

# Losing All Things to Gain Christ

## Philippians 3:1-11

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### Introduction

When compared to the Corinthian epistles or to the respective letters to the Galatians, Timothy, or Titus, the letter to the Philippians is written in mild terms. The reason for this is not hard to discover. Severe, catastrophic problems were threatening the very existence of the churches involved in the aforementioned letters, and those problems had to be addressed directly by the apostle. The Philippian church was apparently free of such major problems. Paul was therefore able to spend much of his letter to them commending their faithfulness and giving them general encouragement and exhortations.

One of the powerful evidences of the inspiration of the words of the Bible is their timelessness – they are ever applicable and never obsolete. We will find this to be the case with the material in this section of the Philippian letter.

There is at least one explosion of forceful terminology in Philippians, however, and it is in the early part of the passage before us. It stands out even more forcefully than it might otherwise because it is in such bold contrast with the otherwise generally mild tone of the epistle. A major element of this section consists of what we might refer to as “Paul’s Jewish Resume.” He uses this list of earthly advantages to state in a dramatic way the relative worthlessness of all such privileges and positions when compared with the blessings he found in Christ. This willing exchange of temporal for eternal things is a noble example for all who are moved by spiritual verities.

One of the powerful evidences of the inspiration of the words of the Bible is their perpetual timelessness, as amply demonstrated in this section of the Philippian letter.

### Exegesis and Exposition of Philippians 3:1-11

#### *Chapter 3:1-2: A Warning About Dogs*

**Verse 1:** Some commentators are quick to jump to strange conclusions when they see the word *finally*<sup>1</sup> in this text.<sup>2</sup> Some say that it shows that Paul was rather aimless in what he was writing, intending to end the letter at this point, but kept digressing to various subjects.<sup>3</sup> Others take *finally* as a signal that the section between 3:1 and 4:8 (where Paul uses *finally* a second

time) is from a second mysterious, lost epistle (except for this portion, of course), which was combined with another complete letter.<sup>4</sup>

The Greek phrase (*to loipon*) translated “finally,” literally means “as for the rest.” Although Paul sometimes uses it as a signal that he is planning to draw his words to a close (as perhaps in 4:8), he is by no means consistent in this use of it. Robertson’s insight is helpful:

But Paul uses the idiom elsewhere also as in 1 Corinthians 7:29 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1 before the close of the letter is in sight. It is wholly needless to understand Paul as about to finish and then suddenly changing his mind like some preachers who announce the end a half dozen times.<sup>5</sup>

Wuest suggests that the idea of the Greek phrase is of “something left over.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, after Paul had discussed things pertaining to internal matters in the church in the first two chapters, he then used this phrase to introduce a threat from without.

The first exhortation of this passage is “rejoice in the Lord.” From the beginning of this letter Paul wrote of his own joy, and numerous times he exhorted the Philippian brethren to rejoice. Not only is joy a prominent theme, but the kindred element of gratitude is often mentioned as well (1:3-5; 4:10, 14-16; et al.). Closely related to gratitude and the joy produced by it are the elements of freedom from anxiety, the “peace of God, which passeth all understanding,” and contentment regardless of one’s circumstances (Phi. 4:6-7, 10-13). In spite of the suffering, pain, toil, and tears suffered for Christ, Paul never became cynical or embittered. His remarkable spirit provides the example for every Christian that the ordinary approach to life should be one of gratitude and joy (3:17).

These are all beautiful qualities that are admired by all, and, of all people, Christians ought to be clothed with them. Though in prison when he wrote (1:13), Paul was not complaining or wringing his hands in worry and fretfulness. Rather, he rejoiced, gave thanks, and enjoyed contentment (4:11-12). It is not sinful for one to become discouraged and grieved to tears at times. God’s great men of old, including His Son (e.g., Mat. 23:37), have sometimes been overwhelmed by such emotions. There are many things about which many saints **ought** to be shedding tears, but about which they are totally apathetic. However, discouragement and grief must not be allowed to dominate us and become our constant state of mind.

To “rejoice in the Lord” does not mean that we are to paste a fake smile on our faces and walk around like zombies. However, we should likewise guard against being perpetual “sourpusses” and turning into cynics. We have the means of maintaining a constant level of joy

that springs from our gratitude to God and His Son for all of the blessings that are ours in the eternal kingdom. In spite of all of the evils and false doctrines in the world and among the brethren, let us cultivate this calm, serene joy.

The foundation of the unique joy of the Christian life is Christ – we rejoice in the Lord! It matters not how much money one has, how many privileges or powers are his, whom or what one knows, if he is not “in the Lord” (i.e., a Christian, a member of the church of Christ) he can never know true rejoicing.

Contrariwise, although one is impoverished and persecuted and a fool in the eyes of the world, if he is “in Christ” he knows a joy beyond description. Indeed, the “brother of low degree” is able to “glory in his high estate” as a Christian (Jam. 1:9). How essential and blessed it is to be “in the Lord”! In Him alone are all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Tragically, most men who claim to believe in Christ and His Word adamantly reject the very act chosen by Deity by which one comes into Christ and His church – immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins (Mark. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27).

Paul indicated that he had earlier taught the Philippians on the subject he was about to introduce. He did not consider it a chore (“irksome”) to repeat these warnings, nor did he apologize for so doing. The next phrase gives his rationale for the repetition – it was necessary for their spiritual safety. Here we see the patience of the apostle in tirelessly covering ground which he had already covered. He used repetition, the time-honored tool of educators, to keep them safe (literally, to keep them from reeling or tottering). Robert Taylor correctly points out that inspiration often makes use of this educational principle:

Deuteronomy is a rehearsal of Sinaitic statutes. Much is repeated in the historical books of I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles. There is repetition among the synoptics – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Peter is thrice interrogated relative to his feelings for the now Risen Redeemer (John 21:15-17). Peter employed repetition (II Pet. 1:12ff). The charge to hear with the ear the Spirit’s message is repeated again and again by the Christ in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3.<sup>7</sup>

It bears repeating how essential repetition is in learning God’s revealed Truth! We who are preachers sometimes forget the importance of repetition. If we are not careful, we can forget to review the frequency of our preaching on certain fundamental themes that are necessary if the church is to remain pure and distinctive. It is easy to think that since we have preached on a certain subject or exposed a given false doctrine in a sermon or a series of sermons or classes, it need not be dealt with again. However, there are at least three good reasons this is not so:

1. We have the example of inspired men who kept repeating God's message—they must have had good reason for doing so.
2. There will always be those among our hearers who did not understand and/or who were not present when we dealt with a given subject.
3. There will always be the need to reinforce what even mature brethren have already understood and learned.

We are convinced that many of the serious doctrinal problems now plaguing the church of the Lord can be traced to a failure to follow the cardinal rule of repetitive preaching and teaching on fundamental and distinctive doctrinal themes.

Wise elders will provide duplication of sound doctrine from pulpit and classroom by means of providing and encouraging use and purchase of good books, such as those produced by Scripturally sound lectureships. They can further enhance this repetition and reinforcement by subscribing to at least one true-to-the-Book Gospel journal for the entire church. If individuals are left to subscribe on their own, inevitably, those who most need the material will not get it.

**Verse 2:** "Beware of the dogs" is the first of a triplet of warnings. The thrice-repeated word *beware* lends emphasis to the dangers of which those brethren were being warned. The ones of whom to beware are a single group, referred to by three different terms. The "dogs" were not literal four-legged animals, but humans who were **behaving** as dogs. It becomes apparent when one reads the second and third warnings that the "dogs" were Jews who had been baptized and who were determined to force Gentiles who would be saved to keep the law of Moses, especially circumcision.

There is irony in Paul's application of "dogs" to Jews. Dogs were despised and unclean animals to the Jews. The Gentiles were "dogs" in the eyes of the Jews. Paul took their term of derision and turned it back on them. There were several ways in which those infamous Judaizers were like dogs. They were constantly "barking" out their false doctrine. They "hounded" Paul from city to city, persistently spreading their heresy. Like a pack of rabid dogs, they constantly attacked the body of Christ, biting and devouring all they could. Also, like rabid dogs, their bite was poisonous, destructive, and spiritually fatal if allowed to go unopposed. The apostle could hardly have used a stronger or more odious term to describe those false teachers. They needed to be described in just such terms so that none of the Philippians could mistake the significance of the warning.

Paul's second warning was, "Beware of the evil workers." The Jews were noted for their zeal, often reaching fanatical levels. The scribes and Pharisees would "compass sea and land to make one proselyte" (Mat. 23:15). Paul's countrymen had a "zeal for God" (Rom. 10:2). In both passages just mentioned the zeal of the Jews was condemned because it was misdirected. When one reads of the indefatigable way the Judaizing teachers worked to impose the law of Moses upon the church of Christ, we do not wonder that Paul called them "workers."

Lamentably, they were evil workers. There is apparently no hesitation on the part of the apostle so to describe those false teachers. They were a corrupt tree that could only produce corrupt fruit (Mat. 7:17-18). They were sowing to the flesh, of which they could but reap corruption (Gal. 6:8). To pretend or wish that the work of these men was **not** destructive, false, and evil would not change the fact that it **was**.

How wonderful it would be if all who are zealous in religion could be commended and encouraged because they are zealous for Truth rather than for error! However, it was not so in ancient times, and it certainly is not so now. When one is involved in error, zeal simply makes him a more destructive tool in the devil's hand. Paul knew that false teachers (whether at Philippi or anywhere else) must never be ignored or tolerated. Regardless of how kind, jovial, well-known, and likable they may be, how many good works they may seem to do, or how zealous they are, false teachers are still "evil workers," and they must be exposed as such and opposed.

In this third warning—"beware of the concision"—Paul specifically identified the "dogs" and "evil workers." "Concision" translates a term that means to make an incision, to mutilate by cutting the flesh. This word occurs in the New Testament only here. Paul used this term with biting sarcasm and irony to refer to those baptized (but not converted) Jews (thus the circumcised ones) who insisted that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). He refused to call them the "circumcision" here. Rather, he made a play on words to indicate that they were not the true "circumcision." They had merely had a surgical procedure ("concision").

Those wicked zealots originated their own set of "salvation conditions": faith, repentance, confession, baptism—and circumcision. However, the old fleshly rite of circumcision upon which they insisted was a mere fleshly incision, mutilation, or cutting of the flesh. It was rendered so by the death of Christ (Col. 2:14) and had absolutely nothing to do with salvation through Christ. Those false teachers thought they were preaching circumcision,

but actually (as far as any spiritual value was concerned) they were only preaching flesh-cutting, mutilation, or concision. Among the Galatians he described their motive: "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they compel you to be circumcised; only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ" (Gal. 6:12). By calling them the "concision," Paul boldly exposed the falseness and evil of those teachers and the utter vanity of their contention.

The work of the circumcision sect had not yet seriously affected the Philippian saints as it had the Galatians (Gal. 1:6). He wanted to prepare the Philippians to recognize these men so as to reject and avoid them. God's people must be "sober" and "watchful" concerning the devil's servants, even as for the devil himself (1 Pet. 5:8). Paul apparently anticipated the arrival of these evil men in Philippi and urged the brethren to prepare a "welcoming party" for them.

It is significant that, even in an otherwise mildly worded letter of encouragement, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to strongly caution these brethren. Warnings about spiritual dangers posed by false teachers and their doctrines are appropriate, or else the Bible would not be so full of them, as every Bible student knows it is. Please consider the following thoughts concerning some of the "whys" and "hows" of these necessary warnings:

1. There is a need to issue such warnings as a preventive measure. Preventive treatment is the best kind and usually the least painful. While no righteous person rejoices in the news of a brother, a school, or an entire congregation that has abandoned the Truth, it is better to be warned of such than to be led astray by them through ignorance and/or innocence. Appropriate and timely warnings of men gone astray and of what they are teaching (whether within or without) are a necessary preventive measure. By sounding forth warnings of the errors being circulated, we can fortify many brethren and prepare them to withstand the errors. Paul did this in his three-fold "beware" of the foregoing passage.
2. Warnings are also needed to cure problems that have already developed from false teaching. Paul did not get the warnings about the evil workers to the Galatians in time to prevent the occurrence of grievous problems. However, he did not hesitate to sound forth the warnings of the follies and consequences of succumbing to the false teachers although they had already done their dirty work. Problems caused by false doctrines can never be cured by ignoring them. If any of those ensnared by them are to be rescued, the **sources** of the heresies, as well as the errors themselves, must be exposed by due warnings concerning them.
3. When warnings are given, they must be in such terms that those who hear may recognize and identify the source of the danger. Otherwise, the warnings are of little worth. Paul used great plainness in the warnings of our text, identifying the "dogs" and the "evil workers" as the Judaizing teachers. He was even more specific when he warned Timothy to shun Hymenaeus and Philetus because their doctrine (that the resurrection was already past) was erroneous and cancerous and had already corrupted some (2 Tim. 2:16-18). We are

commanded to mark those who cause division through false doctrine so as to identify them and warn others of them (Rom. 16:17). We should always take great care not to slander or falsely accuse any person or institution for any reason. However, when souls are at stake, we are derelict in our duty if we do not sound the warnings plainly, including calling the names of men, institutions, or congregations where necessary. May all of our warnings be issued from a broken heart full of love for the sinner, but even more for the Lord, His Word, and His people.

4. There is the need to hear and act upon the warnings. We live in a strange time in church history when even the elect have come under the influence of so much human philosophy that they do not want to hear the warnings upon which the salvation of their very souls depends. Because of such shallow and perverted thinking, many brethren are critical of preachers, churches, or publications that are “issue-oriented,” as they are wont to say. Some members of the church are hypersensitive to any exposure or identity of a false teacher or his doctrine, regardless of how destructive he or it may be. Others will come right out and tell you that they do not want to hear about any “problems” in the church, as if ignorance of them would cause them to disappear. Ira Y. Rice, Jr., is right: “You just cannot warn some brethren!”

The admonitions are frequent that we hear reliable spiritual warnings so as to act upon them and thereby avoid many dangers. The Lord wrote seven letters to as many churches, issuing many warnings designed to save their souls (Rev. 2-3). At the conclusion of each letter He urged, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches” (Rev. 2:7, et al.). Clearly, He not only intended for them to hear, but to heed and act upon the warnings He issued.

Some preachers and elders take pride in not keeping up with “the issues,” as if this behavior represented some sort of nobility or spiritual virtue. Too few elderships in our acquaintance are careful to stay abreast of the many winds of false doctrine that are blowing ever more strongly and of the men that are blowing them. Preachers and elders who are wise will stay informed themselves and will keep their respective congregations informed. Not all will listen with appreciation, but all need to hear the warnings anyway. Paul wrote the warnings in Philippians (and in many other passages) because he knew brethren needed to hear them for their own spiritual safety.

### *Chapter 3:3: The True Circumcision*

**Verse 3:** By implication Paul indicated above that the Judaizing teachers who sought to enforce circumcision on the Gentiles were not truly circumcised themselves. They had only undergone a surgical procedure on the flesh. Since the passing of the Mosaic law at the death of

Christ, fleshly circumcision – as prescribed by the law – had passed away with it as a religious ordinance.

In writing, “We are the circumcision,” Paul includes himself and all faithful disciples from Pentecost to the Second Coming. True saints alone, God’s spiritual Israel under the new covenant, hold the true doctrine and fulfill the true practice of circumcision – of the heart rather than the flesh. Such are identified by three descriptive terms: those who (1) “worship by the Spirit of God,” (2) “glory in Christ Jesus,” and (3) “have no confidence in the flesh.” The Judaizers likely failed on all three counts; they most certainly did on the latter two.

*Worship* is from the Greek word *latrountes*, which actually means “service rendered.” It is almost always translated *service* and we believe would have been the more accurate rendering here. Since this word is from a present participle, it actually denotes the **continual service** we render to God, as directed and authorized by the Spirit through His revelation (Col. 3:17). Paul thus clearly implies that the Judaizers were not serving God. To “glory [rejoice – KJV] in Christ Jesus” is to delight in doing the bidding of Him Who gave up all for us. Paul thus implies that the “concision” delighted not in Christ, but in themselves and in a misdirected loyalty to Moses. In the immediate context, having no confidence in the “flesh” likely applies primarily to the fleshly rite of circumcision these baptized Jews were mandating and in which they trusted. However, in the subsequent verses, Paul extends the application of “flesh” to include not relying for our salvation on our own righteousness (perfect law-keeping), family members, position, wealth, or any other earthly advantage. This reference to fleshly confidence is the springboard for Paul’s introduction of his “resume” (Phi. 3:4–6), which was quite impressive from a worldly perspective – all of which he forfeited in becoming a Christian.

Because this circumcision cult was so zealous, determined, and troublesome to the apostolic church, Paul several times drew a sharp contrast between true and false circumcision:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: 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 of men, but of God (Rom. 2:28–29).

Wherefore remember, that once ye, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision, in the flesh, made by hands (Eph. 2:11).

[Christ] in whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ (Col. 2:11).

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God (1 Cor. 7:19).



For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love (Gal. 5:6).

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature (6:15).

Christians, not fleshly Jews, constitute God's true Israel in the Christian age. God's promises to Israel of old were always conditional. She forfeited her chosen national status in rejecting her Messiah and Redeemer. The A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem was God's final earthly judgment on Israel as a nation. She had proved herself an evil, adulterous, and sinful people one too many times (Mat. 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:36). God fulfilled all of the land promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the days of Joshua (Jos. 21:43-45; et al.) God owes Israel nothing.

The national status and territory the Jews have gained in the past half-century are due to the benevolence of other nations and to its own brute strength, rather than to the fulfillment of promises from God. All of the modern speculative theories relating to a glorious, God-blessed future for the nation of Israel are based on ignorant and/or willful misinterpretations of Scripture. Ironically, the only way in which a Jew by race may become a part of Israel (as defined by the New Testament) is by obedience to the Gospel whereby he is added to the church.

#### *Chapter 3:4-6: Paul's Jewish Resume*

**Verse 4:** Paul may have anticipated the quibble that the reason he had "no confidence in the flesh" (v. 3) was that he had no fleshly advantage which would allow him to do so. The apostle was generally modest, self-effacing, and humble, apparently by his very nature. However, at times it became necessary for him to defend himself against false accusers (2 Cor. 11:21-12:13). Philippians 3:4 introduces another such occasion.

He leads into reciting his fleshly credentials by mentioning those "who have no confidence in the flesh" (v. 3). He wants all to know that if anyone were entitled to spiritual confidence because of fleshly advantages and accomplishments, he most certainly was. The other side of this principle is equally true – if he, with all of his fleshly Jewish attainments, could not trust in them for salvation, then no Jew could. This statement is no less true of Gentiles – they cannot be saved by trusting in the flesh (Rom. 1:16; 3:9, 23).

**Verse 5:** Here Paul begins a recitation of facts about himself that would especially attract the attention of the Jewish troublemakers and those who might tend to give them a sympathetic ear:

1. *Circumcised the eighth day*: God first commanded Abraham to perform circumcision on himself, then on all the males in his house, and all of the male children of his descendants at the age of eight days (Gen. 17:9-14). God chose this rite as a “token” of the covenant He made with the patriarch. When Jehovah gave the law through Moses, He incorporated this practice into the law for the Hebrews (Lev. 12:3). Paul’s statement meant that he was a born Hebrew, not a proselytized one, who would have been circumcised in adulthood. “The proudest claim is put first; he is a true-blooded Jew from the cradle and nursed in the ancestral faith.”<sup>8</sup>
2. *Of the stock of Israel*: This further emphasizes the fact that Paul was not a “wild olive” that was “grafted in” to the Jewish “tree” (Rom. 11:17-24). His Israelite identity came not by conversion, but by birth.
3. *Of the tribe of Benjamin*: Paul’s identity within Israel was in the tribe of Benjamin. Though small, this tribe claimed certain distinctions. It had remained loyal to David in the insurrection led by Absalom. Further, Saul, the first God-allowed king in Israel, was a Benjamite. The apostle’s Hebrew name reached back to the old king. Paul could take pride in his tribal, as well as his national heritage.
4. *A Hebrew of Hebrews*: Barnes claims that “This is the Hebrew mode of expressing the superlative degree; and the idea is that Paul enjoyed every advantage which could possibly be derived from the fact of being a Hebrew.”<sup>9</sup> Moffat renders this statement, “the Hebrew son of Hebrew parents.”<sup>10</sup> Paul was not of mixed parentage, as was Timothy (Acts 16:1). This item constitutes his racial, tribal, and cultural background – all inherited privileges, and all of which declare that if anyone could claim to be a full-blooded Israelite/Jew/Hebrew according to the flesh, Paul could. Now Paul turns to his credentials relating to the law and religion, which were matters of choice rather than of privilege.
5. *As touching the law, a Pharisee*: The Pharisee sect arose during the intertestamental period in an effort to preserve adherence to the law in the face of extreme persecution and apostasy. Their original motivation was altogether honorable, but by the time of Christ, they had so digressed themselves that they exalted the traditions of the elders above the law and thereby voided the law (Mat. 15:3, 6). They bound “heavy burdens,” laws where God had bound none, and which they would not lift a finger to carry (Mat. 23:4). They are generally depicted in the New Testament as self-righteous hypocrites (Mat. 23; Luke 18:10-14; et al.) To their credit, in the face of Sadducean liberalism, in the time of the Lord they still held to the Truth concerning angels, the resurrection, and immortality of the soul (Acts 23:8). Paul identifies the Pharisees as “the strictest sect of our religion” at the time he was one (26:5). They led the attacks against the Lord, and, along with the Sadducees, were the principal instigators of and cheerleaders at His death. Paul’s point in identifying himself with the Pharisees is not to imply his approval of them, but to imply his conservative attitude toward the law in his pre-Christian life.

**Verse 6:** Paul continues to describe some of the personal choices he made out of the deep spiritual convictions he possessed.

6. *As touching zeal, persecuting the church:* This behavior grew out of his loyalty to the law as a Pharisee (see above). The Pharisees believed Jesus was trying to destroy the law and the prophets (Mat. 5:17). This belief was one of their motives for despising Him and zealously promoting His crucifixion. Jesus warned the apostles: “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20b). As part of the San Hedrin, they were active in persecuting the church in Jerusalem and likely many other locations as well. Paul, as a Pharisee, led the charge against the church, beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 7:58–8:3; 9:11–13; 22:19–20; et al.) and extending his campaign to other cities (9:1–2, 14; 26:9–11). He obviously had the complete admiration and confidence of the Jewish court. His Pharisee membership well fitted him for his fierce campaign.

The Judaizing element within the church was composed of Pharisees (Acts 15:5). Lightfoot calls Paul’s statement “an expression of intense irony, condemning while he seems to exalt his former self.”<sup>11</sup> As with David, Paul was forgiven of his sinful past, but he never erased the memories. To Timothy he described himself as “a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious...” – the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:13, 15). When he described his countrymen as possessing “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2), he perfectly described himself before he obeyed the Gospel.

7. *As touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless:* In the sight of men, Paul was blameless – could not be faulted – in his efforts to observe the law of Moses. None could accuse or had accused him of carelessness and unconcern toward the requirements of the Sinaitic covenant. He counted none of it trivial, but sought strictly to submit to all of it.

### ***Chapter 3:7–9: Paul’s Grand Exchange***

**Verse 7:** With this verse we see the significance of Paul’s detailed Jewish credentials. He trusted in these elements for his righteousness – his salvation before Jehovah. To observing fellow-Jews, Paul “had it all” and “had it made” (cf. Gal. 1:13–14). Many must have counted him the ultimate fool to renounce this illustrious heritage, uproot these strong convictions, and abandon such a promising career and future in Judaism. Not only so, but also in their stead he went from principal persecutor to principal promoter of “the faith of which he once made havoc” (Gal. 1:23). What could cause a man to make such a radical reversal of his course? What could be worth such a sacrifice?

Saul of Tarsus had likely heard some of the apostles preach their resurrected Jesus and His plan for man’s salvation. And, could such a sensitive soul as this young man not have been deeply impressed with both the message and the manner of Stephen as he consented to his martyrdom (22:20)? When the Lord made His Damascus appearance to Saul (Acts 9:3–9), his brilliant mind must have been instantly flooded with numerous significant implications of it, such as the following:

1. Jesus was therefore indeed resurrected and living
2. He was therefore no imposter and blasphemer
3. The message of the apostles and Stephen was therefore true
4. Reliance on the law and one's own righteousness were therefore insufficient to save
5. He himself was therefore the enemy, rather than the servant, of God
6. Therefore, there was something he must do in light of these Truths (22:10)

In his crusade against the Christ, Paul had already amply demonstrated his depth of conviction and his zeal for what he believed. However, in his reactions at Damascus we see his utter honesty. Regardless of personal loss or cost, his integrity demanded that he embrace the startling new Truth that was now plain. Though the Lord's appearance blinded him physically for a season, it caused him to see for the first time some basic spiritual verities. We can scarcely imagine the agony of Saul's great soul that underlies the description that "he was three days without sight and did neither eat nor drink" and "behold he prayeth" (Acts 9:9, 11b). Saul of Tarsus dramatically exemplifies the "honest and good heart" in the parable of the sower (Luke 8:15). His integrity drove him to change his object of devotion and allegiance immediately and radically.

Paul discusses "gains" and "losses" in this verse, but only as men view them. He put all of his fleshly advantages together and wrote them off as one great loss (that which causes damage, handicap, or impediment) when He met the Christ. The things that once mattered to him no longer mattered. He could not hold on to them and take hold of the Lord; so he made the right choice. He took to heart Solomon's statement: "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Pro. 23:23). Paul's statement contains a hint of the Lord's challenging words on gains and losses: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mat. 16:26, KJV).

His explanation of the reason he made this far-reaching decision to forfeit Judaism implies "...why the Judaizers who now threatened the Philippians should be ignored."<sup>12</sup> He gave up all of these things "for Christ" ("that I may gain Christ," v. 8), that is, in order that he may have forgiveness and salvation through Him and fellowship with Him. The Judaizers sought these blessings through their ties to Abraham through the law and circumcision, but Paul knew these false teachers had nothing but unnecessary burdens to impart. The Christ was Paul's "treasure hid in the field" and the "precious pearl," and he willingly gathered all that he

had to make the exchange (Mat. 13:44-46). Would to God that all men could be so wise and decisive!

**Verse 8:** Now Paul elaborates a bit on his statement of verse 7. “Yea, verily” is an expression indicating “even more” or “more-over.” He not only counted all of his Hebrew accomplishments as sources of damage, but also now counts all things as even worse. Anything that would block him from attaining “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ” or cause him not to “gain Christ,” he would consider to be “refuse” (i.e., dung, table scraps after a banquet, garbage). Few indeed are those who have such clear spiritual perception as this verse indicates. The entire world and a large percentage of the saints lust for and clutch tenaciously the most trivial trinkets at the expense of gaining Christ. Anyone who wants to know what drove this apostle to sacrifice himself so completely will find the answer here. He will summarize a few verses later in his statement: “but one thing I do” (v. 13). Only one thing mattered to this man – all else was expendable and dispensable.

**Verse 9:** Above all, Paul wanted to be “found in” Christ, the one for Whom he gave up all things. To be “found in him” involved the realization that he could not attain righteousness through the law of Moses, the very thing the Judaistic teachers were advocating. If Paul, blameless regarding the law, could not find righteousness before God through the law, then neither could these false brethren, nor any who might follow them.

To be “found in Christ” also meant that, rather than in self and the law, the only means of attaining righteousness is “through [*dia*, by means of] faith in Christ.” Paul continues by saying that our righteousness through faith in Christ is from God (the source) “by [*epi*, based or resting on] faith.” Righteousness in Christ is not unconditional. When our faith takes hold of God’s grace in Gospel obedience, God cleanses and justifies us through the blood of His Son. Here we have a precious summary of Paul’s great treatise on justification by faith found in Romans 1-11. He proved himself willing to pay whatever price it took to have the righteousness of God in Christ. All wise men will do the same.

### ***Chapter 3:10-11: Paul’s Manifold Aim***

**Verse 10:** Paul not only chose to forsake all earthly title and ambition to follow Christ. Even beyond following Him, his grand aim was to “know him.” Lightfoot indicates that *know* is an intensive term that means “not simply ‘know,’ but ‘recognize, feel, appropriate.’”<sup>13</sup> The apostle enumerates three particulars of the knowledge he wishes to have of Christ:

1. "The power of his resurrection": The whole Christian system rests upon the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead (1 Cor. 15:14-15, 17), which fact immediately indicates the power and significance of it. The Twelve recognized the power of the Lord's resurrection and made it a prominent theme of their preaching, beginning with Pentecost (Acts 2:24-32; 3:15, 26; 4:1-2, 10, 33; 5:30-32; 13:37; et al.). Paul was the last man on earth to see the resurrected Lord (1 Cor. 15:8), and it wrought a revolution in his thinking and his life. However, he wanted to understand to the fullest all of the implications of that resurrection – the hope of immortality, the comfort in death, the vouchsafing of his own resurrection, the certification of all of the claims of Jesus and of the Gospel itself, and the motivation to live a life in harmony with the expectation of his own immortality. Barnes is correct: "There is no one truth that will have greater power over us, when properly believed, than the truth that Christ has risen from the dead."<sup>14</sup>
2. "The fellowship of his sufferings": Jesus suffered much at the hands of blasphemous enemies even before the awful scenes of Gethsemane, Caiaphas's house, Pilate's court, Herod's palace, and finally Calvary. Unlike most saints who do not even want to be inconvenienced for the sake of worshiping or serving Christ, it is remarkable that Paul longed to suffer for Him and in the same ways He suffered. Paul already knew the Lord quite well in this respect and was in prison in Rome when he penned these words. If wicked and godless people continue to gain influence with wealthy and powerful forces in our nation, it may not be many years before God's people will be called upon to know the fellowship of the Lord's sufferings in outright persecution.
3. "Becoming conformed unto his death": Whether in living or in dying, Paul wanted to know Christ fully, to be like Him, and to be identified with Him. Some suggest that Paul is speaking figuratively of crucifying self and arising with Christ in repentance and baptism (Rom. 6:4-11; cf. Gal. 2:20; 6:14). However, since the two previously stated desires are not figures, we doubt that this one is. Paul was willing to die for the Lord, even to be crucified as He was, had he been called upon to do so: "Then Paul answered, What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

**Verse 11:** Robert Taylor captured Paul's meaning: "Paul's ardent ambition was that he might be able to attain the resurrection of the dead."<sup>15</sup> "If by any means" signifies a modest and humble hope. Obviously, he is not implying that he or others might not be raised at all. Nor is he implying that there will be a resurrection of the righteous dead alone before an alleged earthly millennium, as the dispensationalists deceptively teach in their "rapture" doctrine. Paul had earlier taught (by inspiration) that good and evil will be raised simultaneously (Acts 24:15), even as the Lord taught (Mat. 25:31-46; John 5:28-29). He is not teaching a different doctrine here. His aspiration was to be among the righteous with all of the attendant glories, privileges, and joys on the great day of the resurrection. What greater ambition can any mortal have?

## Conclusion

There are many powerful and practical lessons to be learned from the context of Philippians 3:1-11:

1. We should be joyful because we are “in the Lord” (v. 1a).
2. We do well to use repetition in learning what the Bible teaches (v. 1b).
3. We should have enough sense and Bible knowledge to recognize and beware of false teachers (v. 2).
4. Racial Jews are no longer God’s people by race; the church is God’s Israel under the new covenant (v. 3).
5. All fleshly achievements and reputation are worthless when compared with blessings in Christ (vv. 4-6).
6. Gaining Christ and His blessings are so valuable as to be worth sacrificing all else for them (vv.7-8).
7. We can never reach Heaven by our own righteousness, but through faith in Christ (v. 9).
8. We should ever strive to know Christ in His powerful resurrection, His sufferings, and His death (v. 10).
9. Our life’s chief ambition ought to be centered in being among the righteous in the resurrection (v. 11).

## Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. Some portions of the early part of this chapter appeared in a slightly different form in *The Book of Philippians, “Living the Life of Dogs (Warnings About Dogs),”* ed. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1987), pp. 191-202.
3. Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), p. 134.
4. Pat Edwin Harrell, *The Letter of Paul to the Philippians* (Austin, TX: R. B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1969), p. 111.
5. Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1931), p. 451.
6. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Philippians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956), p. 86.
7. Robert R. Taylor, Jr., *Studies in Galatians and Philippians* (Ripley, TN: Taylor Pub., 1986), p. 145. We are convinced that repetitive teaching explains some (if not many) of the variations between the synoptics of the details of some of the parables and other illustrations of the Lord, as well as the variant occasions and times at which the Lord used similar statements and illustrations. The Lord varied some details of his illustrations from time to time to fit particular audiences and occasions. All such occurrences are therefore complementary rather than contradictory.
8. R. P. Martin, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977 reprint), p. 141.
9. Albert Barnes *Notes on the New Testament – Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 193.
10. James Moffatt, *A New Translation of the Bible* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Pub., 1935).
11. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (Lynn, MA: Hendrickson Pub., Inc., 1981), p. 148.
12. Wayne Jackson, *The Book of Philippians* (Abilene, TX: Quality Pub., 1987), p. 66.
13. Lightfoot, p. 150.

14. Barnes, p. 196.
15. Taylor, p.149.

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