

CHAPTER 3

He cautions them against judaizing seducers (v. 1-3) and proposes his own example: and here he enumerates the privileges of his Jewish state which he rejected (v. 4-8), describes the matter of his own choice (v. 9-16), and closes with an exhortation to beware of wicked men, and to follow his example (v. 17-21).

~~<300>~~PHILIPPIANS 3:1-3

DESCRIPTION OF TRUE CHRISTIANS

It seems the church of the Philippians, though a faithful and flourishing church, was disturbed by the judaizing teachers, who endeavoured to keep up the law of Moses, and mix the observances of it with the doctrine of Christ and his institutions. He begins the chapter with warnings against these seducers.

I. He exhorts them to *rejoice in the Lord* (v. 1), to rest satisfied in the interest they had in him and the benefit they hoped for by him. It is the character and temper of sincere Christians to rejoice in Christ Jesus. The more we take of the comfort of our religion the more closely we shall cleave to it: the more we rejoice in Christ the more willing we shall be to do and suffer for him, and the less danger we shall be in of being drawn away from him. *The joy of the Lord is our strength,* ~~<400>~~Nehemiah 8:10.

II. He cautions them to take heed of those false teachers: *To write the same thing to you to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe;* that is, the same things which I have already preached to you; as if he had said, “What has been presented to your ears shall be presented to your eyes: what I have spoken formerly shall now be written; to show that I am still of the same mind.” *To me indeed is not grievous.* Observe,

1. Ministers must not think any thing grievous to themselves which they have reason to believe is safe and edifying to the people.

2. It is good for us often to hear the same truths, to revive the remembrance and strengthen the impression of things of importance. It is a wanton curiosity to desire always to hear some new thing. It is a needful caution he here gives: *Beware of dogs*, v. 2. The prophet calls the false prophets dumb dogs (²⁸⁰Isaiah 56:10), to which the apostle here seems to refer. *Dogs*, for their malice against the faithful professors of the gospel of Christ, barking at them and biting them. They cried up good works in opposition to the faith of Christ; but Paul calls them evil workers: they boasted themselves to be of the circumcision; but he calls them the concision: they rent and tore the church of Christ, and cut it to pieces; or contended for an abolished rite, a mere insignificant cutting of the flesh.

III. He describes true Christians, who are indeed the circumcision, the spiritual circumcision, the peculiar of people of God, who are in covenant with him, as the Old-Testament Israelites were: *We are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*. Here are three characters: —

1. They worshipped in the spirit, in opposition to the carnal ordinances of the Old-Testament, which consist in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, etc. Christianity takes us off from these things, and teaches us to be inward with God in all the duties of religious worship. We must *worship God in spirit*, ⁴⁰⁴John 4:24. The work of religion is to no purpose any further than the heart is employed in it. *Whatsoever we do, we must do it heartily as unto the Lord*; and we must worship God in the strength and grace of the Divine Spirit, which is so peculiar to the gospel state, which is the *ministration of the spirit*, ⁴⁰⁸2 Corinthians 3:8.

2. They *rejoice in Christ Jesus*, and not in the peculiar privileges of the Jewish church, or what answers to them in the Christian church — mere outward enjoyments and performances. They rejoice in their relation to Christ and interest in him. God made it the duty of the Israelites to rejoice before him in the courts of his house; but now that the substance has come the shadows are done away, and we are to rejoice in Christ Jesus only.

3. They have no *confidence in the flesh*, in those carnal ordinances and outward performances. We must be taken off from trusting in our own bottom, that we may build only on Jesus Christ, the everlasting foundation. Our confidence, as well as our joy, is proper to him.

PHILIPPIANS 3:4-8

FALSE CONFIDENCE RENOUNCED

The apostle here proposes himself for an example of trusting in Christ only, and not in his privileges as an Israelite.

I. He shows what he had to boast of as a Jew and a Pharisee. Let none think that the apostle despised these things (as men commonly do) because he had them not himself to glory in. No, if he would have gloried and trusted in the flesh, he had as much cause to do so as any man: *If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof to trust in the flesh, I more*, v. 4. He had as much to boast of as any Jew of them all.

1. His birth-right privileges. He was not a proselyte, but a native Israelite: *of the stock of Israel*. And he was *of the tribe of Benjamin*, in which tribe the temple stood, and which adhered to Judah when all the other tribes revolted. Benjamin was the father's darling, and this was a favourite tribe. *A Hebrew of the Hebrews*, an Israelite on both sides, by father and mother, and from one generation to another; none of his ancestors had matched with Gentiles.

2. He could boast of his relations to the church and the covenant, for he was *circumcised the eighth day*; he had the token of God's covenant in his flesh, and was circumcised the very day which God had appointed.

3. For learning, he was a Pharisee, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, an eminent doctor of the law: and was a scholar learned in all the learning of the Jews, taught according to the perfect manner of the laws of the fathers, ~~421B~~ Acts 22:3. He was a *Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee* (~~421B~~ Acts 23:6), and *after the most strict sect of his religion lived a Pharisee*, ~~421B~~ Acts 26:5.

4. He had a blameless conversation: *Toughing the righteousness which is of the law, blameless*: as far as the Pharisees' exposition of the law went, and as to the mere letter of the law and outward observance of it, he could acquit himself from the breach of it and could not be accused by any.

5. He had been an active man for his religion. As he made a strict profession of it, under the title and character of a Pharisee, so he persecuted those whom he looked upon as enemies to it. *Concerning zeal, persecuting the church*.

6. He showed that he was in good earnest, though he had a zeal without knowledge to direct and govern the exercise of it: *I was zealous towards God, as you all are this day, and I persecuted this way unto the death,* ^{427B}Acts 22:3, 4. All this was enough to have made a proud Jew confident, and was stock sufficient to set up with for his justification. But,

II. The apostle tells us here how little account he made of these, in comparison of his interest in Christ and his expectations from him: *But what things were gain to me those have I counted loss for Christ* (v. 7); that is, those things which he had counted gain while he was a Pharisee, and which he had before reckoned up, *these he counted loss for Christ*. “I should have reckoned myself an unspeakable loser of, to adhere to them, I had lost my interest in Jesus Christ.” He counted them loss; not only insufficient to enrich him, but what would certainly impoverish and ruin him, if he trusted to them, in opposition to Christ. Observe, The apostle did not persuade them to do any thing but what he had himself did, to quit any thing but what he had himself quitted, nor venture on any bottom but what he himself had ventured his immortal soul upon. — *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,* v. 8. Here the apostle explains himself.

1. He tells us what it was that he was ambitious of and reached after: it was the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, a believing experimental acquaintance with Christ as Lord; not a merely notional and speculative, but a practical and efficacious knowledge of him. So knowledge is sometimes put for faith: *By his knowledge, or the knowledge of him, shall my righteous servant justify many,* ^{251B}Isaiah 53:11. And it is the excellency of knowledge. There is an abundant and transcendent excellency in the doctrine of Christ, or the Christian religion above all the knowledge of nature, and improvements of human wisdom; for it is suited to the case of fallen sinners, and furnishes them with all they need and all they can desire and hope for, with all saving wisdom and saving grace.

2. He shows how he had quitted his privileges as a Jew and a Pharisee: *Yea doubtless;* his expression rises with a holy triumph and elevation, *all men oun ge kai*. There are five particles in the original: *But indeed even also do I count all things but loss*. He had spoken before of *those things*, his Jewish privileges: here he speaks of *all things*, all worldly enjoyments and mere outward privileges whatsoever, things of a like kind or any other kind which could stand in competition with Christ for the throne in his

heart, or pretend to merit and desert. There he had said that he did count them but loss; but it might be asked, “Did he continue still in the same mind, did he not repent his renouncing them?” No, now he speaks in the present tense: *Yea doubtless, I do count them but loss*. But it may be said, “It is easy to say so; but what would he do when he came to the trial?” Why he tells us that he had himself practised according to this estimate of the case: *For whom I have suffered the loss of all things*. He had quitted all his honours and advantages, as a Jew and a Pharisee, and submitted to all the disgrace and suffering which attended the profession and preaching of the gospel. When he embarked in the bottom of the Christian religion, he ventured all in it, and suffered the loss of all for the privileges of a Christian. Nay, he not only counted them loss, but dung, *skybala* — *offals* thrown to dogs; they are not only less valuable than Christ, but in the highest degree contemptible, when they come in competition with him. Note, The New Testament never speaks of saving grace in any terms of diminution, but on the contrary represents it as the fruits of the divine Spirit and the image of God in the soul of man; as a divine nature, and the seed of God: and faith is called precious faith; and meekness is in the *sight of God of great price*, ~~1~~ 1 Peter 3:4; ~~2~~ 2 Peter 1:1, etc.

~~1089~~ PHILIPPIANS 3:9-14

THE APOSTLE'S CONCERN AND HOPE

We now heard what the apostle renounced; let us now see what he laid hold on, and resolved to cleave to, namely, Christ and heaven. He had his heart on these two great peculiarities of the Christian religion.

I. The apostle had his heart upon Christ as his righteousness. This is illustrated in several instances.

1. He desired to win Christ; and an unspeakable gainer he would reckon himself if he had but an interest in Christ and his righteousness, and if Christ became his Lord and his Saviour: *That I may win him*; as the runner wins the prize, as the sailor makes the port he is bound for. The expression intimates that we have need to strive for him and after him, and that all is little enough to win him.

2. That he *might be found in him* (v. 9), as the manslayer was found in the city of refuge, where he was safe from the avenger of blood, ^{<465>}Numbers 35:25. Or it alludes to a judicial appearance; so we are to be found of our Judge in peace, ^{<484>}2 Peter 3:14. We are undone without a righteousness wherein to appear before God, for we are guilty. There is a righteousness provided for us in Jesus Christ, and it is a complete and perfect righteousness. None can have interest or benefit by it but those who come off from confidence in themselves, and are brought heartily to believe in him. “*Not having my own righteousness, which is of the law; not thinking that my outward observances and good deeds are able to atone for my bad ones, or that by setting the one over against the other I can come to balance accounts with God. No, the righteousness which I depend upon is that which is through the faith of Christ, not a legal, but evangelical righteousness: The righteousness which is of God by faith, ordained and appointed of God.*” The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord our righteousness, ^{<534>}Isaiah 45:24; ^{<426>}Jeremiah 23:6. Had he not been God, he could not have been our righteousness; the transcendent excellence of the divine nature put such a value upon, and such a virtue into, his sufferings, that they became sufficient to satisfy for the sins of the world, and to bring in a righteousness which will be effectual to all that believe. Faith is the ordained means of actual interest and saving benefit in all the purchase of his blood. It is *by faith in his blood*, ^{<485>}Romans 3:25.

3. That he might know Christ (v. 10): *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings.* Faith is called knowledge, ^{<511>}Isaiah 53:11. Knowing him here is believing in him: it is an experimental knowledge of the *power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings*, or feeling the transforming efficacy and virtue of them. Observe, The apostle was as ambitious of being sanctified as he was of being justified. He was as desirous to know the power of Christ's death and resurrection killing sin in him, and raising him up to newness of life, as he was to receive the benefit of Christ's death and resurrection in his justification.

4. That he might be conformable unto him, and this also is meant of his sanctification. We are then made conformable to his death when we die to sin, as Christ died for sin, when we are crucified with Christ, the flesh and affections of it mortified, and the *world is crucified to us, and we to the world, by virtue of the cross of Christ.* This is our conformity to his death.

II. The apostle had his heart upon heaven as his happiness: *If by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead*, v. 11.

1. The happiness of heaven is here called the resurrection of the dead, because, though the souls of the faithful, when they depart, are immediately with Christ, yet their happiness will not be complete till the general resurrection of the dead at the last day, when soul and body shall be glorified together. *Anastasis* sometimes signifies the future state. This the apostle had his eye upon; this he would attain. There will be a resurrection of the unjust, who shall arise to *shame and everlasting contempt*; and our care must be to escape that: but the joyful and glorious resurrection of saints is called *the resurrection*, *kat' exochen* — by *eminence*, because it is in virtue of Christ's resurrection, as their head and first-fruits; whereas the wicked shall rise only by the power of Christ, as their judge. To the saints it will be indeed a resurrection, a return to bliss, and life, and glory; while the resurrection of the wicked is a rising from the grave, but a return to a second death. It is called the *resurrection of the just*, and the *resurrection of life* (~~413~~ John 5:29), and they are *counted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead*, ~~415~~ Luke 20:35.

2. This joyful resurrection the apostle pressed towards. He was willing to do any thing, or suffer any thing, that he might attain that resurrection. The hope and prospect of it carried him with so much courage and constancy through all the difficulties he met with in his work. He speaks as if they were in danger of missing it, and coming short of it. A holy fear of coming short is an excellent means of perseverance. Observe, His care to be found in Christ was in order to his attaining the resurrection of the dead. Paul himself did not hope to attain it through his own merit and righteousness, but through the merit and righteousness of Jesus Christ. “Let me be found in Christ, that I may attain the resurrection of the dead, be found a believer in him, and interested in him by faith,” Observe,

(1.) He looks upon himself to be in a state of imperfection and trial: *Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect*, v. 12. Observe, The best men in the world will readily own their imperfection in the present state. We have not yet attained, are not already perfect; there is still much wanting in all our duties, and graces, and comforts. If Paul had not attained to perfection (who had reached to so high a pitch of holiness), much less have we. Again, *Brethren, I count not myself to have*

apprehended (v. 13), *ou logizomai*. “I make this judgment of the case; I thus reason with myself.” Observe, Those who think they have grace enough give proof that they have little enough, or rather that they have none at all; because, wherever there is true grace, there is a desire of more grace, and a pressing towards the perfection of grace.

(2.) What the apostle's actings were under this conviction. Considering that he had not already attained, and had not apprehended, he pressed forward: “*I follow after* (v. 12), *dioko* — *I pursue* with vigour, as one following after the game. I endeavour to get more grace and do more good, and never think I have done enough: *If that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.*” Observe,

[1.] Whence our grace comes — from our being apprehended of Christ Jesus. It is not our laying hold of Christ first, but his laying hold of us, which is our happiness and salvation. *We love him because he first loved us,* ^{604B}1 John 4:19. Not our keeping hold of Christ, but his keeping hold of us, is our safety. We are *kept by his mighty power through faith unto salvation,* ^{604B}1 Peter 1:5. Observe,

[2.] What the happiness of heaven is: it is *to apprehend that for which we are apprehended of Christ*. When Christ laid hold of us, it was to bring us to heaven; and to apprehend that for which he apprehended us is to attain the perfection of our bliss. He adds further (v. 13): *This one thing I do* (this was his great care and concern), *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before*. There is a sinful forgetting of past sins and past mercies, which ought to be remembered for the exercise of constant repentance and thankfulness to God. But Paul forgot the things which were behind so as not to be content with present measures of grace: he was still for having more and more. So he *reaches forth,* *epekteinomenos* — *stretched* himself forward, bearing towards his point: it is expressive of a vehement concern.

(3.) The apostle's aim in these actings: *I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,* v. 14. He pressed towards the mark. As he who runs a race never takes up short of the end, but is still making forwards as fast as he can, so those who have heaven in their eye must still be pressing forward to it in holy desires and hopes, and constant endeavours and preparations. The fitter we grow for heaven the faster we must press towards it. Heaven is called here the mark, because it is that which every good Christian has in his eye; as the archer has his eye fixed

upon the mark he designs to hit. *For the prize of the high calling.* Observe, A Christian's calling is a high calling: it is from heaven, as its original; and it is to heaven in its tendency. Heaven is the *prize of the high calling; to brabeion* — *the prize* we fight for, and run for, and wrestle for, what we aim at in all we do, and what will reward all our pains. It is of great use in the Christian course to keep our eye upon heaven. This is proper to give us measures in all our service, and to quicken us every step we take; and it is of God, from whom we are to expect it. *Eternal life is the gift of God* (~~4623~~ Romans 6:23), but it is in Christ Jesus; through his hand it must come to us, as it is procured for us by him. There is no getting to heaven as our home but by Christ as our way.

~~4085~~ PHILIPPIANS 3:15-16

WARNINGS AND EXHORTATIONS

The apostle, having proposed himself as an example, urges the Philippians to follow it. Let the same mind be in us which was in blessed Paul. We see here how he was minded; let us be like-minded, and set our hearts upon Christ and heaven, as he did.

1. He shows that this was the thing wherein all good Christians were agreed, to make Christ all in all, and set their hearts upon another world. This is that whereto we have all attained. However good Christians may differ in their sentiments about other things, this is what they are agreed in, that Christ is a Christian's all, that to win Christ and to be found in him involve our happiness both here and hereafter. And therefore let us walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing. Having made Christ our all, *to us to live must be Christ.* Let us agree to press towards the mark, and make heaven our end.

2. That this is a good reason why Christians who differ in smaller matters should yet bear with one another, because they are agreed in the main matter: *“If in any thing you be otherwise minded* — if you differ from one another, and are not of the same judgment as to meats and days, and other matters of the Jewish law — yet you must not judge one another, while you all meet now in Christ as your centre, and hope to meet shortly in heaven as your home. As for other matters of difference, lay no great stress upon them, *God shall reveal even this unto you.* Whatever it is wherein

you differ, you must wait till God give you a better understanding, which he will do in his due time. In the mean time, *as far as you have attained*, you must go together in the ways of God, join together in all the great things in which you are agreed, and wait for further light in the minor things wherein you differ.”

~~3087~~ PHILIPPIANS 3:17-21

THE APOSTLE URGES HIS OWN EXAMPLE

He closes the chapter with warnings and exhortations.

I. He warns them against following the examples of seducers and evil teachers (v. 18, 19): *Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.* Observe,

1. There are many called by Christ's name who are enemies to Christ's cross, and the design and intention of it. Their walk is a surer evidence what they are than their profession. *By their fruits you shall know them,* ~~4020~~ Matthew 7:20. The apostle warns people against such,

(1.) Very frequently: *I have told you often.* We so little heed the warnings given us that we have need to have them repeated. *To write the same things is safe,* v. 1.

(2.) Feelingly and affectionately: *I now tell you weeping.* Paul was upon proper occasions a weeping preacher, as Jeremiah was a weeping prophet. Observe, An old sermon may be preached with new affections; what we say often we may say again, if we say it affectionately, and are ourselves under the power of it.

2. He gives us the characters of those who were the enemies of the cross of Christ.

(1.) Whose God is their belly. They minded nothing but their sensual appetites. A wretched idol it is, and a scandal for any, but especially for Christians, to sacrifice the favour of God, the peace of their conscience, and their eternal happiness to it. Gluttons and drunkards make a god of their belly, and all their care is to please it and make provision for it. The same observance which good people give to God epicures give to their

appetites. Of such he says, *They serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies*, ^{<5168>}Romans 16:18.

(2.) They glory in their shame. They not only sinned, but boasted of it and gloried in that of which they ought to have been ashamed. Sin is the sinner's shame, especially when it is gloried in. "They value themselves for what is their blemish and reproach."

(3.) They mind earthly things. Christ came by his cross to *crucify the world to us and us to the world*; and those who mind earthly things act directly contrary to the cross of Christ, and this great design of it. They relish earthly things, and have no relish of the things which are spiritual and heavenly. They set their hearts and affections on earthly things; they love them, and even dote upon them, and have a confidence and complacency in them. He gives them this character, to show how absurd it would be for Christians to follow the example of such or be led away by them; and, to deter us all from so doing, he reads their doom.

(4.) Whose end is destruction. Their way seems pleasant, but death and hell are at the end of it. *What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death*, ^{<5161>}Romans 6:21. It is dangerous following them, though it is going down the stream; for, if we choose their way, we have reason to fear their end. Perhaps he alludes to the total destruction of the Jewish nation.

II. He proposes himself and his brethren for an example, in opposition to these evil examples: *Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark those who walk as you have us for an example*, v. 17. Mark them out for your pattern. He explains himself (v. 20) by their regard to Christ and heaven: *For our conversation is in heaven*. Observe, Good Christians, even while they are here on earth, have their conversation in heaven. Their *citizenship* is there, *politeuma*. As if he had said, We stand related to that world, and are citizens of the New Jerusalem. This world is not our home, but that is. There our greatest privileges and concerns lie. And, because our citizenship is there, our conversation is there; being related to that world, we keep up a correspondence with it. The life of a Christian is in heaven, where his head is, and his home is, and where he hopes to be shortly; he *sets his affections upon things above*; and where his heart is there will his conversation be. The apostle had pressed them to follow him and other ministers of Christ: "Why," might they say, "you are a company

of poor, despised, persecuted people, who make no figure, and pretend to no advantages in the world; who will follow you?” “Nay,” says he, “but our conversation is in heaven. We have a near relation and a great pretension to the other world, and are not so mean and despicable as we are represented.” It is good having fellowship with those who have fellowship with Christ, and conversation with those whose conversation is in heaven.

1. Because we look for the Saviour from heaven (v. 20): *Whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.* He is not here, he has ascended, he has entered within the veil for us; and we expect his second coming thence, to gather in all the citizens of that New Jerusalem to himself.

2. Because at the second coming of Christ we expect to be happy and glorified there. There is good reason to have our conversation in heaven, not only because Christ is now there, but because we hope to be there shortly: *Who shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body,* v. 21. There is a glory reserved for the bodies of the saints, which they will be instated in at the resurrection. The body is now at the best a *vile body*, *to soma tes tapeinoseos hemon* — *the body of our humiliation*: it has its rise and origin from the earth, it is supported out of the earth, and is subject to many diseases and to death at last. Besides, it is often the occasion and instrument of much sin, which is called the *body of this death*, ^{<412>}Romans 7:24. Or it may be understood of its vileness when it lies in the grave; at the resurrection it will be found a vile body, resolved into rottenness and dust; the *dust will return to the earth as it was*, ^{<417>}Ecclesiastes 12:7. But it will be made a glorious body; and not only raised again to life, but raised to great advantage. Observe,

(1.) The sample of this change, and that is, the glorious body of Christ; when he was transfigured upon the mount, *his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light*, ^{<417>}Matthew 17:2. He went to heaven clothed with a body, that he might take possession of the inheritance in our nature, and be not only the *first-born from the dead*, but the *first-born of the children of the resurrection*. We shall be conformed to the image of his Son, *that he may be the first-born among many brethren*, ^{<418>}Romans 8:29.

(2.) The power by which this change will be wrought: *According to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.* There

is an efficacy of power, an *exceeding greatness of power*, and the *working of mighty power*, ^{<4119>}Ephesians 1:19. It is matter of comfort to us that he can subdue all things to himself, and sooner or later will bring over all into his interest. And the resurrection will be wrought by this power. *I will raise him up at the last day*, ^{<4164>}John 6:44. Let this confirm our faith of the resurrection, that we not only have the scriptures, which assure us it shall be, but we *know the power of God*, which can effect it, ^{<4122>}Matthew 22:29. At Christ's resurrection was a glorious instance of the divine power, and therefore *he is declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead* (^{<4104>}Romans 1:4), so will our resurrection be: and his resurrection is a standing evidence, as well as pattern, of ours. And then all the enemies of the Redeemer's kingdom will be completely conquered. Not only he *who had the power of death*, that is, *the devil* (^{<4124>}Hebrews 2:14), but the *last enemy, shall be destroyed*, that is, *death*, ^{<4156>}1 Corinthians 15:26, *shall be swallowed up in victory*, v. 54.