

### Comments on Philippians 3

Paul contrasts himself with the Judaizers. He says he himself is more Jewish than anyone of them, and he has let go of the Law of Moses in favor of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so he is part of His fellowship and will be part of His resurrection (v. 1-11).

Paul is instead working towards perfection, leaving behind the Law of Moses and reaching towards the Gospel (v. 12-16). The ecclesia should follow Paul's example, and not follow after the Judaizers (v. 17-19). If they do, then they will be part of the citizenship of heaven and they will be exalted (v. 20-21).

The chapter follows a loose A-B-C-A-B-C pattern, where the first A-B-C is the example of Paul's personal religious story, and the second A-B-C is what Paul is hoping the ecclesia's religious story will be, as follows:

A (v. 4-6) Paul formerly zealous for the Law of Moses, was blameless as far as the Law was concerned, and yet a persecutor of the ecclesia

B (v. 7-9) Paul abandons Law of Moses, accept Christ's righteousness

C (v. 10-11) Paul is part of the fellowship of His suffering, His resurrection

A (v. 12-16) Paul and ecclesia work towards perfection in Christ

B (v. 17-19) Ecclesia should also abandon the Law of Moses, and not follow the Judaizers who reject Christ's righteousness

C (v. 20-21) The ecclesia's Citizenship in heaven, He will transform their bodies

Paul is trying to have the remaining ecclesia follow his example, and entirely reject the Judaizers and their doctrine.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

v1 Paul must have written to them previously, with that letter now lost to us. We would assume from his comments that the

letter he previously wrote dealt with the issue of the Judaizers within the ecclesia, given the immediately following text.

<sup>2</sup> Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. <sup>4</sup> 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: <sup>5</sup> 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; <sup>6</sup> Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup> 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,

v2-8 Paul warns the ecclesia at Philippi against Judaizers. He uses circumcision as a symbol to warn them against falling back on the Law of Moses (v. 2-3). Paul then recounts how he is an Israelite by birth who used to be a Pharisee zealot, but he abandoned that and the Law of Moses for the gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 4-8).

Given the local Judaizers are likely Gentile proselytes to Judaism and not Jewish by birth, Paul's diatribe in v. 4-6 holds particular strength in the argument against them. Paul is saying that he is much more Jewish than these Judaizers, and, yet, he has gladly abandoned it all for what Christ offers.

There is a long unfortunate history of calling Jewish people "dogs" as an insult because of this verse, on the assumption Paul is employing it as a reversed epithet against Jews. Aside from being simple bigotry, there are a couple of internal logical problems with that reading. First, there is no case of Jews called Gentiles "dogs" as a racial epithet in Scripture (Matt. 15:28 is the closest occurrence, and it ends favorably for the non-Jew, so interpreting it in this context doesn't work; Matt. 7:6 is similarly non-applicable as the terms "dogs" and "swine" are more likely intended to be applied to Jews, not Gentiles, who reject the Gospel). Second, Paul here is a literal Jew and the Judaizers here are likely Gentiles by birth and Jewish by proselyting (cf. Acts 16:14). If this is a racial epithet, it is not a reversal, it is the one existing exemplar, and the users of the "it's a reversal, so its fair play" are entirely wrong.

v2-3 Paul appears to be arranging these verses in an inverted antithetical parallel:

Beware of dogs,  
beware of evil workers,  
beware of the concision [false circumcision].  
For we are the [true/spiritual] circumcision,  
which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and  
have no confidence in the flesh.

v2 "dogs", discerning Paul's intent is difficult. Perhaps this verse is a loose paraphrase of Ps. 22:16. Note the connection with the "the assembly of the wicked" in conjunction with the "evil workers" of the present verse, and "they pierced my hands and feet" in conjunction with "the concision" of the present verse. Perhaps Paul is invoking the general context of Ps. 22, that of the Lord's servant being persecuted, to cast the Judaizers in that role with respect to the ecclesia, they are persecuting or rejecting the Messiah and His followers.

"evil workers", the opposite of 1:6 and 2:12-13, those who reject that Christ is the way of perfection, as in v. 13-15.

"concision", i.e., the false physical circumcision (Greek: katatome [most literally: down-cutting]) as opposed to the true spiritual circumcision (Greek: peritome [most literally: about-cutting]) referenced in the following verse.

The KJV translation is good, but confusing, because Paul deliberately uses a unique word to highlight the difference between the bad circumcision and the good circumcision.

Paul's warning is against the Judaizers who are still requiring the physical acts of the Law of Moses, of which circumcision is the prime example. Paul tells them that the true circumcision is to remove the thickening about one's heart, cf. Rom. 2:29.

In the Greek, Paul uses the prefix "kata-" to describe the false cutting "tome". He also uses the term "katachthonion" (most literally: down-terrestrial) to describe hell in 2:10, also bearing the prefix "kata-". In both cases, these words are novel to the NT, appearing nowhere else. Paul is probably deliberately drawing a parallel between the two using wordplay.

v8 "do count them but dung", the translation is accurate. Paul is referring to literal excrement, likely in contrast to the Judaizers reference of "whose god is their belly" (cf. v. 19). While they are filled with food and worldly things, Paul has

gotten rid of it and eagerly walked away from it, because it is repellent to him now.

There is some discussion among commentators over whether Paul is intending to use the term as profanity for shock value. But, that is not the case, as the Greek term in question is used in medical and agricultural contexts in ancient Greek texts, making it clear it was not profanity.

<sup>9</sup> 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: <sup>10</sup> That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; <sup>11</sup> If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

<sup>17</sup> Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. <sup>18</sup> (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: <sup>19</sup> whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) <sup>20</sup> For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>21</sup> 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.

v9-21 Paul states righteousness does not come from the Law of Moses, rather it comes from God through faith in and knowledge of Christ (v. 9-10). With this righteousness one can be made like Christ and receive the resurrection of glory as did Christ (v. 10-11).

Paul then addresses those who think they are already perfect, and he tells them he himself has not yet achieved the requirements of the resurrection of glory (v. 12). He admonishes them to press forward, letting go of the Law of Moses behind them and reaching for the Gospel ahead of them (v. 13-16). In other words, they need to endure to the end in order to obtain the resurrection of glory.

He then encourages them to follow his example (v. 17) and warns them against falling away from the gospel into worldly

things (v. 18-19). Because their allotment is in heaven with their Savior Jesus Christ (v. 20), who has the power to transform the lowly mortal into exalted resurrected person like Himself (v. 21).

v11 "resurrection of the dead", the IV/JST emends this to "resurrection of the just". Compare Jacob 4:11 for obtaining a resurrection in Christ, which is what Paul is referring to.

v12-15 "either were already perfect...as many as be perfect", Paul is sarcastically referring to those who claim or believe perfection comes through living the Law of Moses, as referenced in v. 9, and also as the "those things which are behind". Paul is saying that those who think they have, or can, reach perfection through the Law of Moses are mistaken.

v13 "those things which are behind", i.e., the Law of Moses. As Paul discussed in v. 4-8, he formerly had the Law of Moses, but has left it behind for the Gospel, which is what he is "reaching forth unto those things which are before" with "before" meaning "ahead".

v18 "enemies of the cross of Christ", in that they reject the ideas of v. 7-8 and do not understand the ideas of 2:6-11 in general and 2:8 in specific.

The issue here is the pride of the Judaizers who were formerly within the ecclesia, and their unwillingness to let go of the Law of Moses and humbly accept the Gospel message in it's entirety.

v19 "and whose glory is in their shame", the IV/JST emends this to "and who glory in their shame". The most literal translation of the Greek would be "and glory in their shame". What Paul means is these are people who take glory in that which is truly shameful. Those who think darkness is light per Isa. 5:20.

v21 Obviously referring to the doctrine of [exaltation](#), known outside of the Church as [theosis](#) among the Eastern Orthodox churches or [divinization](#) among Roman Catholic churches.

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