

Philippians 3 pt. 1 v.1-11

We find ourselves at about the halfway point in Philippians coming to an interesting turn of phrase...”FINALLY, my brethren...”

So Paul is beginning to wrap things up but he still has much to say. Kind of like a southern good-bye, a deliberate plodding toward departure. This is not merely an administrative wrap up. In the remaining verses Paul continues to present to us some deep theological truth.

We see in the verses under consideration that Paul exhorts the Philippians to an action (v.1-2); describes the collective state of the saints as the people of God who “worship God in the Spirit (v.3);” gives a personal autobiography with the express purpose of correcting the self-righteous believer who thinks they have it

altogether (v.4-6); and then gives his future hope -- "...the resurrection from the dead" (v.7-11).

V.1 - As Paul begins to conclude this letter at length he first encourages the Philippians to REJOICE IN THE LORD!

REJOICE loved one! Sometimes we get so caught up in what we think the Bible requires of us that we don't make time to rejoice.

We turn the joy of bearing fruit by the work God has wrought in us into a heavy, depressing, weight!

This might have been the tendency for the Philippians as well.

Paul has just given them quite a few lines on how they are commanded to be like-minded (2:2), esteem others better than themselves (2:3), and adopt the mind of Christ (2:5). As they adopt the mind of Christ they are to be a servant to others (2:7), humble themselves (2:8), and work out their own salvation in fear and trembling (2:12).

That's quite a lot, to say nothing of the common imperatives we are to be mindful of as well -- love your neighbor, care for others, choose the good, shun the evil, etc. It's easy to see how we sometimes inadvertently turn this into a works based religion, is it not? And sometimes the one thing that kind of gets lost in the shuffle is the command to REJOICE.

Though we espouse the idea of grace we are often sucked into a pitifully dull obedience which ONLY focuses on those godly behaviors as a task to complete rather than a joyful expression of worship based on the work that Jesus has already done and continues to do in our lives.

We are supposed to be rejoicing as believers! We have every reason to rejoice. All of the imperative behavioral commands that we are supposed to be doing in our lives are the result of the fact

that Jesus Christ has redeemed us, sealed us by the Spirit, and carries us along in His grace!

He is the one who has defeated sin and death, not us -- that is cause to rejoice! And yet, sometimes we are caught with a holy frown and a critical eye because we forget the joy of the good news. Remember it's good news not bad news!

As deep as the Pauline letters are, as challenging, as much as they call us to deep contemplation, one of the common themes that runs through them is the concept of joy and the reality that the saints are to be people of joy.

Jesus taught the disciples in the upper room:

[Jhn 15:10-11 NKJV] 10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and [that] your joy may be full.

Maybe more profound in its simplicity are Paul's words to the Thessalonians:

“Rejoice always...” (1 Thess 5:16)

Paul goes on to assure them that writing to them the same things repeatedly is not bothersome but it is safe, secure, stable.

Incidentally, this may cause us to ask where is Second Philippians or where is First Philippians. While it is not outside the realm of possibility that some previous letter to the Philippians has been lost to time this could also be relaying the idea that Paul is reiterating in his writing things that he has already spoken to them beforehand face to face.

Here's the deal in regard to repetition in instruction - especially in the gospel -- Loved one, as long as we continue following Jesus

you will continue to hear and read the same life-giving truths over and over again.

Blessedly these truths never get old, and we are certain of the certain truths -- those foundational matters pertaining to salvation.

While the method of how we communicate those truths will change, as God directs His word toward unreached people groups, the message never changes.

This is the reality of discipleship and following Jesus over the long-term. God has designed our faith this way on purpose because something as simple as the command to REJOICE IN THE LORD continues to be a growth point for us that we need to hear over and over again.

As we mature we come to understand more of what that means not only practically but also theologically. As we hear the same

truths retold time and time again we are further instructed in God's heart and His wisdom. Our faulty opinions can then be shaped into truth as we abandon our confused positions for holiness.

Also, consider that Paul explaining this need for repetition to them in very plain terms indicates that the Philippians needed to be reminded of this and so do we.

V.2 - Watch out!

“This warning is not against three different groups of people, but against the same group described in three ways...Most probably Paul's opponents were gnostic Jewish Christians who insisted on combining the gospel with the Law.”¹

¹ I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 91.

This warning, albeit said in different words, is a common warning in Paul's letters as well! The entire book of Galatians was a warning against the poison of legalism and adopting religious works as the basis of salvation.

Paul's language is quite strong! While these men probably appeared religious and sincere Paul characterizes them as dogs, evil workers, and the mutilation (referring to the false requirement that believing men must be circumcised).

V.3-6 - Paul pushes back.

Some in the first century church claimed that true worshippers **WOULD BE** circumcised. If we think this is too extreme let us remember that they even have a Scriptural basis for their argument.

The covenant requirement for circumcision was given by God to Abraham in Genesis chapter 17 way before the ten commandments were given in Exodus 19 & 20 (perhaps 500 years or so!).

That covenant was to be an everlasting covenant among the Israelites.

God even made an allowance for non-Hebrews to participate as He extended this covenant to foreigners who desired to celebrate the Passover in Exodus chapter 12.

Circumcision, this cutting in the flesh, was an ancient custom that was so deeply rooted in their faith that it was naturally carried over into Christianity. But Christ came to fulfill the whole Law, it has been abolished, nailed to the tree of Christ, there is no longer a requirement for those under Christ's covenant.

As Paul writes to the Colossians: [Col 2:13-14 NKJV] 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

While the church has come to acknowledge that circumcision is no longer required because of the doctrine of grace - largely based on Paul's valiant corrective efforts the church has found other things to take its place!

Now, as an exercise in conscience -- consider for a moment some behavior that you believe good Christians WILL DO that aren't specifically commanded by Scripture...that's the new legalism.

Rather, Paul says that the true mark of believing doesn't reside in the body or some action made by human hands but is found in

those who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have NO CONFIDENCE in the flesh!

And we all say amen and praise God for His grace that we aren't bound to rely on our own flesh to win salvation - rather the flesh of Jesus Christ purchased salvation for us.

BUT THEN - in a dramatic show of force and a reality check to those within the Philippian body who were perhaps relying on their own flesh and adhering to the Law, Paul lays his own credentials on the table.

For those who thought they were something, thought they were a big deal because of their fleshly/religious accomplishments, Paul brings them back down to earth.

It's one thing to hear that you don't have to follow a whole bunch of rules from a rule breaker and quite another to hear that you

don't have to follow a whole bunch of rules from somebody who followed ALL OF THEM!

That is Paul! He had followed all of the rules and found that they brought death rather than life!

[Rom 7:10-11 NKJV] 10 And the commandment, which [was] to [bring] life, I found to [bring] death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed [me].

Paul was born for self-righteousness - a Hebrew circumcised on the 8th day as the law requires (not a newcomer) who could trace his lineage all the way back to Benjamin. Incidentally the first time Benjamin is mentioned in the Bible is at his birth in Genesis 35:18. Paul's claim is even more remarkable because of the glaring disruption in Hebrew history that we call the Babylonian Captivity wherein the entire nation of Israel effectively ceased to

exist. Paul could likely trace his covenant lineage back over 1500 years.

Paul was so committed to the “righteous requirement of the Law” that he became a Pharisee - a strict religious-political sect of Judaism concerned with what they viewed as holiness or piety. No doubt they were sincere. The Pharisees get a bad reputation - perhaps deservedly - but they ostensibly held the Scriptures in high regard and were committed to fulfilling them down to the letter.

The problem was that in doing so they became dangerously self-centered and as Jesus observed, “neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.” (Matt 23:23, Luk 11:42)

This was Paul! In fact he was so committed that he set his heart on stamping out this increasingly popular sect of what he and the

Pharisees viewed as a heretical, deluded, offshoot of Judaism - the sect of the Nazarenes, what we call Christianity.

Long before he came to know the risen Lord Paul was a zealous crusader for what he considered to be the true faith - the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! Oh, Paul...how everything changed by that one thing - the resurrection.

V.7 Paul plainly declares that all of those religious accomplishments, accolades, things that made him a force to be reckoned with in Judaism, he considered them to be loss for Christ.

The Greek adds substantial weight to this commonly read verse and may include "...the implication that the loss involves considerable hardship or suffering..."²

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 565.

Bear in mind this is explicitly with regards to Paul's religiosity - the former self-righteousness that he once knew was stripped away for Christ.

V.8-11 Paul expounds on his assertion of losing all for Christ.

In the original language this is one long sentence through verse 11 and is packed with the idea that knowing Christ fully is unmatched - nothing is worth more.

No cost was too high for Paul. As zealous as Paul was for the Pharisees, he exceeded that zeal to know Christ. Paul had known the Law and all that he had studied and learned didn't hold a candle to the risen Lord that Paul met in Acts 9.

Paul's language is so strong here that we have at times diminished it so as to not offend our delicate sensibilities.

The term we translate as “rubbish” means, “useless or undesirable material that is subject to disposal, refuse, garbage (in var. senses, ‘excrement, manure...kitchen scraps’...consider everything...crud Phil 3:8 (cp. AcPI Ha 2, 23; Spicq. s.v. “to convey the crudity of the Greek ... : ‘It’s all crap’.”).”³

The KJV adopts the stronger translation, “...I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,”

Why? Why the strong emotions? Why the ruthless assessment of all past religious accomplishments? To gain Christ and to find our place in Him.

³ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 932.

Paul acknowledges and repeats over and over throughout his writings of the futility of the Law - we can not build our own righteousness! It must come from outside of us.

This is the alien righteousness, foreign righteousness, that was so important to the reformers -- the true, undeniable, righteousness of Christ that is awarded to those who believe in Christ and are found in Him.

But Paul doesn't stop there. The more common danger nowadays, as the pendulum of religiosity continues to swing from self-righteousness rooted in legalism, is what it swings toward -- stalled righteousness rooted in lazy-ism.

Those things that Paul leans into, that he desires to know more of revolve around the saving work of Jesus and Jesus' righteousness.

It is interesting to note that Paul frames these final clauses, his look to the future, in knowing Jesus Christ in specific ways.

Paul desired to specifically know, in very real, personal terms, “the power of His resurrection.” This is nearly incomprehensible for us because we aren’t accustomed to seeing dead people come back to life!

“To know Christ now means first of all to know “the power of his resurrection,” that is, the power that comes to believers on the basis of Christ’s resurrection”⁴

It is by the resurrection that God demonstrates His unmatched power. Do we believe that God forgives sins? Yes. Do we believe that God has reconciled humanity to Himself by the blood of

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 329.

Christ? Yes. What is the proof? The resurrection and the power that made Christ's resurrection reality!

In conjunction with the resurrection, Paul set his heart to know, "the fellowship of His sufferings." Paul traded in his religious accolades, he traded in his "place at the table" of Jewish society, he traded in worldly respect and admiration for knowing the suffering of Jesus - to be poured out for the sake of others. And in the doing was shaped, "came to be similar in form" to what Jesus experienced on the cross.⁵

Why? Because Paul looked forward to another resurrection...his own. Sharing, knowing Jesus and His suffering, even to the extent that we may come to know His death as full as possible is not a death sentence...but is rooted in resurrection power.

As Thomas Scott wrote:

⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 584.

“Every note with wonder swell,
Sin o’erthrown, and captivated hell;
Where is hell’s once dreaded king?
Where, O death, thy mortal sting?”⁶

That is what we celebrate! That is why we REJOICE! The man Jesus of Nazareth, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Christ...is alive today! He didn’t just come back to life for a brief time but is alive now! And we shall see Him face to face.

On this earth we participate in His resurrection partially as we are born again and shaped to His image - though it may be with much suffering AND, as believers it WILL BE with much rejoicing! In eternity we shall participate finally and completely in His resurrection as He gathers His church to Himself.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *The Pastor’s Book* ed. Douglas Sean O’Donnell (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 119.

Christ has risen! All creation lives in the wake of that glorious event. There is a resurrection coming. REJOICE in the resurrection. Know the resurrection power of Christ, know Christ.