we leave worldly things behind and press forward to lay hold of all our riches in Christ. After all, we are not citizens of this world. We are citizens of heaven so our hopes, our confidence, our endeavor, and our joy should be concentrated upward.

OUTLINE OF PHILIPPIANS 3

- I. Rejoice In The Lord - Philippians 3:1
- II. Put No Confidence In The Flesh - Philippians 3:2-8
- III. Press On Toward The Goal - Philippians 3:9-16
- IV. Pattern Your Walk Appropriately - Philippians 3:17-21

I. Rejoice In The Lord - Philippians 3:1

Instead of finding our enjoyment in things of the flesh and of this earth, it is a Christian's privilege, obligation and pleasure to rejoice in the Lord. Paul could repeat this admonition over and over and never become tired of it. To teach the glories of the grace of God and the believer's proper gracious response is never trouble to one who has been called of God to do so. Correspondingly, it is beneficial for all of us to be reminded often of our blessings in Christ so that we do not drift away but rather become established and secure in the truth. "The more we rejoice in Christ the

more closely we shall cleave to Him and be willing to suffer for Him, and the less danger of being drawn away from Him" (Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary).

II. Put No Confidence In The Flesh - Philippians 3:2-6

This passage is a warning to the Philippians to beware of Judaizers. These men were Jews who had become believers, but taught that Gentiles must convert to Judasim and be circumcised before they could be saved (Acts 15:1,5). They were a chronic threat to the church because they placed confidence in the flesh and added works of law to the gospel of faith in Christ. See Galatians 5:1-11 where Paul explains the danger of the Judaizers' teaching.

A. Beware of Judaizers - Philippians 3:2

Paul characterizes the Judaizers as *dogs*, refers to their works as *evil*, and describes their dogma as *mutilation*.

1. Beware of dogs - 3:2

Dogs were considered unclean, and to call someone a dog was an expression of contempt. The Jews called the Gentiles dogs, and now Paul projects that same derogatory term back at them.

2. Beware of evil workers - 3:2

Because their teachings denied the basic doctrine of salvation through faith in Christ alone, their ways and works were evil.

3. Beware of the mutilation - 3:2

Mutilation is literally translated "cutting off". Paul used the word here to show his contempt for the Judaizers and their insistence upon circumcision for the Gentiles. Not only were they insisting upon mutilation of the flesh, but they were mutilating the gospel by doing so!

B. The true circumcision - Philippians 3:3

True circumcision is of the heart (Romans 2:28-29), and it truly always has been (Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4). Those of the true circumcision are spiritual rather than worldly in worship and find all their joy and confidence in Christ and His finished work.

1. *Worship God in Spirit* - 3:3

Those with circumcised hearts worship from the heart and do not put their confidence in outward show.

2. *Rejoice in Christ Jesus* - 3:3

The law was only a shadow of good things to come. Christ, the reality, has now come and we rejoice in Him. See Hebrews 10:1-14.

3. *Have no confidence in the flesh* - 3:3

This means that there is no reliance upon circumcision for salvation, nor upon any other external rite, rank, work, or conformity to tradition or law. Are you depending upon anything other than Christ for salvation such as obedience to laws or rules, observance of traditions, tithing, or church attendance? The Scripture plainly teaches that salvation is in Christ alone (Matthew 1:21; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5).

C. Paul's example - Philippians 3:4-6

Paul shows that he easily could have placed his confidence in the flesh, more so than any of the Judaizers.

1. He was *circumcised the eighth day* - 3:5

The eighth day was the proper day for a Jewish infant's circumcision. This shows that Paul was a pure-blooded Jew and not an Ishmaelite (circumcised at the age of thirteen years) or a proselyte to the Jewish religion.

2. He was *of the stock of Israel* - 3:5

Israel was the covenant name for God's people. Being *of the stock of Israel* means that both his parents were Jews.

3. He was *of the tribe of Benjamin* - 3:5

Of all the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel, Benjamin was the only one who had been born in the Promised Land. Also, the first king of Israel (Saul) had come from the tribe of Benjamin.

4. He was a *Hebrew of the Hebrews* - 3:5

This alludes to the fact that his family spoke Hebrew and followed the Hebrew customs. They had not adopted the Greek language or customs in their home.

5. He was a *Pharisee* - 3:5

The Pharisees were the strictest religious sect of Jews, meticulous in keeping the law and traditions.

6. He was zealous in persecuting the church - 3:6

In Paul's own words: *For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers* (Galatians 1:13-14). See also Acts 9:1-2 and 22:3-5.

7. He was *blameless* concerning legalistic righteousness - 3:6

Paul had been obedient to all aspects and details of the law. He had done all that was required of him in observing the law and leading a moral and upright life. His actions were *blameless*.

D. Count all things loss - Philippians 3:7-8

When Paul turned to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (as recorded in Acts 9:1-22), he did not simply add Christ to the list of his accomplishments and assets. He gave up everything else for the sake of Christ. To Paul, nothing was important in comparison to Christ. In fact, everything else was *rubbish*, a word which denotes "refuse" or "dregs", things which are worthless and contemptible. This is the extent to which having Christ surpassed all he had before or anything else he could ever think of. Paul gave up everything willingly and joyfully because he understood the excellence of knowing Christ as his Lord. He relied fully upon Christ. Are you still relying upon things or accomplishments for your security, or have you counted all things as worthless and contemptible because you have come to understand and value your spiritual blessings in Christ? Read Ephesians 1:1-15 where Paul lists the believer's blessings in Christ.

III. Press On Toward The Goal - Philippians 3:9-16

In order to lay hold of our riches in Christ, believers must *press toward the goal* (3:14). Having been laid hold of by Christ (3:12), we must strive to lay hold of all that He has for us. This we do through faith, having a proper attitude, and common standard of behavior.

A. Press on through faith - Philippians 3:9-11

1. To be found in Christ - 3:9

Paul's desire is to be *found in Him*. By this we see that the believer's position is in Christ. Christ is not just gained as an outward possession but is to be so much an inward and integral part of us that even our righteousness is not our own but from God through

Christ. Righteousness is found only in Him and is not to be pursued through obedience to the law. It is freely received from God through faith in Christ. *Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed..... even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe* (Romans 3:21-22).

2. To know Christ - 3:10

Paul's heart was set upon knowing Christ. The Greek word for *know* expresses not just intellectual knowledge but knowing through experience. In knowing Christ, Paul wanted to experience both the *power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings*.

a. The power of His resurrection - 3:10

Christ's resurrection, which revealed Him as the Son of God, also revealed the power of God (Romans 1:4 and Ephesians 1:19-20). The fact that Christ has been raised from the dead should fill believers with a sure hope that we will also be raised by that same power. Even beyond that, we can experience God's mighty resurrection power in our everyday lives as we live by faith in Christ.

b. The fellowship of His sufferings 3:10

This refers to suffering for Christ's sake, the privilege which Paul has already discussed in 1:28-30. It is a suffering for righteousness which conforms us to His death. To be *conformed to His death* means to continually become more like Him inwardly, in humility and selflessness, living as He did so that we may be willing even to die as He did. Albert Barnes notes that, "They who are most like Him in the scenes of humiliation here, will be most like Him in the realms of glory" (Barnes' Notes on The New Testament).

3. To attain to the resurrection from the dead - 3:11

Paul's desire is to be raised just as Christ was. Paul believed that all the dead would be raised. However, the resurrection of the unjust will be followed by the second death (Revelation 2:11; 20:14 and 21:8). The resurrection of believers will be followed by eternal life, and this is the resurrection to which Paul longs to attain. It is the resurrection of the righteous (righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (3:9). Matthew Henry calls it "the resurrection by eminence" (The Matthew Henry Commentary). Paul expresses his longing for this resurrection in 2 Corinthians 5:4, *For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life*.

B. Press on with the proper attitude (mind) - Philippians 3:12-14

Paul pressed on toward this resurrection. It was his goal, although he realized fully that perfection would not be attained in this life. His words here may be aimed at some who felt they had attained perfection and did not need to strive any further. Paul was intent upon pressing on toward perfection.

1. Fulfilling the purpose - 3:12

His desire was to fulfill the purpose for which God had saved him.

2. Reaching forward to those things which are ahead - 3:13

Paul had his mind on doing one thing. He had singleness of purpose, one place in which he concentrated all his effort. He put the past behind him and out of his mind, both his accomplishments and his failures. He moved forward with no regrets. He was running *for the prize* (3:14).

3. The prize - 3:14

Paul's eyes were fixed on the goal because he wanted *the prize*. This passage evokes a picture of him as a runner, straining every muscle and nerve to reach the finish line and never looking back. *The prize* he so desired was *the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*. The upward call is a heavenly call (Hebrews 3:1). The prize is heaven itself. Do you have your eyes on earthly rewards or are your eyes fixed on the heavenly goal?

C. Press on in unity - Philippians 3:15-16

Mature Christians realize how far they are from the goal, and they are the last to count themselves as perfect. They will also continue to press on for the prize, forgetting the past. Paul writes that he is confident God will confirm this truth and reveal the right attitude.

Paul calls for his readers to continue progress forward together. So far they have been on the right track. They are to keep on living by that same standard in unity of mind.

IV. Pattern Your Walk Appropriately - Philippians 3:17-21

Paul and others who practice what he has taught are examples to be followed, men and women to pattern our lives after. However, many people's lives serve as negative examples, so we must be sure to take note of the lifestyle of those we choose to follow.

A. Do not follow worldly ways - Philippians 3:18-19

Negative examples are enemies of the cross of Christ. These are not the Judaizers to whom Paul had referred earlier, but probably those who misinterpreted Christian liberty as freedom to sin. Paul addressed this heresy in Romans 6. Obviously, those who call themselves Christians and continue to willfully sin are enemies of all the cross stands for.

1. *Whose end is destruction* - 3:19

Even before describing these enemies of the cross, Paul makes it known that their doom is already sealed. The word *destruction* is the Greek "apoleia", which means "ruination by separation from the presence of God in eternal judgment." It is a word which expresses the opposite of salvation.

2. *Their example* - 3:19

Their whole lifestyle is centered around fleshly pleasures and earthly loves.

a. *Whose god is their belly* - 3:19

They are gluttons. They serve their own sensual physical desires. Paul writes a warning against such men in Romans 16:17-18.

b. *Whose glory is in their shame* - 3:19

They are sensual people who know the glory of the gospel but continue to sin. "They value themselves for what is their blemish and reproach" (Matthew Henry, [The Matthew Henry Commentary](#)). In Ephesians 4:19, Paul writes that such people are, *Past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness*. The apostle Peter also warned against the same type of people and called them *accursed children* (2 Peter 2:13-14).

c. *Who set their mind on earthly things* - 3:19

The apostle John warned, *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world* (1 John 2:15-16).

B. *Our citizenship is in heaven* - 3:20-21

Standing contrast to the enemies of the cross of Christ, who live according to the lusts of the flesh and the love of the world, are the citizens of heaven. Many people

in Philippi were colonists who lived far from Rome, the country of their citizenship. In the same way, believers are sojourners and pilgrims on this earth (1 Peter 1:11), living far away from heaven, our homeland (Hebrews 11:16). If our citizenship is in heaven, our love and longing will be upward (3:14).

It is from heaven which Christ will appear when He returns (Acts 1:11 and 3:19-21). Therefore, we are to take our attention away from inferior earthly things and wait earnestly and expectantly for His appearing.

His appearing will mean a transformation of our humble human bodies into conformity with the glorious body of Christ. Having risen from the dead, Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection. When He comes again, those who are His will also be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). It will happen in the twinkling of an eye. Our mortal bodies will be made incorruptible and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:52-54). The transformation will be the supreme act of divine power!

Applications

1. Where does your mind dwell and where is the joy of your heart focused? Is it on earthly things or on heavenly things? Are you eagerly waiting for the Savior, or are you too busy enjoying the pleasures of this life?
2. Is there some Christian whose example you are following? Is that person's life patterned after the attitude and actions of the apostle Paul and the things he has taught in this epistle?
3. What kind of an example and pattern do you set for others?