

PHILIPPIANS

CHAPTER THREE

1. How many times has Paul urged the Philippians to “rejoice” up to this point? What is the cause for joy in this instance?

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord” (Philippians 3:1) is the sixth use of the word thus far in the epistle (1:18; 1:18; 2:17, 18, 28). It is used here to reaffirm what was set forth on the previous occurrence (2:28), that they should be pleased to welcome Ephroditus’s return.

2. What might seem “tedious?” What was it, actually?

“For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe” (Philippians 3:1). Most people, including Christians, get annoyed to hear the same reminders over and over. They are irked by the redundancy. However, reminders are offered for the sake of caution and are, thus, necessary (2nd Peter 1:12-15; 3:1).

3. Whom did he warn about? Why did he call them what he did?

“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!” (Philippians 3:2). The epithets hint at whom he is referring to, but the assertions which follow make it abundantly clear he is talking about circumcisers.

He called them “dogs” because they were always barking and snapping at his heels (Acts 15:1-29; 21:21). They were so persistent, he had to mention the issue in seven of his thirteen epistles (Romans; 1st Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; Titus).

He called them “*evil workers*” because they thought they could work circumcision in order to earn salvation (Ephesians 2:8-13).

He called them “*the mutilation*” because they, literally, commanded genital mutilation as a condition of acceptance before God. This was once a sacred token of God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-15), but was decidedly unnecessary once gentiles were brought into the household of faith (Acts 15:1-29).

4. In contrast to those he warned against, whom does he count himself among?

“*For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*” (Philippians 3:3). Just as the church has become “*the Israel of God*” (Galatians 6:16), overtaking the old nation, so the church is now the new “*circumcision*” (Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:11). As such, we are the ones “*who worship God in the Spirit*” as opposed to those who merely worship in Jerusalem (John 4:20-24). Our joy is centered in the anointed one Christ and this is the seventh reference to rejoicing in the book. All that being said, our confidence has nothing to do with the “*flesh*” (Galatians 5:17).

5. If Paul was inclined to boast in the flesh, what claims could he stack up against an opponent?

Like the reluctant hero in many an action flick, who wishes to avoid fisticuffs, but ultimately is a far superior fighter than all his enemies, so Paul put forth: “*though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so*” (Philippians 3:4). His bona-fides as a super-Jew were:

- 1) *"Circumcised the eighth day"* (Philippians 3:5) as the law required (Leviticus 12:3) in accordance with what God had even earlier commanded Abraham (Genesis 17:13).
- 2) *"Of the stock of Israel"* (Philippians 3:5) meant he was a biological descendant of Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28), not a proselyte (Matthew 23:15) who converted to Judaism.
- 3) *"Of the tribe of Benjamin"* (Philippians 3:5) communicates that his ancestors had remained loyal to the house of Judah even when the rest of their kinsmen forsook the Davidic line and worship in the temple (2nd Chronicles 11:1-12).
- 4) *"A Hebrew of the Hebrews"* (Philippians 3:5) shows that he and his family had retained the culture of their people even when others became Hellenized (Acts 6:1). He spoke the language (Acts 22:2).
- 5) *"Concerning the law, a Pharisee"* (Philippians 3:5). No party was more strict in adherence to the law than were the Pharisees (Acts 26:5).
- 6) *"Concerning zeal, persecuting the church"* (Philippians 3:6) is well documented throughout the New Testament (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13-14; 1st Timothy 1:13).
- 7) *"Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless"* (Philippians 3:6) indicates he never violated his conscience (Acts 23:1).

6. What had all these gainful things in Judaism become to him in Christ?

*"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted **loss** for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things **loss** for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as **rubbish**, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8). He called them "loss" and "rubbish" or "dung" (KJV) or "refuse" (ASV). Discipleship starts with sacrifice (Matthew 16:24-26).*

7. How did Paul intend to be found in Christ?

He wanted to *“be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith”* (Philippians 3:9). Self-righteousness accomplishes nothing for the Lord (Luke 18:9-14; Romans 10:3). Since the Old Covenant is obsolete (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:13), and, therefore, cannot justify anyone (Acts 13:39), trying to keep it amounts to self-righteousness. Thus, all that is needed is the righteousness by faith (Romans 10:4).

8. What was the apostle gladly anticipating?

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). Except for those alive at Christ’s return (1st Thessalonians 4:13-17), all will resurrect, even the unrighteous (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15); obviously, Paul was eager to get to the resurrection of life (2nd Corinthians 4:14).

9. Why was he pressing on?

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

He had not yet *“attained”* his *“goal”* or *“prize”* – he was not *“perfected”* yet. Although there is a sense in which every Christian has already risen from the dead when putting off the old man of sin in baptism and rising to new life (Romans 6:3-6;

Colossians 2:12), the final resurrection has yet to occur (2nd Thessalonians 2:1-2), and it definitely will happen (1st Corinthians 15:12-19). Nobody will miss it. Because of what he was eager to receive in the resurrection, Paul kept pushing forward.

10. How could he reach forward?

“Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). Reaching forward requires forgetting what is behind (Luke 9:57-62). Lot’s wife disobeyed this precept and taught us all a lesson (Genesis 19:17-26). Elisha obeyed and taught us the same lesson in a more positive fashion (1st Kings 19:19-21).

11. What did he tell the mature to do?

“Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind” (Philippians 3:15-16). He was calling on mature people to think how he thinks (1st Corinthians 1:10) and if any were not quite there yet, he was confident they would learn (John 7:17).

12. Whose pattern and example must be followed?

“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (Philippians 3:17). Paul presented himself as an example worthy of emulation (1st Corinthians 4:16) and he instructed others to become examples (1st Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1st Peter 5:3), so there are others who should be imitated, so long as they, themselves, are imitating Jesus (1st Corinthians 11:1).

Noting, or marking, others is a two-way street. Good examples should be marked and followed, but bad examples should be marked and avoided (Romans 16:17).

13. Why did Paul insist the Philippians think like he did and follow his and similar examples?

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18). With an awareness of the opposition, he was warning them.

14. Why would the enemies of the cross meet their end in destruction?

“Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who set their mind on earthly things” (Philippians 3:19). They would be destroyed, implicitly in hell, because of their worldly mindset (1st John 2:15-17). Christians need a different perspective (Colossians 3:1-2).

15. Where is our citizenship?

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). Jesus is in heaven (Luke 24:51; Hebrews 1:3). If He is our Prince (Acts 3:15; 5:31), our Lord (Acts 2:36), our King (Revelation 17:14), and our Sovereign (1st Timothy 6:15), then our citizenship is where He is. If our kingdom is not of this earth, we better behave accordingly (John 18:36).

16. What are we waiting for Jesus to do?

He *“will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself”* (Philippians 3:21). He went to heaven to get our permanent home ready (John 14:1-4) and that is what we set our hope upon (2nd Corinthians 5:1-8). It will be transformative and we cannot yet fathom what the changes will be like (1st Corinthians 15:35-53), but they will be grand (1st John 3:2)!