

# Heavenly Citizenship

Philippians 3

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## Phil 3:1-11 – All for Christ

*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. <sup>2</sup> Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: <sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup> Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; <sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, <sup>11</sup> if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

## v1-2 – Why should we rejoice in the Lord?

This is a fitting theme for the whole letter. Paul shared with the Philippians the principle of being able to rejoice in the Lord – not in circumstances or in situations, but in the Lord who works all things together for good.

- Rejoice in the Lord: The entire phrase may be the Christian equivalent of the Old Testament exclamation, Hallelujah.

## How do we cultivate joy in the Lord?

We must steadfastly arrest any tendency to murmur and complain; to find fault with God's dealings; or to seek to elicit sympathy. We must as much resist the temptation to depression and melancholy as we would to any form of sin.

## What did Paul do for the safety of the Philippians?

*For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe:* Paul assured the Philippians that he didn't

mind reminding them of the same things because it was for their safety.

## What did Paul warn the Philippians about?

- *Beware of dogs:* This was a harsh reference to the troublemaking legalists who attempted to deceive the Philippians. "Dogs" is exactly the term of contempt Jews would use against Gentiles.
- *Beware of evil workers:* This describes both what these legalists do (working evil), but was also a word against their emphasis on righteousness with God by works.
- *Beware of the mutilation:* Here is another harsh reference to the insistence of these Jewish legalists on requiring circumcision for Gentiles who wanted to become Christians.

## v3-4 – What is true circumcision?

*For we are the circumcision:* These Jewish legalists considered themselves the ones truly circumcised and right with God. But Paul declared that he and his followers were the true circumcision.

- *Who worship God in the Spirit:* The true circumcision is worshiping God in the Spirit, as opposed to the fleshly and external worship emphasized by the legalists.
- *Rejoice in Christ Jesus:* This also characterizes those of the true circumcision. Their joy is not found in their own ability to be justified by the law or by their law-keeping. Jesus alone is their joy.
- *Have no confidence in the flesh:* This is a third characteristic of the true circumcision. They do not trust in their own ability to be righteous before God through external works (the flesh), but their only confidence is in Jesus.

## How do we worship God in the Spirit?

Worship is more than just praising God in a church building... it is what we do. We're either worshiping God in our daily lives or our worship is to ourselves or some other entity who seeks to be a substitute for God.

- To walk in the Spirit means that we yield to His control, we follow His lead, and we allow Him to exert His influence over us.

#### **v4 – Why might Paul have confidence in the flesh?**

Paul knew that he was more qualified to be justified by the keeping of the law than any of his present legalistic opponents were.

#### **How is it that those who have confidence in the flesh are often the least qualified to have such confidence?**

People who promote salvation by works are often the least qualified to have such confidence...

Colossians 2:23 – *These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

#### **v5-6 – Why might Paul have confidence in the flesh?**

- Paul was circumcised the eighth day in accordance with Leviticus 12:3.
- Paul was of the stock of Israel, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and therefore an heir to God's covenant with them.
- Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, distinguished by giving Israel her first king, Saul (1 Samuel 9:1-2). They also were aligned with faithful Judah when Israel divided into two nations (1 Kings 12:21). It was also the tribe that had the city of Jerusalem within its boundaries (Judges 1:21).

#### **How was Paul a Hebrew of the Hebrews?**

This contrasted him with the Jews who embraced Greek culture as it spread through the Mediterranean. In that time, many Jews became ashamed of their Jewishness and tried to live and act as much like Greeks as they could, sometimes even to the point of having their circumcision cosmetically restored or hidden so they could enjoy the Roman public baths without being noticed as Jews.

#### **How could being a Pharisee give confidence in the flesh?**

The Pharisees were an elite sect who were noted for their scrupulous devotion to the law of God.

- There were only about 6,000 Pharisees, but they were the spiritual athletes of Judaism.
- Their very name means The Separated Ones. They had separated themselves off from common life in order to keep every smallest detail of the Law.

#### **For what did Paul formerly have zeal?**

Persecuting the church; Paul was not merely an intellectual opponent of perceived heresies against Judaism; he was also an active fighter against them. Paul's comment on the religious Jews:

Romans 10:2 – *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*

#### **How could Paul be blameless in the righteousness which is in the law?**

Paul had achieved the standard of righteousness which was accepted among the men of his day – though this standard fell short of God's holy standard.

- Because of how the law was interpreted and taught, there were those of that day who were deceived into thinking that they really were blameless, like the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-23).

#### **v7 – How did Paul regard his credentials for confidence in the flesh?**

Any of the corrupting teachers Paul warned against would be proud to claim Paul's pedigree. Yet Paul made it plain: these things I have counted loss for Christ.

#### **v8 – What else did Paul consider as loss in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

Paul did not only count his religious pedigree as a loss; he counted all things loss – but he counted them as a loss in view of the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

- It wasn't so much that other things were worthless, but compared to the greatness of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, they really were nothing.

#### **How had Paul suffered the loss of all things?**

This is demonstrated by the place and circumstances under which Paul wrote this letter – a Roman prison, where he truly could say that he had suffered the loss of all things.

#### **What did Paul think of the things he lost for Christ?**

*rubbish*: Paul here used strong language. Literally, Paul considered them as excrement – as dung; not only as worthless, but as offensive.

#### **v9 – How was Paul now righteous before God?**

Because Paul was in Christ, he could renounce his own righteousness and live by the righteousness which is from God by faith.

- The foundation for his righteousness was in what Jesus had done for him and not in what he had done, or would do for Jesus in the future.

#### **v10-11 – What was Paul's experience of a personal relationship with Jesus?**

*That I may know Him*: This was the simple plea of Paul's heart. It was a plea unknown to the legalist, who must necessarily focus on his own performance and status to find some kind of peace with God. But Paul wanted Jesus, not self.

### **How do we get to know others?**

- We can say that we know someone because we recognize them.
- We can say that we know someone because we are acquainted with what they do.
- We can say that we know someone because we actually converse with them.
- We can say that we know someone because we spend time in their house and with their family.
- We can say that we know someone because we have committed our life to them and live with them.

Yet beyond all this, there is a way of knowing Jesus Christ that includes all of these yet goes beyond them.

### **What is the power of Christ's resurrection?**

Knowing Jesus means knowing this power, the new life that is imparted to us now, not just when we die.

- The power of His resurrection is an evidencing power. It is the evidence and seal that everything Jesus did and said was true.
- The power of His resurrection is a justifying power. It is the receipt and proof that the sacrifice of the cross was accepted as payment in full.
- The power of His resurrection is a life-giving power. It means that those who are connected with Jesus Christ receive the same resurrection life.
- The power of His resurrection is a consoling and comforting power. It promises that our friends and loved ones who are dead in Christ live with Him.

### **What is the fellowship of Christ's sufferings?**

It is all part of following Jesus and being in Christ. We can say that suffering is part of our heritage as the children of God; we get to be part of the family of suffering: If children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together (Romans 8:17).

### **How is it that children of God are conformed to Christ's death?**

This reminds us that being in Christ also means being “in” His death. These words had particular relevance to Paul who faced possible martyrdom.

### **v11 – What did Paul consider the value of His resurrection to be?**

Being resurrected was a goal that was worth any means to Paul. The suffering was worth it, considering the greatness of the goal of resurrection from the dead.

### **Phil 3:12-18 – Pressing Toward the Goal**

<sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.* <sup>13</sup> *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

<sup>15</sup> *Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.* <sup>16</sup> *Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.*

### **v12-14 – Where did Paul think he was on goal of being perfected in resurrection?**

Paul realized that he had not arrived and that his resurrection was yet future.

- Paul wrote from such spiritual maturity that we might expect he believed he had conquered all spiritual difficulties and had arrived at near perfection. Yet he assured us this was not so.

### **For what did Paul press on?**

*That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me:* Paul pressed on for what Jesus wanted. His effort was put forth to do God's will, not his own.

### **Why did Jesus lay hold of Paul?**

- Jesus laid hold of Paul to make him a new man (Romans 6:4) – so Paul would lay hold of that and wanted to see the converting work of Jesus completely carried out in himself.
- Jesus laid hold of Paul to conform him into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29) – so Paul would lay hold of that and wanted to see the nature of Jesus within himself.
- Jesus laid hold of Paul to make him a witness (Acts 9:15) – so Paul would lay hold of both the experience of Jesus and to testify of that experience.
- Jesus laid hold of Paul to make him an instrument in the conversion of others (Acts 9:15) – so Paul would lay hold of the work of bringing others to Jesus.
- Jesus laid hold of Paul to bring him into suffering (Acts 9:16) – so Paul would lay hold of even that work of God in his life, wanting to know Jesus in the fellowship of His sufferings.
- Jesus laid hold of Paul that so that the Apostle might attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:11) – so Paul would lay hold of that heavenly hope.

### **What is the prize of the upward call of God?**

The prize is the upward call of God. The prize is the call itself, not the benefits that come from the call or any other thing. The prize is being able to run the race at all, working with God as a partner to do the work of His kingdom.

- Paul was focused on one thing and would not let those things which are behind distract him from it. He pressed on for the prize.

### **v15-16 – What did Paul exhort us to adopt?**

To adopt the same attitude of Paul...

- *Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind:* Those who are really mature will have this mind. If they do not, Paul trusted that God would reveal the necessity of having it.
- *God will reveal even this to you:* Paul had great trust in the ability of the Lord to deal with His own people. He didn't think that if he failed to convince them, they would then never be convinced.

### **What rule did Paul want the Philippians to observe?**

*Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule:* However, Paul would not allow a lack of understanding to excuse anyone from doing what he did know to be the Lord's will. What we don't know can never excuse us from failing to fulfill what we do know to do.

### **Of what mind should the Philippians be?**

*Let us be of the same mind:* Part of doing what we do know is being of the same mind. This is a call to unity (a unity of truth, against the potential division brought in by the legalists) that looks back to Philippians 2:1-2.

The problems of unity facing the Philippians did not spring from great problems with carnality as was the case with the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Rather it seemed to be a danger brought on by pressure, both from the outside (Philippians 1:27-30) and from the inside (Philippians 3:2). Paul wanted to make sure that this pressure pushed them together instead of driving them apart.

### **Phil 3:17-21 – Our Citizenship in Heaven**

<sup>17</sup> *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.* <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 set their mind on earthly things.* <sup>20</sup> *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,* <sup>21</sup> *who will transform our lowly body*

*that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*

### **v17 – What did Paul exhort the Philippians to do?**

*Join in following my example:* Paul was not being egotistical here. He knew that he was not a sinless or perfect example, yet he was still a good example...

1 Cor 11:1 – *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*

*And note those who so walk:* Paul wasn't so proud to think that he was the only one who could be such an example. He told the Philippians to note those who so walk in the way he spoke of, and he noted that the Philippians had us as a pattern.

### **v18-19 – Who were the bad examples?**

The enemies of the cross celebrated their supposed liberty in Christ to the indulgence of their flesh. They thought that as long as your soul was saved, it didn't matter what you did with your body.

- They were enemies of the Biblical truth of the atonement Jesus made for us on the cross.

### **Why did these enemies of the cross so grieve Paul?**

First, on account of the guilt of these enemies of the cross of Christ. Second, on account of the ill effects of their conduct. Finally, on account of their doom.

### **What would become of the enemies of the cross?**

*Whose end is destruction:* The word translated destruction is the same word used for perdition in other places (such as Philippians 1:28). This can refer to either their ultimate damnation or to the present destruction of their lives.

### **What does it mean that the enemies of the cross have their belly as god?**

This describes their idolatry. Not that they were necessarily focused on what they eat, but belly here has a broader reference to sensual indulgence in general. They live for the pleasures of the body, mind, and soul.

### **What does it mean that the enemies of the cross have shame for their glory?**

This shows the misplaced priorities of these enemies. They gloried about things they should have been ashamed about.

### **How did the enemies of the cross have their minds set on earthly things?**

This describes the focus of their life. It was not to please and worship God, but to get along in this world.

**Is it possible to be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good?**

Colossians 3:2 – *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

If you're focused on pleasing God, some men will be pleased as well. Those enemies of God will not be pleased but sense their interests are temporal, it is infinitely better to serve eternal interests.

**v20 – What does it mean that our citizenship is in heaven?**

We need to appreciate all this would have meant to the Philippians, who greatly valued their Roman citizenship.

- Just as the Philippians could consider themselves citizens of Rome and were under Roman laws and customs so Christians should consider themselves citizens of heaven.
- We have our home in heaven, and here on earth we are a colony of heaven's citizens.

**What should it mean that we are resident aliens on earth?**

Foreigners are distinct in whatever foreign land they go. Christians must be so marked by their heavenly citizenship that they are noticed as different

- Aliens should seek to do good works in the land they sojourn in.
- Aliens should not seek to interfere in the affairs of the land they sojourn in.
- Aliens have privileges as well as duties; they are not under the same obligations as citizens of the land they sojourn in.
- Aliens are not eligible for the same rewards and recognitions as the citizens of the land that they sojourn in.
- Aliens should not focus on building riches in the land they sojourn in.

**What should characterize us as citizens of heaven?**

- we are under the government of heaven.
- we share in heaven's honors.
- we have property rights in heaven.
- we enjoy the pleasures of heaven.
- we love heaven and feel attached there.
- we keep in communication with our native home.
- *From which we also eagerly wait for the Savior:* Christians eagerly await the coming of their King – Jesus Christ.

**How was it counter cultural to call Jesus Christ Lord?**

The title Lord was also applied to the Roman Caesar. It wasn't long after the time of Paul that Christians were martyred for refusing to call Caesar Lord, claiming that Jesus was the only Lord.

**v21 – What should we look forward to Jesus doing?**

Our Savior can do and will do something that no Caesar can. When we are resurrected, we will have the same type of body Jesus had when he was resurrected.

**What will be different about our resurrected bodies?**

Jesus was not merely resuscitated from the dead in the same body. He was resurrected in a new body, patterned after the old yet equipped and fitted for heaven.

**How can we be confident of our ultimate resurrection?**

*According to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself:* This is possible only because the God we serve is omnipotent. He is able even to subdue all things to Himself and accomplish something as amazing as the resurrection of our bodies after the pattern of Jesus' resurrection.

**What does it mean that Jesus can subdue all things?**

There may be sins within your heart that have long resisted control. If you will hand over the conflict to Jesus, He will subdue them; He will bring them under his strong, subjecting hand.

**What applications do we see from our discussion today?**

- We should be joyful due to our identity in Christ.
- It is to our benefit to foster an eternal perspective and resist compromising with the world.
- We grow in Christ as we experience our relationship with Him.
- Remembering God's promise of our ultimate resurrection diminishes all of life's difficulties.
- We should seek out godly examples to emulate.
- We should conduct ourselves as citizens of heaven, not as citizens of the world.