

Introduction (3:1)

3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

What does it mean to “rejoice in the Lord”?

Think of all that Paul has said so far about joy and rejoicing:

He rejoices that Christ is preached – whether in pretense or in truth (1:18)

He rejoices in his ultimate salvation through the prayers of the Philippians
and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (1:19-20)

He sees his continued work in the flesh
as necessary for their “progress and joy in the faith” (1:25)

He calls them to “complete my joy by being of the same mind (2:2)

He rejoices with them that he may be poured out as a drink offering
on the sacrificial liturgy of their faith (2:17)

and calls them to rejoice with him in this as well (2:18),

And he calls the Philippians to rejoice in the return of Epaphroditus (2:28-29).

What themes do you see there?

Rejoicing in the Lord has very little to do with ordinary occasions for “happiness.”

Rejoicing in the Lord is all about suffering, death, and the cross.

Or to put it another way,

rejoicing in the Lord is all about having the mind of Christ.

That’s why Paul says “to write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.”

In other words, I’m now going to repeat myself –

and give you one more example of what it means to have the mind of Christ.

It may well be that Paul had intended to close his epistle after chapter 2,
and began 3:1 –

but then, in mid-sentence decided that he needed one more point.

And 2,000 years of Christians have been grateful that he did!

Because Philippians 3 is one of the clearest statements of Christian theology –
and one of the most powerful statements of Christian piety –

ever penned.

1. Where Is Your Confidence? (3:2-3)

And it starts with an abrupt warning –

a fierce condemnation of the Judaizers:

2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

We saw earlier in Philippians 1 that Paul rejoices that Christ is preached – whether from good motives or bad motives.
Here we see that Paul plainly does not include Judaizing preaching in this!
Paul does *not* rejoice over the preaching of “the dogs.”

Paul uses three terms for these people:

- 1 “dogs” – this is not just an insult.
Today, if you call someone a dog, you are just being mean.
In Paul’s day, if a Jew calls someone a dog, he is calling them a Gentile.
Think of Mark 7:27, when Jesus called the Syro-Phoenician woman a dog.
He wasn’t insulting her – and she didn’t take it as an insult.
He was saying, “You’re a Gentile” and she agreed “I’m a dog.”
Gentiles are called “dogs” because they are outside the covenant community.

Now Paul says that these Jews he is warning against are “dogs” – they are outside God’s covenant community – they are ritually unclean.

- 2 “evildoers” – the phrase does not refer simply to “people who do bad things,” but more particularly it is “workers of evil.”
These Jewish leaders claim to do the “works of the law” – but in fact, Paul says, they do works of evil.
- 3 “those who mutilate the flesh” – actually this is one word in the Greek “the mutilation” – watch out for the mutilation! (katatome)
The word for circumcision is “peritome” (v3).
The Judaizers were sometimes called the “peritome” – the circumcision.
But Paul says that they are not “circumcisers” – but mutilators!
When Jewish Christians require Gentile converts to be circumcised, they are no longer “the circumcision” – they are “the mutilation”!
They are no better than the barbaric customs of the pagans.

The Judaizers, in Paul’s view,
are “dogs” “evildoers” “the mutilation”

And in contrast, Paul says that *we* are the circumcision.

In verse 3 he explains what it means to *be* the circumcision:
3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

It is instructive that Paul refers to “us” as the circumcision.

He was often accused of rejecting the OT –
but Paul argues that the church is the true fulfillment of the OT.
Paul is not saying that the NT church is a parenthesis.
He is not saying that the NT church is something new and different from the OT people of God.

He is saying that *we are the circumcision*.

We are the continuing people of God.

The Jews as well as the Judaizers *are not* the people of God.

And it is not as though the church has *replaced* Israel.

The church *is* Israel.

And even as there were three things to watch out for –

three things that identify the “mutilation” – (katatome)

there are also three things that identify the circumcision (peritome):

1 “who worship by the Spirit of God” -

this is conceptually identical to what Jesus says in John 4:23-24,
that true worshipers will “worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

This is not talking about “internal” vs. “external.”

Neither Jesus nor Paul wants to divide the inward from the outward.

Rather, they are talking about the eschatological significance
of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

“The coming of Christ...has ushered in the new age of salvation,
and the Holy Spirit is the sign of this redemption.

Those who belong to Christ are part of the new order (2 Cor. 5:17);
they have the Spirit and are thus able to offer worship
that is pleasing to God.” (Silva, 171).

Why does Paul put this first?

Because this is what the prophets had said would characterize the people of God.

God had said in Ezekiel 36 that he would take away their hearts of stone
and give them hearts of flesh – that he would give them his Spirit.

He had promised in Joel 2 that he would pour out his Spirit on all flesh.

The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost
was the fulfillment of what God had promised.

The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost
demonstrates that Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father
and has sat down on the throne of his father David.

And therefore, those who worship by the Holy Spirit (or “in” the Holy Spirit)
are the circumcision.

2 “who glory in Christ Jesus” – or perhaps better, “who boast in Christ Jesus”

And this is closely related to point 3

3 “who put no confidence in the flesh”

The “mutilation” puts their confidence in the flesh.

They boast that they are descended from Abraham.

Their confidence is in their fleshly circumcision.

But the true circumcision does not put confidence in the flesh –
rather, the true circumcision glories in Christ Jesus.

Really, we should say “boasts” in Christ Jesus –
because Paul is playing off of Jeremiah 9 in this passage.

Turn over to Jeremiah 9:23.

You really need to see this – because Jeremiah 9 undergirds this whole passage.
In Jeremiah 9 you can see how all this fits together:

After proclaiming the coming destruction upon Jerusalem,
Jeremiah says,

“Thus says the LORD:

‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom,
let not the mighty man boast in his might,
let not the rich man boast in his riches,

but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me,
that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice,
and righteousness in the earth.

For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

In the LXX Jeremiah uses the same word as Paul – “kaukaomai” –
“to boast.”

Do not boast in the flesh –

do not boast in your wisdom, might, or riches.

Now, remember that wisdom, might and riches were all things that came through grace!

God gave Israel the promised Land (not because of their wisdom, might, or riches,
Deuteronomy 6-11).

God gave the Son of David (Solomon) wisdom, might and riches.

But wisdom, might, and riches are never things to boast about!

Jeremiah warns that God does not delight in these things.

God delights in the one who understands and knows *him*.

And when you know the LORD –

then you know him *as* the LORD who practices steadfast love,
justice and righteousness in the earth.

But Jeremiah doesn't stop there.

He continues:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD,

when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh –

Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab,

and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair,

for all these nations are uncircumcised,

and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.” (Jeremiah 9:25-26)

Jeremiah says that Israel is no better than the surrounding nations.

In other words, Jeremiah is making the same point as Paul.
The fact that you are circumcised in the flesh
does not guarantee blessing.
If you are not circumcised in heart,
then you are no better than Gentile dogs.

2. Reasons for Confidence in the Flesh (3:4-6)

And then in verses 4-6, Paul uses himself as an example.

4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

Paul gives four reasons for his confidence in the flesh:

- 1) *circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews;*

The first focuses on his birth heritage –
Saul of Tarsus had an excellent pedigree.
The last phrase “Hebrew of Hebrews” indicates
that his family did not belong to the “compromising” Hellenizers,
but were among the “faithful” Hebrews.
Judaizers often boasted of their “credentials.” (cf. 2 Cor 11-12)
So Paul is pointing out that if you want to boast in pedigree,
he can “boast” with the best of them.
And all that he did only contributed to his standing:

- 2) *as to the law, a Pharisee;*

You must remember that “Pharisee” was a term of respect and praise.
Today we often speak of the Pharisees as legalists and hypocrites,
but in Paul’s day, the Pharisees were the pinnacle of religious achievement
The Pharisees were the orthodox party – the godly folks –
those who took the law seriously and sought to obey it.

- 3) *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;*

No one was more zealous for the purity of Jerusalem than Saul of Tarsus.
Again, today we view this as a black mark on his record,
but you have to remember that God had judged Israel
for their failure to deal with those who turned away from him.
And so when Saul of Tarsus saw the early Christians,
he saw a group who was abandoning the Law of God!
His zeal for the LORD was demonstrated by his persecuting the church.

- 4) *as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*

Or, to put it more literally,
“as to righteousness in the law, having become blameless.”
The word “blameless” never means “sinless” –

no Jew would have claimed absolute moral perfection before God.
Besides, Paul is not talking about his conscience here,
he is talking about his *credentials*.
The point is that anyone could check up on Paul.
Paul is saying – go back to Tarsus, Jerusalem, Damascus,
and inquire of anyone:
you will find that my observance of the Law was spotless.
This is just a standard way of describing a faithful and observant Jew.
Zachariah and Elizabeth are described as “blameless” in Luke 1:6.

The righteousness under the law of which Paul speaks
is an observable, demonstrable righteousness –
it is a way of life prescribed by God.

But this is not *just* a way of talking about Jews under the OT law!
Paul told the Philippians in 2:15 that they should be “blameless and pure”
before the watching world.
The quality of blamelessness, then,
cannot be pejoratively described as a “mere” outward righteousness.

Rather, the reason why Paul will repudiate his “blamelessness” *before the Law*
is because the righteousness that comes from the law is not worth comparing
with the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ.

Notice that Paul is *not* saying that there is *no* righteousness that comes from the law.
You can be blameless before the law!
You can attain to all that the law prescribes!
And what do you have?

Nothing!

Because the righteousness that comes from the law could never give life!
That’s Paul’s whole point in Galatians 3.
The inheritance does not come by the law (3:18)
If a law had been given that could give life,
then righteousness would indeed be by the law. (3:21)
The law was our guardian until Christ came,
in order that we might be justified by faith (3:24)

As Hebrews will tell us, the problem was the law itself was not “blameless” –
the reason why we needed Christ was because the Law could not bring life!
We needed a new covenant, because the blood of bulls and goats,
prescribed in the first covenant, could not remove sin.

And that is why Paul repudiates that “blamelessness” –
that righteousness that he had through the law.

3. The Righteousness that Comes Through Faith (3:7-11)

7 *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

Stop.

Rewind.

Remember Jeremiah 9?

“but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me,
that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice,
and righteousness in the earth.”

And now Paul says, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth
of knowing Christ Jesus my LORD.”

Jeremiah had said “know the LORD” –

Paul agrees: “know the LORD” –

but knowing the LORD means *knowing Christ Jesus*.

Paul’s prescription for the problems in the Philippian church is doctrine.

You need to get your theology straight.

If you are going to avoid the perils of the Judaizers,
and if you are going to be of one mind – and have the mind of *Christ* –
then you need to *know* Christ Jesus my Lord.

Now, when I say that you need to know your theology,

I don’t mean that you need to stuff your head with propositions.

But you must understand who Jesus is!

You must understand Philippians 2:5-11.

You must understand that though he was in the form of God,
he did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.

The eternal Son of God humbled himself and came in the form of a servant.

In the incarnation, God took to himself human flesh,
and atoned for our sins with his precious blood.

The language of Philippians 2:1-11 runs throughout 3:7-10.

The word “count” (hegeomai) was used in 2:3

“*count* others more significant than yourselves”
as well as 2:6

“he did not *count* equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

Paul now uses it here in 3:7

“I *counted* [these things] as loss”
and v8

“I *count* everything as loss.”

In other words, Paul is now acting in the imitation of Christ.

Likewise “form” (morphe) was used in 2:6 – the “form” of God,

and 2:7 “the form of a servant” –
and Paul uses the same root in 3:10
when he says that he wants to be “conformed” to Christ’s death.

Likewise, in 2:7 Paul said that Christ was “found” as a man –
and in 3:9 he says that he wants to “be found in Christ”.

And in 2:11 Paul said that every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord –
Well, in 3:8, Paul confesses that Jesus Christ is “my” Lord.

And if all these verbal parallels were insufficient,
Paul structures 3:7-10 around the same pattern of renunciation of past privilege,
followed by humiliation and death, leading to resurrection and exaltation.

Paul had said in chapter 2 that we are to have the mind of Christ.
Now he shows us in chapter 3 what it looks like to have the mind of Christ –
it means to renounce our past privilege,
and to endure the cross,
all so that we might become conformed to his resurrection glory.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish,
“rubbish” is too polite a word here – (skubala)
even dung falls short – since this is not the word used in most agricultural settings
crap or shit would work far better,
since the only question is whether Paul’s point is that these things are revolting,
or simply worthless.

It is not that Paul thinks that his Jewish heritage was all that awful in itself –
only that in comparison to Christ, everything else is worthless/revolting.
(Think of 2 Corinthians 3 where Paul speaks of the glory of the old covenant as being no glory
in comparison with the glory of Christ.)

Why?

in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

We could say that there are three things that Paul wants in these verses,
all rooted in the idea of gaining Christ and being found in him.

And what it means to “gain Christ” has already been summarized in v8.
“the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Nothing else matters to me.

Think of Jesus’ parable of the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46).

The merchant sells everything he has so that he can buy this pearl.
In the same way, Paul considers nothing else of value,
compared to gaining Christ.

in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him,

You can see here the principle articulated by Athanasius:
Christ became all that we are by nature
so that we might become all that he is by grace.
Christ was found in human form,
so that we might be found in him.

This is the basic underlying principle of union with Christ
that you find all throughout Paul's epistles.

And then there are three things that Paul sees flowing out of this:
1) justification (v9), 2) sanctification (v10), and 3) glorification (v11)

1 *not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,
but that which comes through faith in Christ,
the righteousness from God that depends on faith*

There has been a lot of debate about "the righteousness of God"
in recent years.

But here in Philippians 3:9 we have one of the most clear, unambiguous statements
that the righteousness from God is a righteousness that we can "have."

Note the verb: "having" a righteousness.

Paul says that to be found "in Christ" –
to be united to Christ –
means that you do not have a righteousness that comes from the law,
but rather you *have* a righteousness which comes through faith in Christ.

Some have argued that "faith in Christ" should be translated "faithfulness of Christ."
I wouldn't object to that on theological grounds –
after all, the righteousness of God did come through the faithfulness of Christ!
My chief objection comes from the fact that the patristic interpreters
do not seem to have gone that route with this passage.

Scholars have found plenty of patristic references to the idea of the "faith of Jesus,"
but when the fathers interpret Philippians 3:9 or related passages,
they generally take it as "faith in Christ."

But the central point in verse 9 is that as we are found in Christ
we *have* "a righteousness which comes through faith in Christ –
the righteousness of God that depends on faith."
And here it becomes abundantly clear that for Paul

the righteousness of God is not describing the righteousness
whereby God himself is righteous,
but rather the righteousness which we “have” by faith.

When I am found in Christ – when I am united to him –
I have a righteousness from God that depends on faith.
Paul here does not get into the whole discussion of imputation
(that is more central to his discussion in Romans and Galatians).
What he does show is that “union with the resurrected Christ by faith...
is the central motif of Paul’s applied soteriology” (Gaffin, 132),
and that justification is the first thing that Paul thinks of
as one of the benefits of that union.

But the second thing that Paul thinks of as connected with our union with Christ is sanctification.

2 *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,
and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*

There are three things that Paul wants to know:

1) “him” – I want to know Christ – himself.

This reminds us that we are not just talking about a moralistic

“I want to be a better person”

I want to know *Christ* – I want to know *him*.

If that is not the first thing that you want to know,

then you need to rethink your priorities!

And if Christ is the first thing for you –

how are demonstrating this in your daily life?

Is he really first?

Well, what does it mean to know Christ?

The next two things help us:

2) “I want to know the power of his resurrection”

Throughout Philippians Paul has been emphasizing the *knowledge*
that is essential for our sanctification

Sanctification is a profoundly *doctrinal, theological* process.

You will *never* grow in grace, if you are not growing in knowledge.

Of course, there is always the opposite problem –

of people who are always studying and never doing –

but my observation is that those who are seeking to know Christ

in the manner that Paul describes here

are invariably the most active Christians in the church.

Because knowing the power of Christ’s resurrection

is nothing less than experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit –

who is, after all,
the presence of the resurrected Christ with his people.

The resurrected Lord has poured out his Spirit on his church –
and therefore the power of the exalted Messiah is at work in you.

- 3) “I want to know the fellowship of his sufferings”
This comes about first in our baptism –
as we participate in the death and burial of Christ.
As he identified with us in his incarnation,
we identify with him – we are united with his death –
in our baptism.
But this definitive breach with sin
then is worked out throughout the life of the believer.
“becoming like him in his death.”
This is simply another way of saying,
“to live is Christ; to die is gain.”

- 3 *that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*
Verse 11 then emphasizes our “final” sanctification in glorification.
As Paul had said in Romans 8:17,
“we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

Many have been struck by the tentativeness of this –
almost as though Paul was in doubt whether he would attain the resurrection!
But I don’t think we need to read any doubt into this.
Rather, Paul is emphasizing the need for perseverance.
Your present status in Christ does not remove or reduce your need to persevere.

The only way to glory is the way of the cross.

Knowing the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings
and being conformed to the likeness of his death
is the only way to glory.

After all, if Paul has come this far, refusing to have confidence in himself
and his own righteousness,
then how could he have confidence in his own efforts at sanctification?
His only hope is Christ –
and so he wants to keep his confidence fixed there!