

Philippians 3:1–6 (NKJV)

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. **2** Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! **3** For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, **4** though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: **5** circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; **6** concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Confidence in the flesh- doing the right things for the wrong reasons.

Do you realize that if you are a **child of God**, God has never loved you **any more** or **any less** than He loves you right now?

You might wonder how this has anything to do with the text, but we will soon get to that.

Think about this. Before the beginning of time God chose you to be His child. Why? **Why** did He love you? We like to think it was something special **about us**. But ultimately it was purely due to something special **about God**. God is **love**. God is **loving**. That is not a **flexible** trait of God. It does not wax and wane. It is constant. It is unstoppable.

So God loves you right now as much as He **ever has** and **ever will**.

In your years before you came to Christ, God loved you. He loved you as much as He **ever did** or **ever will**.

The day you **came** to Christ, He loved you no more than the **day before** and the **day after**.

Those times in your Christian life when you lived in **ignorance** or **rebellion**, God **loved you** as much then as He ever has.

If you failed miserably yesterday, God loves you as much as He ever has.

His love is unchangeable because it is part of His character.

Now I am not trying to say that God is always **pleased** with us to the same degree.

I am not trying to say that our actions have **no effect** in our relationship with God.

Scripture tells us over and over that **they do**. But God's love is the constant that runs behind everything that happens in a believer's life. If you are a child of God, you are just that. God is the father that will never stop loving His child.

Now why am I bringing that up?

Our text this morning is about a **bad** kind of legalism. And do you know what is so bad about it?

It is the kind of legalism that says that **I must**, and **I can**, make myself **lovable** to God. I can, by my own effort, **win** God's love and approval. I can push myself to a place of such stellar obedience that God will be **pleased to have me**. I can earn God's love. That is the supreme wickedness that drives the wrong kind of legalism.

Prior to salvation, these legalists believe that one can do work to earn God's love, God's salvation. One needs faith **and** works to be found suitable for salvation. After salvation, they say one must live by **Jewish laws** in order to be worthy of sanctification. So again, it is a combination of faith and works.

What that **trust in ourselves** creates is an **insult** to the love of God. Legalism causes flesh to take credit for that which **only God** can do. It demeans the love of God and worships the work of flesh. It makes **man** the hero of the salvation story instead of **Christ**.

Paul is going to share with us his journey from **self** worship to **God** worship. He will give us great insight into the world of our slippery egos. He will shine the light on how **the flesh** can drive mighty actions of moral external behavior. It can drive men to an incredible height of **good looking** actions. It can cause a great deal of **self sacrifice** and **expensive effort**. But it cannot ever move a person from the realm of their righteous actions just being a **fleshly effort** that offends God. No amount of that effort will **ever** please God.

Praise God that our salvation begins and ends with God. As we find our identity in what scripture says about **us** and God and **our salvation**, we can, by faith, choose those **things** that are **most pleasing** to God from the **position of faith** that is **most pleasing to God**.

Ultimately the wrong kind of legalism does the **right thing** for the **wrong reason**. And it never counts for a single good thing with God. We will see Paul's math in the text and we can add it up for ourselves.

Let's look now at our text.

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

Finally is not a word in this context that has to mean, "in conclusion". It can also mean, "As for what remains to be said". So it is a **transition** phrase into the rest of Paul's letter.

Then Paul says "**rejoice in the Lord**". What that means is to call to action. The command is a command to do something. It is a call to actually sing songs and

actively give praise to God. Paul is not telling them to **drum up an emotion**. He is telling them to **do an action**.

In context I believe that Paul is telling the Philippians to **take an active stock** in what you have in Jesus Christ. Make that **preeminent** in your minds. Because it is **this truth** that will **protect you** and **set you free** from this awful heresy that is sure to come your way. **Christ** and **what Christ has accomplished** is the truth that sets you free from the hook of a legalist. **Knowing Christ** will display how insane it is when we try to replace **what Christ did on the cross** with what **we do on this earth**. Christ's work, when properly understood and elevated and appreciated will rescue you from the tremendous error Paul is about to reveal to them.

For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.

The same things- Paul has already briefly touched on this earlier in the letter. So he is repeating the same thing while filling in the details.

Philippians 1:27–28 (NKJV)

27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.

Also this is probably not the first time Paul has told them about **the Judiazers**. So like any good ministry, it **repeats** the important things and does not apologize to do so.

Now it is difficult to know if **tedious** refers to it being tedious of Paul **telling it** or the Philippians **hearing it**. No matter which he is referring to, Paul is saying he has good reasons to do it and he will not relent. Why?

For their safety. The word for **safe** is to keep them from teetering or falling. So Paul is writing what he thinks is necessary to keep his friends from falling into error. He does not want them to go down the wrong road. Even though Paul is praying for these people to **grow in discernment**, that does not mean that he does not keep **preaching** on discernment. The two go hand in hand. We do not only pray that people understand things. We also do our best to explain it to them.

So Paul is telling the Philippians why he is going to say what he says next. It is for their sake. It is for their safety.

2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

Suppose I were to refer to some people in a church down the road somewhere that is teaching error? Suppose I were to say those leaders are dogs? They are

snakes. They are pigs. They are evil. They might as well emasculate themselves. Would you attempt to correct me after the service? I am not the nicest person in the world, but even I would second guess myself if I did that.

We might think that Paul must not be much of a Christian here. He is not very **nice**. Surely he could say this more **softly**. Surely he could be more gentle and forgiving of his enemies. Don't we sometimes think those things? What would Paul say if he went by **our rules** about what a Christian **says** and **doesn't say** and how a Christian **should** and **should not** talk. I think sometimes our ideas about kindness and gentleness get applied the wrong way in the wrong places. We can know that our rules aren't correct if when we **state** our rules for behavior, Paul and Jesus do things that **violate** our rules. When that happens, we do well to reevaluate our rules and submit them to the example of Christ.

Beware of dogs.

That is probably a life verse of Suz's. Suz seems to be **the person of choice** for a dog to bite. But obviously Paul is not talking about literal dogs. He is talking about Judiazers. Now the interesting thing here is that the **Jewish leadership** frequently called the **gentiles** dogs. And the word used is not for dogs that one might keep as a pet. These were wild dogs that roamed in packs and ate garbage. They sometimes attacked people. It was definitely a term of **derision**.

Paul is saying that those who are **calling others** dogs are the **real** dogs. **They** are the ones who are **unclean** and **feeding** on unclean things. **They** are the destructive force. **They** are the ones we would be good to **be rid of**. **They** serve no useful purpose. In fact **they** are actively and continually **leading people to hell**. What could possibly be worse? These Judiazers carried a most deadly message because they could **use so much scripture** to back their **false doctrine**.

beware of evil workers

In the Old Testament, the wicked are referred to as those who **work iniquity**. These Judiazers are urging the Christians to obey the Jewish rules of conduct, those rules that **no longer apply** to Christians. They are teaching that one **MUST** conform to these rules if one is to **be** right with God or **stay** right with God. And by doing this they are **confusing the gospel**. They are **adding** human effort to the **work of Christ**. By doing so they are **undoing** the Gospel of God, the only message whereby a person can be saved. It is like they are taking a remedy to cancer and are mixing it with an ingredient that makes the drug ineffective. That is simply evil. There is nothing **good** to be said about it.

These people have been the bane of Paul's existence, showing up wherever Paul goes. They are the devils "clean up" team to **undo** the effect the Gospel has on

people. There is nothing good about these people. No matter what they say their intention is, they are doing a sheer evil.

beware of the mutilation

These teachers are claiming to be the **circumcised** people, the only people who are right with God. The word for circumcision means “**to cut around.**” The word for mutilation means “**to cut to pieces**”. The word was used for what the idolatrous priests did to themselves when they were trying to get their gods to do something. They would cut themselves in their efforts to please their gods. That is what Paul compares these Judiazers to. The mental imagery is that these Judiazers are urging for human efforts of cutting. But the effect is not cutting in a way that is prescribed by God and pleases God, but it is a cutting of one’s self in a futile attempt to make an unwilling God to act in your behalf. It is a play on words that no one reading this would miss. It is not an act of godly worship. It is an act of heathen worship.

Paul is having nothing to do with it. He calls it as he sees it. He takes it even further in Galatians where he says they ought to castrate themselves in their efforts to please God.

We see from Paul’s example that it is not always wrong to get **worked up** with those whose effect on God’s people is destructive. We need not feel guilty when we, **too**, are motivated by love for God’s people enough to hate the effects of their enemies, of the wolves who would feed on God’s people.

So Paul has laid out who the **enemies** are and what **he thinks** of them. Now Paul talks about the **real people** of God, those who are **really following** God and pleasing God.

3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit

This is interesting. Paul does not say those who have been **circumcised** are the **circumcision**. He says the circumcision is **ALL** the people of God who have been saved by grace through faith in Christ. It does not matter if they are circumcised or not. What matters is if they **worship God in the Spirit**.

The word for worship is actually a word used to describe **the service** that the **Levites** provided in the temple. The word is used in direct opposition to the reference to the **mutilation** earlier. While the Judiazers are cutting themselves like idol worshipping priests, the people of God are providing the kind of **true worship service** in the temple of God. They are not relying upon the **fleshly efforts** of winning God’s love or earning His salvation. They are living in service of God in their whole lives by faith, not to gain something, but because they have

already been given that which they most need. They are providing a **living sacrifice** by surrendering their will to the will of God.

Now Paul provides perfect clarity to all he has said. If you want to understand today's passage pay great attention to this.

rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

Again Paul tells God's people to **rejoice**. And it is given as the direct **contrast** to what? Having confidence in the flesh.

We all, at any point, are exhibiting confidence **in Christ** and **His completed work**, or confidence **in our flesh**. Those are the choices.

How were we saved? The Judaizers would say by believing in Christ and by getting circumcised to show that we are God's people. Christians would say we are saved by **Christ** alone, by **faith** alone, by **grace** alone, by the **word of God** alone. There is no **"and"** to add.

A question was asked in a Sunday School class somewhere- how does a person get to heaven. A woman responded it is like a row boat where **one oar** is **works** and the **other oar** is **faith**. The teacher quickly corrected her. He said **that boat** will never reach heaven. It is only by Christ's work and His alone that we can ever enter heaven. That is where the Judaizers' doctrine is so very wrong, and so very seductive, and so very evil.

Most cults that claim to have the Bible as their source simply **add** something to salvation. Most cults will say that a person is **saved by Christ**. They may even say they are saved **by Christ alone**. But when you invite them to join your church you will find out that their brand of heresy has an additional something that your church does not have. You will find out what the **"And"** is.

Salvation is all of Christ and nothing of flesh. Christ authored it. Christ will finish it. He works in us **to will** and **to do** according to His good pleasure. We work too. But we only work because **He works**. If **He** did not work, all **our** works would be filthy rags. But **SINCE** He works, our efforts become **beautiful offerings** to our Lord.

If there is anything in your salvation that you can **take credit for**, at that point you do not **understand** your **salvation**.

If there is anything in your sanctification that you can **take credit for**, at that point you do not understand your **sanctification**.

That really is what Paul is saying. Rejoice in Christ because He is the cause of all the good things in our lives. If not, we would only have fleshly efforts that have no spiritual merit.

Now Paul goes on to give us the best example he can think of... Paul's own history.

4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:

This is Paul's point. If flesh can produce anything valuable, then Paul ought to be the **poster child** for it. If there is any value in **fleshly efforts**, Paul should be the top dog. He is really making a bold boast. We know enough about Paul to know he is not lying when he said this stuff.

Essentially, Paul **was** everything that the Judiazers said a person **should be**. If anyone would have earned something by his effort like the Judiazers said would happen, it should have happened to **Paul**.

We start with 4 things that Paul was born into, things that happened to him that he did not choose.

5 circumcised the eighth day

So Paul started his life out right as a good Jew. He came from parents that took spirituality seriously. He had a good Jewish family. Even though he lived far from Jerusalem, Paul still kept to the Jewish rules.

of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin

Paul also had a Jewish bloodline. If anyone could be saved through being Jewish, Paul should be able to be. He could track his lineage. He was Jewish.

a Hebrew of the Hebrews;

This is the summary up to this point. Paul's bloodline and heritage is all pure Jewish. He is the epitome of a Jewish person.

But now Paul moves to his achievements by his hard work.

concerning the law, a Pharisee

The Pharisees were the top of the line in spiritual accomplishment, at least in the eyes of the people. They were exceedingly obedient to the terms of the law.

Those things that could be measured by behavior, these guys were impressive.

They were very careful to go by what they thought was the **letter of the law**. And Paul, in Galatians tells what kind of **Pharisee** he was. He says he had advanced in

Judaism **far beyond his contemporaries**. Paul was an up and coming leader. He was the kind of person people took notice of. He was very ambitious for his

religion. He was not your average **person** nor the average **Pharisee**. He was at the top of his class.

If being Jewish could have accomplished anything eternal, Paul would have accomplished it.

Now the next phrase is very interesting.

6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church

We show what we **really believe** by what extremes we will go to **carry it out**.

Many Jews were content to just speak against Christianity. Paul cared so much about what He thought was **God's honor** that he was determined to wipe out this thing called Christianity. Maybe it had to do with the fact that Jesus was hung on a tree. Paul would have viewed him as curse. Anyway Paul would go anywhere and spend any price to do what he thought was the right thing to do.

In reality, these Judiazers are **also** persecuting the church. But the way they were doing it was so tricky and back handed it was nothing compared to how **Paul** did it. Paul was straight forward and bold about the whole thing.

concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

What this is referring to is not the ultimate of righteousness which would be the sinless **position** we have in Christ. Paul is certainly not claiming **that** for himself since he says in other places such a thing is **impossible** for a human.

No. Paul is talking about that which flesh **can** attain. Flesh has the ability to control one's outward behavior to some extent. And if one carefully limits the application of God's law to behaviors a person **can do**, one **can** live in a way that no one can bring provable charges against that person. A good law abider can live in a way where they cannot be convicted of a violation of God's law.

Evidently that is how Paul lived.

What an impressive man. The law would be no easy thing to live up to. They had rules about everything. Yet Paul did live up to its external requirements. His righteous living, living by the rules of the law, was so good he was not open to a charge being proven against him.

Now **internally**, that is another thing. While Paul may have kept the first 9 commandments, he certainly did not keep the 10th one. Coveting is a heart sin.

This is Paul.

All of these **Judiazers** were **second class** compared to Paul. They were amateurs. If a person could **save himself**, if his works could be added to what Jesus did for salvation, surely Paul would have been the guy.

So this makes Paul the perfect person to tell us **it does not work**.

It is sort of like asking the richest man in the world if money makes him happy, if it fulfills his life. When he tells us that it does not, we can know we are barking up the wrong tree if we are looking for happiness there. The same is true here with Paul. If our lives can **add to our salvation**, if our lives can **win God's favor** for ourselves, Paul's should have worked. But it did not. So we know it cannot be true.

There is another thing we should see here.

Look at what flesh can do.

Look at what flesh can do.

We need to be very careful what we are impressed by. I think of Mother Theresa. I have read things she has said that have led me to question if she ever understood salvation. Yet she is held as a patron saint of love and compassion. A fleshly desire to **earn God's favor** can drive a human being to exceptional accomplishment. It can produce activities that are nothing short of amazing. But we must **listen closely**. We should ask the question, "**Why should God let you into heaven?**" If the answer does not revolve around the person and work of Jesus Christ, we are probably looking at a person like Paul was in his pre-Christian days. An **exceptional** person and a **lost** person. A person who can outperform any other human in **moral actions**, but whose heart is **full of darkness**. A person who ultimately can only give credit to **one's self** for all the accomplishments. We need to be careful what we are impressed by. What we need to always look for is **the gospel** being lived out in a person's life.

Look what Paul will tell us in verse 7 **But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.**

It is a far better thing to be a believer who is **failing** at making the changes in behavior that are needed and urgently calling upon God **for help**, Than to be a person who is **succeeding** in the changed behavior through the **efforts of flesh**.

Our **failures** drive us to Christ.

The **successes** of the legalists will drive them **from** Christ and **to** self.

If you are a child of God, God has never loved you **more or less** than He loves you **right now**.

Your **successes** will not cause Him to **love you more**.

Your failures will not cause Him to **love you less**.

So trust Him, bask in His love, and depend upon Christ for your future growth. There is nothing that fleshly accomplishment will ever **add** to what Christ has **already given you**.

Rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice in Christ Jesus

That is where all the logic of our salvation leads us. It leads us to being people who **cannot express our thanks enough** for what Christ has done for us.

We have every reason to rejoice. We are loved by God.