

4. Philippians 3:1-21

In Philippians 3, Paul follows up on his chapter 2 command:

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

The follow-up in chapter 3 includes four encouragements aimed at helping the church members work out their own salvation:

Watch out for those who put confidence in the flesh.

Attain the resurrection of the dead.

Press toward the goal.

Live according to the pattern.

Watch Out for Those Who Put Confidence in the Flesh

Phil 3:1-2

1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

2 Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.

Verse one clearly states the existence of an earlier letter. The repetition of gospel lessons is essential to safeguard the saints.

Paul begins verse three with a warning, “Watch out for the dogs.” *Dogs* was a common metaphor for evil people. David used the term to prophesy of those who would crucify the Lord. He wrote in Ps 22:16-18

16 Dogs have surrounded me;
a band of evil men has encircled me,
they have pierced my hands and my feet.

17 I can count all my bones;
people stare and gloat over me.

18 They divide my garments among them
and cast lots for my clothing.

One of the final statements of God in the Revelation stated the fate of *dogs*. Rev 22:14-15 states:

14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Paul defines the word *dogs* in the context, leaving no doubt about its meaning. They are evil men and mutilators of the flesh. Mutilation of the flesh refers to the legalistic binding of

circumcision. The word used in the KJV is concision. The original word, translated *concision*, which is now archaic, means *a cutting up or off*. Circumcision was never brought forward from the Mosaic Law where it was a sign of the covenant that God had with Abraham and for his descendants only. Gen 17:9-12 reads:

9 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, **you and your descendants after you for the generations to come**. 10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

Phil 3:3-4a

3 *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh – 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence.*

For Christians, physical circumcision is a non-issue. Although if it were an issue, as some would make it, Paul, by his heritage, could have such confidence in the flesh. Yet, the only thing that counts is true faith and obedience to the Lord, according to Gal 5:5-6:

5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

This faith expressed is the route to the new life as a new creature in Christ, and that is a rule. Gal 6:15-16 teaches:

15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

Circumcision for a Christian is the putting off of the sinful nature and not a putting off of the flesh. In Col 2:11-12, Paul places the point of our spiritual circumcision in the depth of our burial with him in baptism.

11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

This spiritual circumcision, done by Christ, leaves the physical act of circumcision as merely *harsh treatment of the body*. Col 2:23 teaches:

23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Phil 3:4b-6

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

However, if one were going to boast about their heritage as a Jew, including circumcision, Paul had no peer. He had all that a Jew could desire in the flesh. In the next verse, he considers all this a loss for the sake of Christ

Attain the Resurrection from the Dead

Phil 3:7-11

7 *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Having considered loss for Christ all that it meant to be a Jew, Paul attained surpassing greatness in knowing Christ his Lord. True righteousness comes from knowing Christ, knowing the power of his resurrection, becoming like him in his death, and attaining the resurrection from the dead. Once again the point of contact that Paul describes as *like him in death* is baptism, the sign of the new covenant. Rom 6:3-4 declares:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Press toward the Goal

Phil 3:12-14

12 *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

The Christian life is a work in progress, a journey, not a sudden destination; and we must press on to take hold of it. One must not let what has happened impede progress toward that goal to win the prize. Paul's statement gives new meaning to *heavenward* bound.

Phil 3:15-16

15 *All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

That all who are mature should take this long view of things expresses how important it is not to be dragged bound by anything. Even issues that we do not understand are not to impede our effort toward the goal.

Live according to the Pattern

Phil 3:17-18

17 *Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.*

As we press forward to goal of heaven, we cannot achieve it by perseverance and commitment alone. We must follow Paul's example, taking note of those who live according to that pattern that the apostles and prophets gave us. Faith, struggle, sincerity, and commitment are not enough. We must keep the example and pattern as Paul encourage over and over. The word for pattern here is TUPOS, a word which means a pattern, form, as in concrete forms, or a

model for imitation. Paul used it to describe how the Romans were made free from sin in Rom 6:17-18:

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Paul wrote emphatically to Timothy in 2 Tim 1:13-14:

13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you — guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Not every one will keep the pattern of sound words, and Paul calls them enemies of the cross of Christ. In other words, one cannot alter the pattern and be a friend to the Lord. They are mutually exclusive attitudes. [For a detail discussion of modern day *Enemies of the Cross of Christ* see www.gospellessons.info/enemiesofthecross.html]

Enemies are enemies no matter how sincere they act or sweet they sound. The devil disguises his ministers, according to 2 Cor 11:13-15

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Phil 3:19-21

19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Paul describes the sad end to their actions:

Their destiny is destruction!

Their God is their stomach!

Their mind is on earthly things!

On the other hand, those who keep the pattern and example of the apostles and prophets receive a glorious end to their efforts to attain the goal of the prize of the high calling:

Our citizenship is in heaven!

We eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus!

Our lowly bodies will be transformed!

We will be like his glorious body!