

I WANT TO KNOW CHRIST

Philippians 3:1-21

Key Verse: 3:10

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...”

In chapter 2, Paul encouraged the Philippian Christians to imitate Christ in his humility. In chapter 3, Paul warns the Philippians to watch out for heresy. It is the best way to warn them to watch out for secular humanists. Then Paul tells them his personal testimony. The key point of his testimony is, “I want to know Christ.”

First, that I may gain Christ (1-11). Look at verse 1. “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.” Time and again, Paul urges the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord. The word “rejoice” is repeated in each chapter, like a theme in orchestra music. 2:18 says, “So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.” 3:1 says, “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!” 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” The life of faith is the life of true joy. To live the life of faith is to learn how to rejoice in all circumstances. We must learn to rejoice in Jesus not only in times of abundant blessing, but also in times of hardship and sorrow, so that our lives may be pleasing to God.

We can see the true Christians’ joy in the early apostolic Christians. Right after the crucifixion of Jesus, the power of the devil seemed to be remarkably increasing and he was wielding his power recklessly. But the early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They rejoiced in the Lord greatly.

Paul was glad and rejoiced, even though he was in prison for Jesus’ name’s sake and for the sake of God’s flock. 2:17 says, “But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and

service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.”

Look at verse 2. “Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.” In this verse Paul calls them “dogs.” Paul uses a harsh word for those who were showing aggressive opposition to the gospel and hindering the genuine gospel faith of the Philippians. They had distorted the meaning of circumcision (3). They said, “Unless you are circumcised like us, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). They asked, “Are you circumcised?” If the answer was “No,” then they said to themselves, “Hmm. You are a ‘dog.’” They thought that because they were circumcised, they were saved and were the children of Abraham, while all others were Gentile dogs because they were not circumcised. They used circumcision as a political tool to persecute the genuine Christians. However, Paul said that they were the “dogs,” because their religious life was habitual, like a dog returning to its vomit. They practiced ritual ceremonies habitually, and no more than that.

On the other hand, Paul claims that the Philippians were the circumcision because they worshiped God from their hearts, glorified the name of Jesus and did not put confidence in the flesh (3).

In order to nullify the self-righteousness of the legalistic Christians, Paul mentions his own credentials as a Jew, rooted in his Jewish pedigree, privileges and attainments. Look at verses 4b-5. “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day....” The descendants of Ishmael received circumcision at the age of 13. Gentiles were circumcised when they believed. But Paul was circumcised on the eighth day as a real Jew. “...of the people of Israel.” He was a direct descendant of Abraham. “...of the tribe of Benjamin.” From Benjamin’s line the first king of Israel, Saul, was born, and from this line came many famous army generals. “...a Hebrew of Hebrews.” He was not just a Greek-speaking Jew (Acts 6:1), but a Hebrew-speaking Jew in the mainstream. “...in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church.” Paul repented that he had persecuted the early church; but he was proud of his zeal. “...as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” In terms of legalistic standards of scrupulous external conformity to the law, he was peerless. His future had been very bright.

In the past, he was proud and selfish. He sought human

recognition and fame. He may have said to himself, "Nothing else matters; I want recognition." In order to get recognition, he studied hard. He actively participated in Jewish religion and politics. He was known as a promising young man. Still, he was hungry for recognition. So, as a shortcut to his immediate success, he became a ringleader in persecuting the church of God. When he was on the road to Damascus to persecute Jesus' people, he met the Risen Jesus. Jesus embraced this enemy of God with redeeming love and forgave all his sins. Then Paul's spiritual eyes were opened to see who Jesus really was, as well as to see himself--a great sinner. At that time he discovered both himself and his mission. Then he realized that his former way of life was worthless and really despicable. Paul's new life in Jesus was not just preferable or a better alternative, it was the only way. To Paul, Jesus was all the world.

After meeting Jesus, Paul's purpose of life was completely inverted, from that of a selfish man to that of a man in Christ. In the past, he grabbed everything he could in order to satisfy his selfishness. Now, he lost everything in order to gain Christ.

Look at verse 7. "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." This verse also tells us of Paul's confidence in Jesus. In order to live for the sake of Christ, Paul lost everything. Look at verse 8. "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ..." In order to live for the sake of Christ, Paul lost everything. But he did not regret it at all. Not only that, he thought of his human pride and achievements as rubbish.

In verse 9, "be found in him" means to discover oneself in Jesus. Paul was most happy to discover himself in Jesus and to restore his ruined image in Jesus. Still, Paul knew that he could not gain Christ with his own righteousness. But he believed that he could gain Christ and live for his name's sake with faith.

Look at verse 10. "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming

like him in his death..." This verse is the key point of Paul's personal life testimony, which tells us three things about Paul.

In the first place, Paul wanted to know the grace of Jesus. Paul said, "I want to know Christ." Paul knew Christ so well. Still, he wanted to know Christ. When he said, "I want to know Christ," it meant, "I want to know his saving grace all the more." In the past, he thought of himself as being great and faultless. But when he met Jesus, he realized that he was a wretched sinner who needed the mercy of God. He also realized that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners --of whom I am the worst." His grace was indeed amazing; the more he thought about his grace, the more amazing it was. Paul was a man who knew the grace of Jesus. Paul's whole life was a life dedicated to knowing the grace of Jesus.

In the second place, Paul wanted to know the meaning of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. Paul's love for Jesus was so great that he wanted to learn the main points of his teaching: his suffering, his death and his resurrection. Because Jesus died for the sins of the world, Paul was also willing to participate in his suffering, becoming like him in his death. We can see that Peter also was willing to participate in Jesus' suffering. When Peter had the desire to live gloriously and happily in this world, he was always angry and fearful. But since he met the Risen Jesus at the beach and ate breakfast cooked by Jesus, his spiritual eyes were opened and he began to have faith in Jesus. He became bold, bold enough to encourage Christians who were under fiery persecutions, scattered all over Asia Minor, to participate in the sufferings of Christ. When we commit sins, we become powerless to do anything. But when we love Jesus, we become strong, so strong that we are not afraid of any hardships or sufferings.

In the third place, Paul's hope. Look at verse 11. "...and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." This verse reveals Paul's ultimate hope. He had future hope in the Risen Jesus for himself and for all men--that all men who believe in Jesus will not die and that even if they die, they will live again in Jesus. Because of this great hope, he gave up all his privileges and self-glory seeking desires.

In light of the Bible, the resurrection of Christ is the great personal anticipation of every believer. Daniel 12:2 says, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." Acts 24:15 reads, "...and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."

Second, "I press on toward the goal" (12-16). In verses 12-14 Paul uses athletic imagery to explain what the Christian life is like. It is like a race or a battle. Hebrews 12:1b says, "...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." 2 Timothy 4:7 says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Look at verse 12. "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." Paul's attitude to hold onto Christ Jesus was single-minded, like that of a runner running so as to get the prize. Paul's goal was Christ's goal for him.

Paul was a great champion of faith, a spiritual general who had won many championship titles and victories in spiritual warfare throughout his lifetime (2 Ti 4:7,8). But he was not at all complacent, like a retired general who enjoys his leisure time by walking his dog. Look at verses 13,14. "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." He is still running, straining toward what is ahead. He is still pressing forward. He is like a quarterback in a football game who drives his team forward to victory. He is like an eagle flying in the sky with his awesome speed. He is like a powerful lion ready to pounce on his prey.

The winner of a Greek race received a wreath of leaves and sometimes a cash award from a man. But Christians receive an award of everlasting glory from God. Paul's ultimate aspirations are found not in this

life, but in heaven. Paul set his heart on things above (Col 3:1). In verse 15 he says, "All of us who are mature should take such a view of things."

Third, "follow my example" (17-21). Look at verse 17. "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you." Paul tells the Philippians to follow his example. No one can dare tell someone else, "Follow my example." But Paul could tell them this because he had followed the example of Christ. We Christians must be enthusiastic in following the example of Jesus and in imitating him and in encouraging others to do so.

Paul said, "...take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" (17). Evidently, there must be a Christian lifestyle worth following. These days there are many kinds of decadent lifestyles. We Christians are shamed by the fact that we can scarcely find any particular kind of Christian lifestyle these days.

Look at verses 18 and 19. "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things." These days, many secular humanists who commit sin without care and increase in wealth despise Christians in their arrogance. Many Christians envy their lifestyles. What did Paul do when he saw secular Christians? Paul cried many tears because of their corrupted lifestyles. They lived double lives. They claimed that they were saved because they were circumcised. They harassed new Christians in order to hinder their gospel faith, which was genuine and sincere. But their own personal lives were materialistic, and what they craved for all the time was shameful things, such as sports, sex and money. So Paul said, "...their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame." They were the early hedonists. They were the enemies of the cross of Christ. They were the source of all kinds of corruption.

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so

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that they will be like his glorious body” (20-21). We Christians must love the cross of Christ and live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We Christians must live with the faith that Jesus, through his infinite resurrection power, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. We have many desires that we want to achieve. But let’s have heart’s desire to know Christ and to live for his name’s sake.