

Phil. 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*.

As is often the case, the King James wording is a bit confusing. I like the CJB translation for this verse:

In conclusion, my brothers: rejoice in union with the Lord. It is no trouble for me to repeat what I have written you before, and for you it will be a safeguard:

Again, the heart of a loving parent comes through as Paul writes to his spiritual children. Parents know the importance of repetition. The Lord taught this principle from the beginning.

Deut. 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD:

Deut. 6:5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Deut. 6:6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

Deut. 6:7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Deut. 6:8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

Deut. 6:9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

I would say that is a pretty important statement on the value of repetition from the Spirit of God through His servant Moses.

Phil. 3:2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

Beware is a statement to “be aware” or be watchful. In the scripture the word *dog* is used as a derogatory term. Paul is equating dogs with evil workers or teachers (from the Greek) such as those that teach that circumcision of the flesh is necessary for salvation. That is a false teaching.

Phil. 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.

Circumcision is a cutting away of the flesh. Circumcision was established as a sign of covenant between God and the Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham. The Jewish people had rejected God even though they faithfully practiced circumcision. That was totally out of the context for which it was established.

Paul is making it clear that true circumcision is a matter of the spirit, a reflection of a heart of love and obedience to God and faith in Christ Jesus His Son. Moses introduced this truth in his last teaching to the people of Israel.

Deut. 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

Physical circumcision was supposed to be an outward sign of an inward commitment to the Lord—just as baptism is today. A physical show of obedience without a sincere heart of faith and commitment behind it is worthless. Our works are worthless unless backed by faith. Paul was very clear on this point in his letter to the Romans.

Rom. 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

Rom. 2:29 But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.

Phil. 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:

Phil. 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;

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

According to Jewish teaching, Paul had more reason than most to boast of works in the flesh.

- He was circumcised the eighth day (as instructed in scripture - Lev. 12:2-3, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.).
- He was a true Hebrew of the tribe of Benjamin.
- He was a Pharisee, those known as experts in the laws of God and who prided themselves in keeping it.
- He was zealous in persecuting the church (those who were deemed by the spiritual leaders of Israel as blasphemers of God).
- Again, one who took pride in keeping the letter of the law.

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

Once Paul met Jesus, he realized how worthless those works of the flesh were. He had taken great pride in his works and position of status before men, and now counted them as a total loss in light of the gospel and the righteousness imputed to him by Christ Jesus.

Phil. 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 is basically saying that even though he has lost everything important according to the opinion of people, he has gained everything that is valuable and most important through faith in Christ Jesus as his Lord. This is a vivid picture of how the Christian should think in this corrupt world of ours today. God does not value what the world values. God does not approve what the world approves. God does not think and/or act according to the thinking of this world. We should stand out as unique and different in this world. This immediately led me to the thoughts Paul expressed in 2Corinthians.

2Cor. 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

2Cor. 6:15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

2Cor. 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

2Cor. 6:17 **Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord,** and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you...

Paul realizes that what the world honors and cherishes is but dung—worthless.

Phil. 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:

Righteousness is a reference to holiness and purity. The only way man can earn righteousness for himself is through the keeping of the law. Scripture tells us that no one can keep the law. If you fail in keeping even one point of the law, you have failed.

Gal. 2:16 ... for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Gal. 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in **all** things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

The Psalmist gives a good assessment of the human condition and why man can't keep the law.

Psa. 14:2 The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God.

Psa. 14:3 They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one.

Paul is not depending on his own works for righteousness. He is depending upon having the righteousness of Christ imputed to him by God through faith. He stated this more clearly in his letter to the Corinthians

2Cor. 5:21 For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Phil. 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;

Paul wants to *know* Christ—absolutely, completely, with understanding. Paul wants experiential knowledge regarding:

- The power of His resurrection – Paul wants to experience resurrection of his own body and the immortality that goes with it. Not only that, Paul wants to live this life in the power of the Holy Spirit, the same power revealed through the resurrection of Jesus.
- The fellowship of His sufferings – Paul counts it a privilege to suffer for his faith just as Christ suffered for His. He wants to be as closely connected to the Lord as possible. The Greek for *conformable* is reference to being like/similar. Paul wants his life experience to parallel that of his Lord's.

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

The wording of this verse is difficult in that it seems to indicate that Paul wasn't sure about his resurrection. We know that is not true because of the message of his other epistles; his letter to the Corinthians is very clear.

1Cor. 15:12-22 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

This verse could also be misconstrued as saying that Paul felt he had to earn his resurrection. We also know that is not true since Paul is very clear in teaching that salvation is by faith, and it is our salvation that guarantees our resurrection to life. Again, the clearest statement of this truth is found in his letter to the Ephesians.

Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

Eph. 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

I think that taken in context with verse 10, Paul is declaring that anything and everything he might experience in his life as God's servant will be worth the reward at the end—the resurrection to immortality and life in the presence of God forever.

Phil. 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 is well aware of his imperfections and areas of weakness. He knows that there is much refining yet needed in his life. He knows that he still has room for spiritual growth. I like the wording of the NLT.

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be.

I think it is important to note that this amazing man of God knew that he had not arrived spiritually, so to speak. He was still growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord. He was still growing and being sanctified through his sufferings.

Phil. 3:13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

Phil. 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul knows he still has room for spiritual growth, but he is not being weighted down or held back with memories and regrets of his past. He is focused on the

future. His past has been covered by the precious blood of Jesus, and he doesn't intend to waste his time worrying about what he cannot change. He is excited about his new life in Christ and being the best servant he can be before the Lord. He knows that there are eternal rewards to be earned. He has a goal and intends to win the prize for reaching that goal. Most of the translations connect the "high calling" to heaven. I tend to think that Paul is equating it to becoming more like Jesus. What has God called us to do?

- To glorify him.
Is. 43:7 *Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.*
2Th. 2:14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- To be saints—pure, blameless and holy.
Rom. 1:7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints....
1Cor. 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints....
1Th. 4:7 For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.
- To eternal life.
1Tim. 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called....

Wonderfully, heaven is part of the eternal prize.

Phil. 3:15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

Again, the KJV can be confusing since in verse 12 Paul states that he isn't *perfect*, but in this verse he begins with referencing "us" who are "perfect." There is a difference in the Greek words used for *perfect* in each verse. In this verse the reference is to spiritual maturity. Those who are spiritually mature should find themselves of like mind with Paul regarding his message to them. If they aren't in agreement with Paul, he is convinced that God will reveal their error if they are seeking the truth without prejudice (a sign of spiritual maturity). Paul has no doubt that he is sharing the truth as revealed to Him by God through the Holy Spirit. It is the same confidence expressed by Jesus as declared in the book of John.

John 7:16 Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

John 7:17 If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself.

Phil. 3:16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Paul is basically saying that although we haven't reached the goal, we should be obedient to the truth that we do know. We may have much to learn, but we are responsible and expected to live according to the truth we do know. The truth of God's word is unchanging and should unify the body of believers.

Phil. 3:17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

I like the wording of the NLT for this verse:

Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example.

Again, this is a statement that all mature believers should be able to make. Like Paul, we are to live according to the example of Christ. If we do so, we can confidently encourage others to walk according to our example. Paul emphasized this truth in his letters to the Ephesians and to Timothy; Peter also affirmed this truth.

Eph. 5:1-2 **Be ye therefore followers of God**, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

1Tim. 4:12 Let no man despise thy youth; but **be thou an example of the believers**, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

1Pet. 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:**

1Pet. 2:22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

1Pet. 2:23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously:

Phil. 3:18 (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:

Phil. 3:19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

Paul has a tender heart for the lost. He is brought to tears at the thought of those who have rejected Christ and are positioned as His enemies. The Greek for the word *weeping* is a reference to sobbing/wailing aloud. He knows that their eternal future is damnation—not eternal life. These unbelievers live their lives according to the wisdom and morals of the world. They are controlled by their physical appetites and take pride in their shameful (disgraceful, dishonest) lifestyles. Does this sound like a commentary on our culture today or what!

Thought—Am I weeping with concern over the immorality that is rampant in my nation? In the world? Am I brought to tears because people are headed to hell? Honestly, I would have to answer more often than not, “No.” The tears come more quickly for those in my own family and circle of friends/acquaintances. I am burdened to pray for the lost, but not often at the point of tears. “Father, I pray that You give me Your heart for the lost as exemplified by Paul.”

Phil. 3:20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

Phil. 3:21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

“conversation” = community, citizenship

As new creations in Christ, the believer has changed his citizenship; he is no longer identified with the world, Satan’s domain; he is now a citizen of heaven, Christ’s domain. We believers are looking forward to the time that the Lord

Jesus will come down from heaven to complete our salvation. At that time He will change our vile, debased, corruptible bodies into gloriously exalted incorruptible bodies—just like His. He has all power in heaven and in earth, and the time is coming when He will “subdue all things unto himself.” Satan and sin will be destroyed. I think it is worth repeating Paul’s wonderful detailing of this event in his letter to the Corinthians.

1Cor. 15:51-55 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. **For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.** So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, **then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.** O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?

JFB made an interesting connection to the Greek regarding our “vile body.”

“Greek, “Who shall transfigure the body of our humiliation (namely, in which our humiliation has place....”

I think that is a wonderful explanation of how we should feel about our sin. The fact that we rebelled from Almighty God and chose sin over obedience is, or should be, a humiliating truth. It should bring us to our knees in repentance and motivate us to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (v14 above)