**December 15, 2021**

**BIBLE STUDY**

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**"HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH"**

**Philippians 3:1-12**

***Philippians 3:1 "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed [is] not grievous, but for you [it is] safe."***

Paul begins chapter 3 with joy, not despair, urging the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord. Reminding them to do this is no trouble for him and is a safeguard for them. We can’t be reminded too often to rejoice in Jesus. But how can we find joy in the Lord when our circumstances are bad? Paul is about to answer that question. The word, "finally" is a transitional word that might be rendered “as for the rest” or “in addition” and indicates that this is summing up the things he had said to them in the last chapter. He sent Aphroditus, and wanted to send Timothy to them to keep them instructed in the ways he had started them in. To write the same things refers to matters that Paul touches on again and again, namely, the call to rejoice found throughout the epistle, and the repeated warnings about their adversaries (1:28–30; 3:1–4:1). He is saying, this letter of instruction is not hard to write, because he loves them and they know that he loves them. Anything he would say, would be well received, because they know what he would say would be in the way of instruction, not to criticize them, but to help them.

***Philippians 3:2 "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision."***

Paul opens by warning them to watch out for the dogs, for the evil workers, and for those who mutilate the flesh. These three epithets refer to Judaizers. "Dogs" is not speaking of an animal, but of the lost Gentile world. In biblical times, dogs were considered unclean animals; thus, Paul is saying to beware of false, “unclean” teachers. These were Jews who professed to be Christians. They preached that unless one is circumcised according to the custom of Moses, one cannot be saved (Acts 15:1). The main thing that Paul is warning them against in this, is the Judaizers who were trying to put them back under the law. They appear in the natural to be believers in Christ, when, in fact, they have not given up Judaism. Paul is saying, do not get back into the flesh religion. Christianity is of the spirit, not the flesh. The apostle refuses to call Judaizers “the circumcision,” the very expression applied in verse 3 to genuine Christians. Instead he calls them “the concision,” meaning, those who mutilate or cut the flesh. Judaizers mutilated the flesh by imposing circumcision on their converts, believing the ritual to be necessary for salvation. But the true “circumcision” consists of those circumcised of heart, not of body, recognizing the ritual to have been abrogated by Christ. Circumcision of the body no longer had spiritual value and significance.

***Philippians 3:3 "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."***

Paul contrasts these false teachers with followers of Jesus, saying we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God. The circumcision of Christians is of the heart. This circumcision is not of the flesh, but the cutting away of the lust of the flesh from around the heart. God is a Spirit, and those that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. Flesh religion is pertaining to the ordinances of the law. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the maid child. Jesus fulfilled the law completely, when He gave His body and blood on the cross in full payment. We are no longer under the law. Christians are living in the grace of God. Christ in us is our hope of glory. The only rejoicing a Christian has is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are to make a big deal about Jesus. He must be the focus of our worship. If Jesus is not a big deal to us, we can’t worship by the Spirit of God because the Spirit was sent to make much of Jesus. Paul concludes with a huge point of emphasis we are not to put confidence in the flesh. “Confidence in the flesh” refers to the conviction that I can do on my own what’s necessary for me to become what I’m supposed to be as a Christian. But when you put confidence in yourself about your relationship with God, you nullify his work in your life.

***Philippians 3:4 "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:"***

Next Paul lists his impressive spiritual pedigree, saying he has reasons for confidence in the flesh if anyone does. Paul had been a man of the law. He had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Indeed, he had quite the spiritual record before becoming a Christian. He had confidence in the fact that he had been circumcised the eighth day and had lived by the law of Moses. God brought a greater than Moses, when He brought His only Son to bring us grace from the law. The law is not done away with, just fulfilled. Paul is saying here, if the flesh could save you, I would have been saved by the flesh. He learned better on the road to Damascus.

***Galatians 2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness [come] by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.***

***Hebrews 10:1 "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, [and] not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."***

The law was fulfilled in Jesus' crucifixion. Any other man refers to Paul’s religious opponent, the Judaizer. Having just stated that Christians do not confide in human merit and religious achievements (v. 3), the apostle now shows that as far as one might do this, he himself could but does not. Paul draws back the curtain on his past Jewish life, lists his religious credentials, places himself on the Judaizers’ ground, and adopting their language, speaks of himself as having that very thing “the flesh,” or human and religious merit—which he in fact has rejected. He does this for two reasons: (1) to prevent his adversaries from alleging that his refusal to trust in religious credentials and accomplishments is due to his lack of them; and (2) to refute the Judaizers’ doctrine of there being any saving value in such human achievements.

***Philippians 3:5 "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;"***

***Philippians 3:6 "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."***

Paul lists seven of his religious credentials or “bragging rights” on which he dares not rely for salvation: (1) He was circumcised the eighth day. The writer begins with the ritual that was central in the Judaizers’ teaching. Unlike the Ishmaelite who was circumcised after his thirteenth year, and the proselyte who was circumcised in adulthood, Paul had the rite performed on him by punctilious parents in accord with the letter of the law. (2) Of the stock of Israel means he was from the nation of Israel. Israel was the covenant name of God’s ancient people. The Israelites’ descent from Abraham was shared with the Ishmaelites; his descent from Isaac was shared with the Edomites; but the Israelite alone could claim to descend from Jacob or Israel who wrestled with God and prevailed. (3) Of the tribe of Benjamin means he was a member of one of the two most prestigious of the 12 Jewish tribes. (4) An Hebrew of the Hebrews means he was a true-blooded Jew coming from a pure line of Jews, tainted with no Gentile admixture. And his ancestors had, to some degree, retained the Hebrew language and customs, thus showing fidelity to the old culture. (5) As touching the law (or, “regarding the law”) tells us that as a Pharisee Paul belonged to the denomination that was the most orthodox defender, observer, and expounder of the Old Testament, and was a former student of their great teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22: 3). (6) Persecuting the church refers to his being so zealous for the Jewish religion that he once persecuted Jesus’ followers to stamp out Christianity. And (7) touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (or: Paul is saying here, “concerning righteousness which is in accord with the law, I was blameless”), that is, outwardly, no one could fault him for failing to keep any point of the law. Paul is telling them that he had been more of a Jew than any of them, but he realized that was not the way to salvation. All of the things Paul said in verse 5 were true, but that was still not the way to heaven. Paul had kept the very letter of the Mosaic law. He thought he was doing God a favor when he persecuted the Christians. Paul was so sincere in what he was doing, that Jesus appeared to Paul in a very bright Light, so that Paul would believe Him. Paul believed and changed completely. Now, he is saying that these who were promoting Judaism must change too if they desire to be saved. The old way is not the true way to God. His discussion of the topic culminates with the bold claim that regarding the righteousness that is in the law, he was blameless. Yet, as a believer, he puts no confidence in the flesh. If he had, he wouldn’t have been able to rejoice in the Lord from a prison cell. If we place our confidence in our accomplishments, or in anything other than Christ, we will find it impossible to rejoice in the Lord when things don’t go well. When we struggle in our marriages or in our careers, we’ll be miserable if we’ve placed our confidence in things. To be steady and joyful in all circumstances, we must place our confidence in Jesus.

***Philippians 3:7 "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."***

***Philippians 3:8 "Yea doubtless, and I count all things [but] loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them [but] dung, that I may win Christ,"***

Paul says, everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. He gave all of his position and former beliefs up to follow Christ. At one time, Paul had thought all of those things to be important, but now he has learned a better way. Paul was willing to turn his back on all the things he had been taught as a youth. He did not count anything in this world valuable enough to keep him from Christ. Then he gets even more radical, pointing out that he continues to consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus. Loss means detriment. On the Damascus road Paul came to realize that what things were gain to him, the seven religious credentials listed in verses 5 and 6, were actually detriments or liabilities. Trusting in all these religious privileges and human attainments for salvation had not brought him closer to God, but farther away from Him. Paul counts his past accomplishments and anything in the present or future as a “loss” compared to knowing Jesus. In fact, he considers them no better than dung. Things are worthless to Paul when compared to Christ. But the only way a person can view life from this perspective is to see how valuable Christ truly is. Not only does Paul view those seven credentials as loss but expanding this idea he also regards all things (i.e., any such human works and religious attainments on which one might depend to secure a place in heaven) as dung or excrement. As one rids himself of his body waste, so did the apostle rid himself of his “gains” upon realizing that they cut him off from God. I have suffered the loss (or, “I have forfeited”) means Paul willingly renounced all his earthly advantages and Jewish privileges as a means of attaining salvation. That I may win Christ means that Paul might make Jesus his Savior and be saved. He had to abandon his “gains” that he might “gain” salvation. One cannot be saved as long as he confides in his own efforts and accomplishments; these must be renounced before he can believe in Christ as Savior. The Light of the world had shined in the heart of Paul, and he would never be the same again. Things of this world meant absolutely nothing to Paul, in comparison with Christ. The greatest possession any person can have, is Jesus Christ. Paul appreciated the greatness of being allowed to know Jesus Christ in reality.

***Philippians 3:9 "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:"***

Paul then returns to the necessity of finding his righteousness in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. And be found in him (or, “and in order that I might be recognized as being in Christ”): Paul renounced his religious credentials so that he could “win Christ” (v. 8) or be saved, and so he would be “recognized” (acknowledged) by God as being “in Christ” or being rightly related to Christ. Through the faith of Christ, that is, divine righteousness is imputed to the repentant sinner through his believing in Christ and depending on Him alone, and not on his good works, for salvation. The righteousness which is of God by faith (or, “the righteousness from God on the basis of faith”). God grants the sinner divine righteousness because of, or “on the basis of,” his faith in Jesus. Until Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he depended on his keeping the law to make him righteous before God. When the great Light of Jesus Christ shined on Paul, it made him see more clearly that he would never be righteous enough in himself to please God. Paul received the righteousness of Christ as a free gift. The righteousness of Christ, through the washing in the blood of Jesus Christ, is the only righteousness that will put us in right standing with the Father God. Jesus took our sin and clothed us in His righteousness, if we are truly Christians.

***Philippians 3:10 "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"***

This verse may also be paraphrased: “In order that I may personally know Him, that I might both experience His resurrection power and share in His sufferings, and thus I will be more and more conformed to His death.” Paul wants “the righteousness of God” (v. 9) so that he can obtain a personal relationship with Jesus in actual day-to-day experience. This knowledge of Christ is obtained by experiencing in daily problems, needs, ministry, and so forth, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Knowing Christ also entails participating in His sufferings. Paul desires to share in the Lord’s sufferings because they bring him into a deeper and more meaningful relation with Him; companionship in sorrow establishes the most intimate and lasting of ties, as afflicted hearts cling to each other. The result of participating in Christ’s sufferings is that Paul is being made like Him in death. This word “death” has double meaning here, including inward and outward, ethical and physical death. As Jesus died in regard to sin on the cross, so Paul is doing more and more in his daily life. As Jesus was bodily slain, so the apostle, should Caesar’s verdict go against him, is prepared to be slain. The eyes of his understanding had been opened, and he could see clearly the Lord Jesus Christ. To know Him is to believe in Him. The following Scriptures is how we must know Him.

***Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."***

***Romans 10:10 "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."***

With His blood, He has saved us and with His power He has raised us. Because Jesus rose from the grave, we will rise, if we believe. Very few know the fellowship of His suffering. Paul thought it a privilege to suffer for Christ. To be able to share in His resurrection, we must share in His death. The flesh must die for the Spirit to live. Jesus is the Quickening Spirit, which makes all believers alive. If you have accepted Christ, he took up residence within you through the Spirit and gave you his righteousness. The key to the Christian life is not you living it, but Jesus living it through you. That’s what makes Christianity unique. Christianity is not merely a religion; it is identified by relationship and driven by a fellowship. That’s why Paul says his goal is to know him. Our passion, too, must be knowing Jesus. All the religious stuff we do only becomes valid if knowing Christ is the goal. Paul wants to know the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death. When you are going through a rough time, then, remember that Jesus Christ invites you to get to know him better through it. He will hurt with you, and you will get to understand him better in the process. Suffering is a call to intimacy with Jesus.

***Philippians 3:11 "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."***

If by any means I might attain means “in order that I may attain” the resurrection from the dead. Like the preceding verse, this one also contains a literal and a non-literal interpretation. Paul is eager to become more like Jesus in His death (v. 10) so that he can (1) progressively experience more of the believer’s resurrection life to be enjoyed now (“newness of life,” Romans 6:4), and (2) someday undergo physical resurrection from the grave, thus experiencing God’s power in one of its greatest aspects. Paul is humbly stating that his hope, as the hope of all believers, is the resurrection. Because Jesus lives, we shall live also. Walking through hard things with the Lord results in resurrection from among the dead. Paul is not talking about rising from the dead when Jesus comes back, though that will happen. He’s talking about experiencing Jesus’s resurrection power in this life to joyously overcome every challenge.

***Philippians 3:12 "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."***

Paul says he hasn’t arrived at full maturity, but he is pressing on toward knowing Christ more and maturing. Paul makes every effort to take hold of that goal because Christ has taken hold of him. He is striving to get closer to that for which Christ has grabbed him. He is not satisfied with where he is; he wants to keep growing. He has a holy discontent that keeps him pressing on. Paul denies that he has already attained his objective of verses 10 and 11. That objective is to know Christ and all that is included in this knowledge, that is, experiencing His power, sharing His sufferings, being made like Jesus in death, and experiencing resurrection from the dead. At this point in his life the apostle does know Christ, but not to the full extent possible. He has experienced His power, but not to the degree he desires. He has been made like Jesus in His death, but he can die still more to sin and self. He does “walk in newness of life,” but there is room for improvement. Either were already perfect: Unlike the perfectionists who claim to be sinless in this life, Paul admits that he is not. If the chief of the apostles does not feel he has “arrived” spiritually, then neither should we. I follow after Christ Jesus: Christ “laid hold of” Paul on the Damascus road for the very objective mentioned in verses 10 and 11: to “know him.” Paul concedes that he has not yet realized this goal to the full extent possible, but he is in hot pursuit of it. Paul, now, realizes that by his own efforts, he could not reach heaven. Everlasting life is a gift bestowed on all who believe. We see in the next Scripture what Paul is attempting to do.

***II Peter 3:18 "But grow in grace, and [in] the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him [be] glory both now and for ever. Amen."***

**QUESTIONS**

1. Finally, my brethren, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the Lord.  
2. What does "finally" in verse 1 indicate?  
3. Why had Paul wanted to send Timothy to these Philippians?  
4. In verse 2, who did he warn them to beware of?  
5. Who are the "dogs" in verse 2?  
6. What was the real thing Paul was telling them to beware of?  
7. Who are the true circumcision?  
8. The circumcision of a Christian is of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.  
9. Who is the maid child?  
10. What is our hope of glory?  
11. The law is not done away with, but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.  
12. When did Paul learn better than to depend on the flesh?

13. Quote Galatians chapter 2 verse 21.  
14. The law was fulfilled in Jesus' \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.  
15. Give the description of Paul from verse 5.  
16. Had Paul kept the Mosaic law?  
17. What showed his zeal?  
18. What did Paul give his position and former beliefs up for?  
19. What had happened to Paul, so he would never be the same again?

20. What is the only righteousness God will accept?  
21. Quote Philippians chapter 3 verse 10.  
22. Quote Romans chapter 10 verse 10.  
23. What is the hope of the believers?  
24. Quote 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 18.