



PHILIPPIANS

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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. Philippians 3:1

Paul begins chapter 3 with “Finally.” Rather than, “to sum up,” the word indicates “something remaining,” and so this begins the last major section of the letter. In it, he will provide warnings against various ills that he is sure they will face. He will speak against the teachings of the Judaizers, he will speak against those who live for this world rather than setting their minds on that which pertains to our heavenly position, and he will warn against factions and divisions within the body. These, along with other words of admonition and encouragement, are to be a part of this “Finally” which is now given.

Next he notes “my brethren.” He is speaking to those who are united as one in the family of Christ. It is those who have received Him who are as his own brothers in the faith. To these, he again reminds them to “rejoice in the Lord.” It is a reminder that they are, in fact, “in the Lord.” He has saved them, and so no matter what occurs, they should look to the glory ahead as a means of enduring whatever trials now exist. In Christ, there is a hope which transcends all earthly troubles, and so he asks them to be joyful in that fact.

His next words form a new thought, and are not logically tied to “rejoice in the Lord.” He says, “For me to write the same things to you is not tedious.” It is uncertain what exactly he is referring to. It could be another letter, or letters, he wrote to them. It could be what he has told them while with them. Or, it could be what he has said already in this letter, and which he will say again in this “Finally” section.

What is important is that whatever he is referring to specifically, it is not a burdensome thing to repeat himself. Rather, he notes that “for you *it is safe.*” In other words, the repetition will instill in them the importance of his instruction. If someone reads the Bible only once, they will have a very general view of its significance. But for the one who reads it again and again, it will continue to have more and more importance. The warnings will call out more notably; the grace will be more evident; the glory will radiate out more fully. Paul is instilling in them the same words so that they will remember what he has said and be more likely to apply them to their (and thus also we to our) lives. For his audience, this is a safe measure.

Life application: Doctrine matters. The more we look into the word of God, the more fully we will understand matters of doctrine, and the more likely we will be to apply them to our lives. But we must come to it as the word of God which is to be revered. For those who read the Bible with the view that it is not the word of God, the warnings and admonitions will harden, not soften their hearts. Let us be wise in our pursuit of this magnificent, superior word.

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! Philippians 3:2

Paul now actually begins his words of warning and admonition which he hinted at in the preceding verse. Although his words can include other parties who are harmful to the faith, they are directed specifically at one group of people, the Judaizers. These are the Jews, or those following the Jews, who have come to reinsert the law, in part or in whole. They are those who, by one work or many, set aside the grace of Jesus Christ in order to establish a righteousness of their own.

He begins with “Beware of dogs.” The translation unfortunately leaves off an article before “dogs.” It is necessary and it makes the warning less forceful than it should be. “Beware of THE dogs.” The word “beware” in Greek is *blepó*, and “it carries *what is seen* into the non-physical (immaterial) realm so a person can take the needed action (respond, beware, be alert)” (HELPS Word Studies).

Paul is asking them to mark out and be spiritually aware of these wicked people. They are “the dogs.” The term “dog” is highly derogatory. It indicates a raging unclean animal. Dogs in the Middle East, even to this day, are not considered with the delight of folks in the west. They travel in packs, eat corpses and other dirty things, and are considered disease-ridden nuisances. This is seen in both testaments of the Bible. Paul’s words probably go beyond mere uncleanness, but also to the fact that they are snarling savages which tear and bite at those around them. This is how severely he treats those who would come in and attempt to reintroduce the law, in part or in whole. It is the greatest offense to the purity of the gospel. In Revelation 22:15, we read this about such people –

“But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.”

By trampling on His grace, Jesus places these evil-doers first in a list of the worst of all offenders.

Next he says to “beware of evil workers.” Again, an article has been dropped which takes away the severity of his words. It says, “...beware of THE evil workers.” The Judaizers are the epitome of such evil workers. There are those who are caught in sin and may not even realize it, but these people willingly cut themselves off from the grace of Christ, and they actively work evil against His name. Jesus has strong words for them, again from Revelation –

“Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.” Revelation 3:9

A true Jew would come to Christ, understanding He is the fulfillment of all that is spoken in Scripture. A false Jew will work against Christ, demanding the law be adhered to in part or in whole. This is truly one who is the evil worker. He warns against them in several epistles. In 2 Corinthians, he identifies them and their false works with their true master –

“For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

He completes the verse with, “...beware of the mutilation.” This is a scathing phrase directed to the very heart of the sect of Judaizers, circumcision. He uses a word found only here in the NT. It indicates to mutilate or to spoil. A word in English which meets the irony of this word would be concision, which would then stand opposed to circumcision. Paul, in essence, is saying that those who are Jews in flesh only are simply flesh-mutilated and flesh-mutilators. They boast in the flesh, but speak against the grace of Christ. Much of the book of Galatians deals with exactly this subject. The warning there is so strong that he sums up the process of physical circumcision with these words –

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³ And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴ You have become

estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to be justified by law*; you have fallen from grace.” Galatians 5:1-4

Life application: If you wonder why Judaizers and Hebrew Roots movement people speak so vehemently against Paul, it is because they are heretics who are set on a course to hell. They willingly cut off their flesh in order to cut themselves off from Christ. They are the epitome of wickedness because they see the truth of Christ’s grace, and yet they work against it. Such will find no peace, nor will any who follow in their deeds. Stand fast on the grace of Jesus Christ alone.

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

Paul, now clearly explains the “mutilation” of the last verse by stating a contrast. He says, “For we are the circumcision.” He uses the abstract term “the circumcision” to speak of those who are the truly circumcised. This was written to a Gentile church who had never been circumcised, and yet he boldly states this. If Paul was circumcised, and they were not, and yet he says “we,” then he must be referring to something not of the flesh. And this is exactly so. In Romans 2, he says –

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷ And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?* ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.” Romans 2:25-29

His words show that circumcision of the flesh means nothing unless it is accompanied by a change in the heart. And his words are not without prior confirmation. In fact, the thought goes all the way back to Moses himself. In Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6, he mentions circumcision of the heart. This is then repeated by Jeremiah hundreds of years later –

“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord,
And take away the foreskins of your hearts,
You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,
Lest My fury come forth like fire,
And burn so that no one can quench *it*,
Because of the evil of your doings.” Jeremiah 4:4

Israel had made the immense mistake of assuming that they were righteous before God because of who they were and because of what they had done. This was the farthest thing from the truth. They relied on that which was fleshly and did not “worship God in the Spirit.” These words go back to what Jesus said in John 4 –

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23, 24

Jesus’ words imply that not all supposed worship is truly worship. A Jew could claim they were worshipping God by being circumcised, wearing certain clothes, and observing certain rituals. However, such is not the case. True worship comes from the heart and is directed to God in a spiritual manner, not in an external, earthly manner. To worship God in the Spirit is to “rejoice in Christ Jesus.” He has accomplished all of that which is necessary to reconcile us to God. Therefore, we are to rejoice in Him and in what He has done, “and have no confidence in the flesh.”

What this means is that for those in Christ circumcision of the flesh means nothing – absolutely nothing. It cannot bring a person any nearer to God. In fact, if a person who receives Christ later opts to be circumcised in order to obtain God’s favor, they have set aside the grace of God in Christ and have become obligated to the entire law. Paul explains this in Galatians. No person should boast in anything but Jesus Christ and what He has done.

Life application: It has become very popular today to observe certain feasts from the Law of Moses, to give up eating certain foods prohibited there, and to be circumcised in order to make God “happy.” Paul says otherwise. Circumcision schmircumcision. It is contrary to a right relationship with God, and it shows that the person does not trust that what Jesus did is sufficient for their salvation. It is stamping on His work and saying, “Nice try, but I can do better.” Reject such people as warped and foolish.