

# **Philippians 3 - Warning Against Legalism; What to Avoid & What to Follow; Paul's Transition From Legalism**

## IV. Warning against legalism (Phil 3:1-21)

- (1) Safeguarding joy (3:1)
- (2) What to avoid: Judaizers (3:2)
  - (A) Dogs (3:2a)
  - (B) Evil workers (3:2b)
  - (C) False circumcision (3:2c)
- (3) What to follow: Paul's example (3:3-14)
  - (A) Characteristics of true believers (3:3)
    - (a) Genuine circumcision (3:3a)
    - (b) Worshipers of God in spirit (3:3b)
    - (c) Rejoicing in Christ (3:3c)
    - (d) Having no confidence in the flesh (3:3d)
  - (B) Paul's reasons for confidence in the flesh (3:4-6)
    - (a) General statement (3:4)
    - (b) Seven reasons for Paul's fleshly confidence (3:5-6)
      - (i) Circumcised (3:5a)
      - (ii) Israeli (3:5b)
      - (iii) Benjamite (3:5c)
      - (iv) Hebrew (3:5d)
      - (v) Pharisee (3:5e)
      - (vi) Persecutor (3:6a)
      - (vii) Blameless (3:6b)
  - (C) Paul's spiritual priorities (3:7-14)
    - (a) Rejection of fleshly things (3:7)
    - (b) Embracing spiritual things (3:8-14)
      - (i) Knowing Christ (3:8)
      - (ii) Christ's righteousness (3:9)
      - (iii) Resurrection (3:10-12)
      - (iv) Prize (3:13-14)
  - (D) Application (3:15-4:3)

- (a) Maturity (3:15-16)
- (b) Watchfulness (3:17-19)
- (c) Eschatological perspective (3:20-21)
  - (i) Heavenly citizenship (3:20)
  - (ii) Future transformation (3:21)

## Philippians 3

### IV. Warning against legalism (Phil 3:1-21)

Legalism is attempting to do the work of God by putting myself under a set of human standards, often not found in the Bible. What these human standards do is to get the flesh to try harder. The problem is, the flesh, no matter how hard you try, no matter how much you "white knuckle" it, can't live out the Christian life. It will fail every time. As long as I'm trying to live the Christian life by measuring up to artificial human standards, by working harder, there's no way I can walk in joy

Legalism takes the entire focus of your life and accomplishments off of Christ and puts them squarely on myself and what I can or need to do. It constantly points out my failures and tells me I'm not trying hard enough. What then happens is that you try harder, then fail. You then try even hard, but fail again. And after this cycle happens a few times, you conclude that the Christian life is just not for me. What God wants us to do instead of legalism is to rely on the divine resources He has provided to every believer to live the Christian life, outside of a set of rules and regulations.

The first example of legalism displayed in the Bible is when Eve took God's simple instructions (Gen 2:16-17) and complicated them (Gen 3:2-3) (Cf. 2 Cor 11:3).

#### (1) Safeguarding joy (3:1)

**1** Finally, my brothers and sisters, **rejoice** in the Lord. To **write the same things again** is no trouble for me, and it is a **safeguard** for you.

**1** Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

**1** So then, my brothers, keep on rejoicing in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you; indeed, it is for your safety.

**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.

- "...rejoice" - *chairō*, imperative mood, meaning a command not a suggestion or a smart thing to do

- "...write the same things *again*" - this epistle was not the first time Paul addressed the issue of legalism

- Philippians was probably the 10th out of 13 epistles that Paul wrote. He wrote Galatians first (about 10-12 years earlier), which is the standard bearer against legalism.
- "...safeguard" - what is it that Paul wants to safeguard? Their joy.
- Paul identifies legalism as the number one suffocater of joy in the Christian life

(2) What to avoid: Judaizers (3:2)

- (A) Dogs (3:2a)
- (B) Evil workers (3:2b)
- (C) False circumcision (3:2c)

**2** Beware of **thedo**gs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the **false circumcision**;

**2** Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

**2** Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil workers! Beware of the mutilators!

**2** Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

- Paul is dealing for "pharisee-ism" describing those Jews who desired to put Church Age believers back under the Mosaic Law. They were mixing Law and faith, as if the two could co-exist.

— They wanted believers, under their own human power, to obey a legal code. That's impossible. But these pharisees tried to do it over and over again, and Paul says it's a "joy stealer."

- "...the dogs" - unsaved Pharisees; people of very low character who were false teachers teaching a works-oriented doctrine (Cf. Rev 22:15)

- "...false circumcision" - the legalists always emphasized something physical or outside of the mind/heart. They camped on the outer, physical circumcision of the body rather than the inner circumcision of the heart.

— But the path to spiritual growth is not something external, but rather something that happens in the heart. Paul was far more interested in the circumcision of their hearts rather than the circumcision of their bodies.

There were three types of Pharisees:

## Types of Pharisees

Type	Overthrown
Justification	<b>Matt 5:20</b>
Sanctification	<b>Galatians</b>
Ecclesiology	<b>Acts 15</b>

The Pharisee



1. "Justification" pharisees - salvation is believing in Christ and obeying the Law
  - Jesus overthrew this sect of the pharisees in Matt 5:20, when Jesus said that the most righteous, law abiding people in Israel (the Pharisees) would not enter the kingdom of God
2. "Sanctification" pharisees - a combination of faith and Law were required to grow as a believer
  - This heresy was completely dealt with by Paul in his epistle to the Galatians (Gal 3:3)
  - It is this group of Pharisees that Paul deals with in the majority of his epistles, including here in Philippians
3. "Ecclesiology" pharisees - you are saved by faith in Christ alone, but you must put yourself under the Mosaic Law in order to join the church
  - These people mixed faith and Law not so much for justification, but for ecclesiology
  - The decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) ruled that it was not required for a believer to put themselves under the Mosaic Law in order to join the church

(3) What to follow: Paul's example (3:3-14)

(A) Characteristics of true believers (3:3)

- (a) Genuine circumcision (3:3a)
- (b) Worshipers of God in spirit (3:3b)
- (c) Rejoicing in Christ (3:3c)
- (d) Having no confidence in the flesh (3:3d)

3 for we are the **true circumcision**, who **worship in the Spirit of God** and **take pride** in Christ Jesus, and **put no confidence in the flesh**,

3 for we are the *true circumcision*, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

3 For it is we who are the circumcision—we who worship in the Spirit of God and find our joy in the Messiah Jesus. We have not placed any confidence in the flesh,

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

- In contrast to the legalists and pharisees, who believed in mixing faith and works (or faith and Law) in order to grow as a Christian, Paul describes what true spiritual life really is...  
- "...*true circumcision*" - those who are spiritually circumcised (in the heart), not just physically circumcised

— Paul also addressed this in Rom 2:28-29 in countering the Romans who were proud of the fact that they were circumcised on the 8th day, just as the Law commanded

— The legalists and pharisees emphasized the physical circumcision of male infants, but Paul emphasized the spiritual circumcision of their hearts

- "...worship in the Spirit of God" - these are people who worship the Lord out of the abundance of their heart, because they are eternally grateful for what God has done for them

— This is the opposite of people who show up at a worship service and perfunctorily go through a ritualistic ceremony to check it off their list and go on to something else

— Paul here is referring to authentic spiritual worship of the God whose grace, properly understood, should overwhelm us. Spiritual worship is first knowing God and knowing about Him, and when we understand this in our hearts, then our thankfulness and gratefulness for what He has done for us should overwhelm us to the point that we can't hold in our worship of Him and it bursts out of us.

— Worship is not a ritual that someone imposes on us during a certain time period on Sunday morning, it's an attitude of the heart (Cf. John 4:24)

- "...take pride" - *kauchaomai*, "glory" or "to glory in something"

— This is why legalism is anathema to God: because legalism makes my fresh try harder, and as my flesh tries harder, who gets the glory for holiness in my life? I do, rather than God. And God is such that He will not share His glory with another (Cf. Is 42:8).

— Legalism steals God's glory for myself. It takes God's resources out of the picture and places the burden on human shoulders. I'm going to obtain holiness through human power! This mindset destroys joy because it puts you on a path of persistent failure, while stealing glory that belongs to God because now "I" am the center of my attention, my spiritual walk and holiness rests on "my" shoulders.

- This is also a good way to recognize a false gospel...the true gospel will always put the spotlight for every facet of my salvation on Jesus Christ, never on myself. The key thing to understand is where does the emphasis of the gospel lie...on me, what I do, and my resources, or is the focus on Jesus Christ, what He did, and the resources He provides.
- "...put no confidence in the flesh" - to get to this place in your Christian life, you must be broken and brought to the end of yourself. I have to recognize that all my good intentions and good effort never really got me anywhere in my spiritual walk.
- Legalism deceives us into thinking that we're actually gaining ground toward holiness, but are you really? God then allows us to fall on our face a few times (i.e. Peter) so that He can begin to use us. Peter came to the end of himself numerous times (i.e. confronting Jesus about His pending death, Matt 16:18f; denying Jesus 3x, John 13:37-38).
- Jesus had to get Peter to the point where he no longer put any confidence in his flesh. This same thing is what God is doing in every believer's life...the breaking process. Bringing us to the point of crisis where we throw up our hands in defeat, set aside our pride, and finally look to God and His resources alone. It is at this point, once we have our priorities in line, that God can then begin to use us as He pleases, for His purposes.

(B) Paul's reasons for confidence in the flesh (3:4-6)

(a) General statement (3:4)

- 4 although I myself *could boast* as having confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he is confident in the flesh, I *have more reason*:
- 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:
- 4 although I could have confidence in the flesh. If anyone thinks he can place confidence in the flesh, I have more reason to think so.
- 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:
- Paul now holds himself up as the supreme example of a person who put confidence in the flesh...yet Paul says the Lord transitioned me out of that into what I have now, and I want you Philippians to experience this same transition, which is saying no to the legalists who suffocate your joy
- Paul holds up his transition out of his supreme confidence in the flesh (legalism) to the spiritual life that he had, which he wanted the Philippians to experience also, as a solution to the lack of joy that they were currently under

(b) Seven reasons for Paul's fleshly confidence (3:5-6)

- (i) Circumcised (3:5a)
- (ii) Israeli (3:5b)

- (iii) Benjamite (3:5c)
- (iv) Hebrew (3:5d)
- (v) Pharisee (3:5e)

**5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;**

5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

5 Having been circumcised on the eighth day, I am of the nation of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. As far as the Law is concerned, I was a Pharisee.

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;

– "circumcised the eighth day" – Paul's parents strictly followed the Mosaic Law (Gen 17:12)

– "...of the nation of Israel" – Paul was a Jew; he received all of the privileges of being a Jew (Rom 3:2; 9:4-5)

– "...tribe of Benjamin" – Paul knew his tribal identity

– "...a Hebrew of Hebrews" – a superlative; Paul is saying that he isn't just your run of the mill Hebrew, he was the ultimate Hebrew (i.e. King of kings; Lord of lords; Song of Solomon; Holy of Holies, etc.)

– "...as to the Law, a Pharisee" – in Paul's mind, he kept all 613 regulations of the Mosaic Law, along with all of the other rules and regulations that the Pharisees added on top of the Law ("hebrew tradition" as found in the *Talmud* [both the Palestinian and Babylonian versions] and the *Mishnah*).

— As a Pharisee, Paul had certain privileges. He studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), the top Jewish scholar alive at the time.

- (vi) Persecutor (3:6a)
- (vii) Blameless (3:6b)

**6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.**

6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

6 As for my zeal, I was a persecutor of the church. As far as righteousness in the Law is concerned, I was blameless.

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

– "...as to zeal, a persecutor of the church" – Paul was so zealous for the legalism brought on by the Mosaic Law that anything that came along that opposed it, he stamped it out

immediately (Cf. Acts 7:58; 8:1; 1 Cor 15:9; Eph 3:8; 1 Tim 1:15-19). But his zeal was without knowledge (Rom 10:2).

- "...blameless" - how do you call yourself blameless when you murder people?
- That is exactly what legalism does: you're so right in your cause in your own eyes that it becomes easy to be blind to your own sin.
- People who are legalistic are some of the most self-righteous people you'll ever meet, they are also the most difficult to get along with. The deception of legalism is that they believe they are right in what they are doing (Cf. John 16:2).

(C) Paul's spiritual priorities (3:7-14)

(a) Rejection of fleshly things (3:7)

7 But whatever things were gain to me, these things I have counted as loss because of Christ.

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

7 But whatever things were assets to me, these I now consider a loss for the sake of the Messiah.

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

- After giving his resume, and acknowledging that he had some very good things on his resume, Paul says that God loosened his grip on these things and God replaced them with something far better

— What Paul got in exchange for these good things was God's very best...

— One of the biggest deceptions from the devil is that if you yield your life to Christ, you're going to be a very boring and unhappy person. You'll have all of these rules and regulations to follow, and you'll never have any fun.

— However, the opposite is true. The sooner in life that you find salvation and the earlier you begin to walk out the principles of grace by the power of the Holy Spirit, the more fulfilled you will be in life.

— The last thing Satan wants is for believers to understand this, so he lies to them that their lives will be shipwrecked if they get too close to Jesus Christ

— Paul now gives us five better things that God gave to him when he let go of his resume (v8-14):

1. Knowing Christ (v8)
2. Christ's righteousness (v9)
3. Fellowship of His suffering (v10)
4. Resurrection (v11-12)
5. Prize (v13-14)

(b) Embracing spiritual things (3:8-14)

(i) Knowing Christ (3:8)

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of **knowing** Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them **mererubbish**, so that I may gain Christ,

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

8 What is more, I continue to consider all these things to be a loss for the sake of what is far more valuable, knowing the Messiah Jesus, my Lord. It is because of him that I have experienced the loss of all those things. Indeed, I consider them rubbish in order to gain the Messiah

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,

- The first thing Paul received from God when he let go of his resume was that he had a better understanding and comprehension of who God is

- "...knowing" - *gnōsis*, understanding who God is; it speaks not of head knowledge, but of relationship knowledge; "the deeper more perfect and enlarged knowledge" of Christ Jesus

- "...rubbish" - *skybalon*, animal excrement

— The greatest work of Paul's flesh, when compared to his greater understanding of who God is, is compared to animal excrement

— God did not ruin Paul's life...He gave to him something that was far better than what Paul had before

(ii) Christ's righteousness (3:9)

9 and may be **found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own** derived from *the Law*, but that which is **through faith** in Christ, **the righteousness which comes from God** on the basis of faith,

9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but one that comes through the faithfulness of the Messiah, the righteousness that comes from God and that depends on faith.

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:

- This verse may be the best articulation of Christianity in all of the Bible. It defines the idea of imputation, the exchange of Christ's righteousness transferred to us at the point of faith.
- We do not have standing before God by self-righteousness or performance. We can't be righteous enough or perform enough to warrant salvation. Someone else's righteousness must be imputed to me.
- When God looks at me today, it's as if He sees Jesus. To God, I'm just as righteous as Jesus Christ.
- Martin Luther called it the "great exchange"—in a moment of time, our unrighteousness is exchanged for His righteousness. Don't hold out for a better deal, because there is none.
- If Christians understood how God sees us, we would live differently, we would certainly pray differently. We tend to always live beneath our position.
- "...found in him" - Paul again looked forward to the Judgment Seat of Christ
- He made his choices in life, since his conversion, based on getting to know Christ better, and also on the fact that God would one day evaluate his life
- On that future day, Paul wanted to be found "in Him," meaning standing in the merit of Christ rather than his own
- His own merit rested on his own "righteousness" as the Mosaic "Law" defined it; the merit of Christ is His righteousness that God credits to the believer at justification (Rom 3:20-23)
- "...not having a righteousness of my own" - Paul lost his desire for self-righteousness, which is the human invention whereby we somehow think that we can make ourselves right with God through our own works. Self-righteousness is the plague of humanity.
- This is what separates Christianity from every false doctrine man has ever conceived
- "...through faith" - *dia pistis*, noun (verb form is *pisteuō*); it means "to believe" also "to be persuaded of" and thus, to "place confidence in" or "to trust." In this sense of the word, it signifies "reliance upon" rather than mere credence.
- "...the righteousness which comes from God" - before Paul was saved, he thought that doing a bunch of "good things" got him saved. Look at the change now!
- Paul is no longer dealing with self-righteousness, he's dealing with imputed (transferred) righteousness. The Protestant Reformers called this "alien" righteousness, a righteousness from outside the universe.
- This is a righteousness that does not come from what I do; I'm not even able to produce this kind of righteousness. No amount of energy from my flesh can conjure up this righteousness. It's a righteousness that can only come from God Himself.
- God demonstrated this to us in Genesis, after the Fall of Adam & Eve. They hid themselves and covered themselves in leaves (Gen 3:7). God said that isn't good enough, killed an animal, and covered them in animal skin (Gen 3:21). They tried to clothe themselves, but God clothed them instead.

— When we open our hands to what God wants to do, God is not going to ruin your life. He is going to replace whatever you think you've lost with something far better. And just like Apostle Paul here, you will look back at what you used to hold on to and think was so valuable, and feel like a fool for hanging on to it for so long.

There are three "transfers" (imputations) in Scripture:

<b>Adam's Sin to All Humanity</b> 	<b>Humanity's Sin to Jesus Christ</b> 	<b>Christ's Righteousness to Believers</b> 
<b>Hamartiology</b> Rom. 5:12	<b>Christology</b> 2 Cor. 5:21	<b>Soteriology</b> Phil. 3:9

### (iii) Resurrection (3:10-12)

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the **fellowship** of His sufferings, **beingconformed** to His death;

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

10 I want to know the Messiah—what his resurrection power is like and what it means to share in his sufferings by becoming like him in his death,

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

— "...fellowship" - *koinōnia*, when we walk out suffering in the Christian life, we're following in the pattern of Jesus Christ (Cf. John 15:20)

— Christians don't suffer in order to pay Christ back for what He has done. We suffer because we are "little Christs" in the sense that our character is being molded into the same character as Christ.

— "...being conformed" - *symmorphizō*, to make of like form with another person; to render like

— Growing into conformity with the death of Christ indicates the practical apprehension of the death of the carnal self, and fulfilling his share of suffering following the sufferings of

Christ (Cf. Rom 6:3-6)

— The moment that I put my faith in Christ is the moment that God identified me with the transaction of Jesus Christ on the cross. Eph 1 tells us that Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father; Eph 2 tells us that's where we are right now (positionally).

11 if somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

11 though I hope to experience the resurrection from the dead.

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

- Part of the positional truth of every believer is that because Jesus rose from the dead, His resurrection (as the firstfruits) guarantees our future resurrection, so I'm on a fast track to a resurrected body (Cf. 1 Cor 15:20-23)

— The believer's certainty of glorification is as certain as the objective evidence of Jesus' empty tomb

**12** Not that I have already grasped *it all* or have already become perfect, but **I press on** if I may also take hold of that for which I was even taken hold of by Christ Jesus.

**12** Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

**12** It's not that I have already reached this goal or have already become perfect. But I keep pursuing it, hoping somehow to embrace it just as I have been embraced by the Messiah Jesus.

**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.

- But we have not yet been glorified; we're still in our fleshly, earthly bodies, and thus while we are still in our human bodies, we have a dual nature

— We can quickly and easily go back to our sin nature at any time, through our own free will (Rom 6:6; 7:24; 13:14). Our sin nature has been "defeated" but not "destroyed."

— Even though we're dual-natured today, the time will come soon when we will be single-natured, when we receive our glorified bodies either at the Rapture or our physical death

- "...I press on" - Paul is not teaching here the idea of "pressing on" to a point of sanctification that is sinless perfection

— None of Paul's writings, and nowhere else in Scripture, promotes such an idea. The best we can hope for in this life is not to be "sinless" but rather to "sin less"

— Paul here isn't looking forward (or "pressing on") to some form of sinless perfection that he expects to achieve in this life; he's looking forward to the 3rd tense of his salvation, his glorification, when Jesus will save him from the presence of sin and he will be single-natured instead of dual-natured.

(iv) Prize (3:13-14)

13 Brothers and sisters, I do not regard myself as **having taken hold of it yet**; but one thing *I do: forgetting what lies behind* and reaching forward to what *lies ahead*,

13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it yet*; but one thing *I do: forgetting what lies behind* and reaching forward to what *lies ahead*,

13 Brothers, I do not consider myself to have embraced it yet. But this one thing *I do: Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead*,

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*,

- "...having taken hold of *it yet*" - Paul had not received his resurrected body, so the prospect of sinless perfection is not something that Paul had yet experienced because he had to still contend with the sin nature

- "...forgetting what *lies behind*" - it's difficult to over-emphasize this verse

— We deal with so many problems, both mentally and emotionally, because we spend so much time looking in the rear view mirror. It's not good to dwell on our past because often there are so many failures there.

— Paul had some huge failures in his past. If there was ever a guy who could sit around and dwell on his past failures, it would be Paul. He could've easily spent his entire Christian life looking backwards, sorry and miserable for the things he did, and therefore neutralized in his service to the Lord.

— You ever talked to someone and they are rehearsing about how they were wronged or mistreated? And you listen to them more, and find out that what they are talking about happened 10-15 years or more in the past. And they are re-telling the story as if it was recent, like it happened yesterday.

— The problem with modern psychology is they want to always take people back into the past to dig up old wounds. There is no such notion in the Bible. They say you can't experience the present until you deal with the past. You have to go back and revisit all of these wounds that have been afflicted upon us by other people. All this does is put you in bondage.

— There's always a place to look back at the past, see how you were wrong, what you could've done differently, and learn from the experiences and grow. But to sit around and ruminate on the past, to dwell on it, does no good whatsoever.

— Had Paul spent his life looking backward, he would never have become the Paul that God made him to be

- We need to forget the mistakes and sins of the past and not dwell or ruminate on them in the present, for one primary reason: because that's what God does

- At the point of faith, God takes our sins, every one of them, and washes them in a sea of forgetfulness. He takes our sins and separates them as far as the east is from the west.
- If we go to God and say, Remember that sin I committed 5 years ago? God says, I'm sorry, but no, I don't remember it. It's not that God isn't omniscient...He *chooses* to not remember our sins because they have already been paid for.
- Satan does not want us to know this or be aware of how God views our sin, because he doesn't want us to become what God wants us to become in Christ. Instead, he wants to keep us in a state of emotional and spiritual bondage.
- This bondage is a state that Paul could've easily stayed in, considering his past, but he didn't. He forgot what was behind him, all the sins of his past, and he "pressed on" (v14) to become what God purposed for him, in Christ.

14 I press on toward the goal for the **prize** of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

14 I keep pursuing the goal to win the prize of God's heavenly call in the Messiah Jesus.

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

- "...prize" - *brabeion*, the prize Paul is referring to, in context, is his glorification; the time in history where he will no longer be dual-natured, but will have his resurrected body and will no longer struggle with his sin nature
- The appetites and desires of the flesh will no longer be there
- The same Greek word used here for "prize" (*brabeion*) is also used by Paul in 1 Cor 9:24, and speaks of the Bema Seat judgment of rewards for believers
- His point is that if the Bema Seat judgment of rewards is a reality for all believers, just after the Rapture, why am I sitting around worried about my past? I have too much to live for in the present and in the future to be bogged down by my past.

#### (D) Application (3:15—4:3)

Paul now lists the genuine substitutes that God brought into his life to replace the things he gave up when he relinquished legalism. These are things that God commands us to embrace in lieu of legalism. God never asks us to give up something without replacing it with something better.

##### (a) Maturity (3:15-16)

15 Therefore, all who are mature, let's have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, **God will reveal that to you** as well;

15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

15 Therefore, those of us who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will show you how to think.

**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.

- After listing the five things that God gave to Paul when he let go of his resume (v8-14), he now says that God brought him to, not perfection, but spiritual maturity

— Spiritual maturity is not sinless perfection, but an upward trajectory in our spiritual growth whereby we don't become sinless, but we sin less

— This is what Paul experienced when he left legalism and living his life according to a bunch of manmade rules and began discovering his resources in Christ

— This upward trajectory of spiritual growth is only birthed in God's Word (1 Peter 2:2). Growth is when your practice begins to catch up with your position and we learn more about what we already have.

— This is one of the purposes of the church: to equip the saints for the work of service (Eph 4:12)

— "...God will reveal that to you" - if anyone in Philippi disagreed with Paul in this matter, he wasn't going to argue with them. He simply said, in effect, If you don't agree, God will give you light on the subject.

— This is good advice for today. Many Christians will spend hours arguing a theological point, trying to convince the unconvincable. Paul says, I'm an apostle, and if you're not convinced by what I am saying, I'm going to hand you over to the Lord to convince you.

— Paul later warned Timothy about getting into prolonged arguments or discussions with people, which most of the time do not produce anything but strife (2 Tim 2:23-24). They often tend to generate more heat than they do light.

— And Satan loves when we get sucked into these things because he wants you to waste your mind, energy, and emotions on something that is fruitless, because only God can change the heart of a person.

16 however, let's keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

16 however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

16 However, we should live up to what we have achieved so far.

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

(b) Watchfulness (3:17-19)

**17** *Brothers and sisters*, join in **following my example**, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

17 Join together in imitating me, brothers, and pay close attention to those who live by the example we have set for you.

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

- "Brothers and sisters" - "brethren"; important to note that Paul refers to his original audience as "brethren" because he is writing to saved people

— Paul is not writing to unsaved people to teach them how to be saved; he's writing to saved people who need help or instruction in the second tense of their salvation (sanctification)

- "...following my example" - Paul holds himself out as an example for the Philippians to follow (Cf. 1 Cor 11:1)

18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and **now tell you even as I weep, that they are the enemies of the cross** of Christ,

18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are enemies of the cross of Christ*,

18 For I have often told you, and now tell you even with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of the Messiah.

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*:

- Paul is about to tell the Philippians that there are many false teachers out there who are teaching licentiousness (Cf. 1 John 4:1)

— Paul reiterates that he has told them about these false teachers and this false teaching before, many times

— Many today will say that we should not confront and expose false teachers, but that mindset appears to be completely counter to how Paul handled false teachers (Col 1:28)

- "...now tell you even as I weep" - the thought of false teaching brought Paul to tears (Acts 20:29-31)

- "...enemies of the cross" - the false teachers who taught licentiousness, a doctrine that mitigates what Jesus did on the cross

— Paul says that if you believe what they teach, it will subtract from the provision of Christ on the cross

19 whose **end is destruction**, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who **have their minds on earthly things**.

19 whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame. Their minds are set on worldly things.

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

- "...end is destruction" - licentiousness is just as empty as the legalism that they were fleeing from

- "...have their minds on earthly things" - those who move out of legalism into licentiousness do not have their minds on God's grace, but rather on themselves and what they can do (Cf. Col 3:2)

- Contrary to most evangelical teaching today, it's completely possible for a believer to indulge in licentiousness and still be saved, because we are saved by God's grace

- It was God's grace, not human works, that got me saved in the first place, and it's God's grace, not human works, that keeps me in the door

- If licentiousness was not possible for a believer, why would Paul be warning the believers at Philippi (and Galatia, Gal 5:13, Rome, Rom 6:12; 13:14) about it? But once a believer begins to live a licentious lifestyle, joy is an impossibility in their life.

- When a believer lives a lifestyle that pleases the sin nature, they take the Y and put it in front of the JO, which misspells JOY

(c) Eschatological perspective (3:20-21)

(i) Heavenly citizenship (3:20)

20 For our **citizenship** is in heaven, from which we also **eagerly wait for a Savior**, the Lord Jesus Christ;

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

20 Our citizenship, however, is in heaven, and it is from there that we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah.

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

- Instead of setting your mind on earthly things (v19), set your mind on heavenly things

- To understand this verse in context with the believers in Philippi, we need to understand the background of Acts 16:20

- Philippi was a privileged city and a Roman colony. If you were a resident of Philippi, you received privileges from Rome, including an exemption from taxation.

- Many people migrated to Philippi in exchange for the *Italic Right*, which meant they were citizens of Philippi, but also citizens of Rome. They had dual citizenship.

- The Philippians considered themselves privileged people because they lived in Philippi, but they were also Roman citizens. This verse would've resonated with them because Paul is telling them that they are privileged people because they currently live on earth, but they were also citizens of heaven.
- Because of our destiny, we have privileges that the world does not have. We are dual citizens of earth, as well as heaven.
- Heb 11:10 says that Abraham was looking for a city (the New Jerusalem), whose architect and builder is God. When we attach our hope to earthly things, things that are transitory, and lose focus on our eternal destiny, we lose joy.
- "...citizenship" - *politeuma*, it is the word from which we get the English word "politics"
- According to this verse, a believer's legal (*de jure*) standing is as a citizen of heaven, but one is still a *de facto* citizen of the USA (or other country) because this is where they presently reside
- See [The Coming Kingdom 68 Kingdom Now Passages: Rom 14:17; 1 Tim 6:15](#) and note on Rom 14:17 for more information and examples of *de jure* / *de facto* distinction.
- Our heavenly citizenship and destiny are far more important than our brief earthly stay (Cf. Gal 4:26; Heb 11:10)
- All believers need to learn to live as foreigners and pilgrims on this earth (Heb 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11)
- "...eagerly wait" - *apekdechometha*, a strong compound word emphasizing the intense yearning of Christ's return
- The expectation of the Lord's personal and imminent return gave joy and power to the early Christians and to Christian communities
- One of the greatest incentives to holiness in the NT is that we might be ready for Him when He returns (Cf. 1 Cor 1:7; 1 Thess 1:10; James 5:8)
- Because Abraham looked for a city, he was content to live in a tent (Heb 11:10,13-16)
- "...for a Savior" - it's interesting that the NT never exhorts us to eagerly await any other prophetic sign, such as the Antichrist's treaty with Israel or the rebuilding of the Tribulation temple. We are not to be looking for the Antichrist, we are to be looking for Jesus Christ.
- The NT consistently focuses believers upon, and eagerly awaiting, the imminent return of Christ for His Church in the Rapture (see [Doctrine of Imminency](#))

### (ii) Future transformation (3:21)

21 who will transform the body of our lowly condition into conformity with His glorious body, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

21 He will change our unassuming bodies and make them like his glorious body through the power that enables him to bring everything under his authority.

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.

- A beautiful description of the Rapture (Cf. 1 Cor 15:49-54)

- Is Jesus powerful enough to transform our human bodies into glorified bodies? All authority has been given to Him in heaven and on the earth (Matt 28:18).

— This is a figure of speech called a merism, which means infinite power. Jesus has been given all power and authority over heaven and earth, and everything in between.

— Paul is saying that as a replacement for legalism, we should embrace a heavenly and eternal perspective in life, which will facilitate joy