

Philippians 3:1-16

Introduction-In this chapter Paul begins by reiterating the theme of the epistle: joy and rejoicing in the Lord. As a matter of fact, there are sixteen references to the words joy, rejoice and glad(ness) in this letter alone.

He then makes marked pivot (verse 2) and departs temporarily from the theme in order to give a stark warning to his readers first about the false doctrine of legalism and, later in the chapter, warns against the error of licentiousness (the two extremes that believers can lean towards).

Being called as a watchwoman over the flock, I was drawn to this chapter because of the colorful description Paul gives of the false teachers they were to be on the lookout for. But before we get to that juicy subject, I want to “park” in verse 1 for a few moments because I believe there is an important message that Paul is relating to us that should not be overlooked.

Read verses 1-2

Notice that Paul begins with the exhortation to rejoice in the Lord and ends with the warning to beware of those colorfully described false teachers, which we will get to later. But in between, he tells them something very important that is germane (relevant) to both themes.

Let’s take a look at the later part of verse one in a couple different translations:

Phil 3:1(b) For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.
NKJV

Phil 3:1(b) To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.
NASU

Phil 3:1(b) I never get tired of telling you this, and it is good for you to hear it again and again.

TLB

I would argue that Paul is repeating himself both in the former and later parts of verses 1-2. It is easily seen in the repetition of the words joy, rejoicing and gladness throughout the letter. As far as the warnings, we must assume that Paul had spoken to them about the issue of the Jewish legalists when he was with them in person. Pastor George spoke about this a few weeks ago in his study in Romans. Paul was followed on his missionary

journeys by this group of false teachers, who sought to undermine the gospel message with legalism.

Paul said that it was not tedious for him to tell them the same things; it was not a burden to repeat himself; in fact, it was a safeguard to them. This statement spoke so strongly to me because I think that many Christians today are susceptible to be drawn away from the repeated, time tested, sure principles that are found in the Word of God. I fear that a large percentage of Christians have come to consider biblical truth as passe, outdated or no longer relevant for personal growth, church growth or society as a whole. We see that many pastors have moved away from teaching the unadulterated truth of God's word, line by line, precept by precept. They have moved toward liberalism, progressivism and wokeism.

Matthew Henry- *"It is good for us often to hear the same truths, to revive the remembrance and strengthen the impression of things of importance. It is a wanton curiosity to desire to hear some new thing."*

Paul encountered this in Athens-he saw that the people there-*spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear of some new thing*. They had "itching ears." Are we not, in our modern society, inundated with a myriad of "new thing(s)" that can prick our "itching ears" if we don't watch out!!

Paul addressed the problem of itching ears in his second letter to Timothy:

2 Tim 4:2-4 Preach the word! (exclusively, repeatedly!) Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, (with the word!) with all long-suffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables.

I have found in my time researching many subjects that relate to end times eschatology, false doctrine and the general political climate that there are a lot of things out there that cater to the itching ear crowd. I'm sure you've seen examples of this on Telegram, Instagram, X or other social media platforms, not to mention all the podcasts from influencers: religious, secular and political. It is tempting to go down rabbit holes that look enticing and invigorating and dare I say, even salacious. But we need to be aware that they can lead to **confusion rather than clarity** and may even cause some to question the inerrancy of the Word of God, or even what is true or false in what's going on in the crazy world around us. Have you ever heard yourself thinking, "I don't know what to believe anymore?" THAT IS BY DESIGN!!

I recently heard someone say, “Intentional chaos and confusion is a tactic of the enemy! A culture can become unraveled by pummeling it with different versions of the same narrative, which leads to demoralization and the inability to determine what is true.

We are in the middle of an information melee, and that melee is designed to cause chaos and confusion!

What Paul is saying here is that we need to stay within the safe boundaries of the sure Word of God and not see them EVER as tedious or burdensome, even in their repeated themes!!

My warning: Take note when you become confused as you take in all the noise of the world, this is not from God, for He is not the God of confusion. SATAN IS!!

(This portion was not in the original study)

Now, back to the subject of rejoicing:

Defined *chairo* (*khah-ee-ro*)-to be cheerful, calmly happy

Barnes-*The idea here is that it is the duty and the privilege of all Christians to rejoice*

In instructing the Israelites on the prescribed place and method of worship God would establish, Moses related the following:

Deut 12:18 But you must eat them (sacrifices) before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your gates; and **you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all to which you put your hands.**

The Israelites had the privilege of being called God’s special people and with that privilege, came the ability to draw near to Him through the sacrificial system and receive all the blessings that He promised to them for their obedience. It was their duty as they approached the tabernacle, and later the temple through the sacrificial system and the feasts to come before the Lord with rejoicing. In other words, it was a command.

It is no different with us, as we approach the throne of grace, we are called to rejoice.

I know that sometimes it can be hard to be cheerful or calmly happy as we come before the Lord. Sometimes we are so heavily burdened that it is hard to find anything to be cheerful about.

I had such an experience recently that I'd like to relate here. I was approaching the Lord in my prayer time one morning and was very depressed about a situation that I have been dealing with for over a decade now, that, at the time, seemed very dark and insurmountable. I was recounting to God all the dark feelings I was struggling with...despair, depression, desperation, despondency, hopelessness and confusion. I realized after a few minutes that I was focused on me, my feelings, my struggle. This was only adding to my despair. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit nudged me to start focusing on The Lord instead. Once I began listing all the attributes of my Heavenly Father...His faithfulness, His compassion, His power, His mercy, His lovingkindness...all the darkness I felt was flooded with light and I began to rejoice in the Lord!

It was a lesson in FOCUSING ON HIM AND NOT MY PROBLEMS!!

So now let's talk about these Judaizers!

Read verses 2-6

A little background: When the church was founded it was populated primarily by Jewish converts. Some of these Jewish converts considered their Christian faith in Messiah to be an additional aspect to their Jewish faith. As Gentiles began to get saved and enter the church community, the church leaders had to consider how to enfold them into the church. God stepped in to bring clarification through the vision he gave to Peter in Acts 10. In essence, God was communicating to the apostles that He had considered to Gentiles "clean," and proved that they were accepted in the Christian community by giving them the Holy Spirit. But there were some that would not accept this new work of God and rejected the belief that any person can be saved by grace alone through faith alone. These were labeled Judaizers by the early church. They made it their mission to follow the apostles wherever they went, seeking to undermine the gospel message (Acts 15). Here in his letter to the Philippians, Paul seeks to warn them to be on guard against their doctrine.

Paul's descriptive characterization of these men:

Beware of Dogs-This was the term that the Jews used in describing Gentiles! (Matt15:26)
Evil scavengers, menacing, unruly-They were looking to tear the church apart instead of building it up.

Beware of Evil Workers-These were not of the fellowship of believers!

In the letter sent to the churches addressing the Judaizers, the elders in Jerusalem noted this in the first sentence!

Acts 15:24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls.

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, explains the motives of these evil workers.

Gal 6:12 As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

Beware of the Mutilation-This descriptor leaves no doubt that he was directing his ire towards the Judaizers

Gal 5:12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

Why was Paul so harsh towards these people? Because they were subverting the faith of these converts by putting up a barrier for entry into the Kingdom! They were requiring, in their own words (Acts 15:1), “unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Jesus dealt with this as well:

Matt 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

The Judaizers were putting up a roadblock and detouring these believers onto the road that leads to destruction!

Paul's proclamation: WE ARE THE CIRCUMCISION!

Instead of the outward mark of circumcision (works of the flesh), the marks of circumcision that Paul is referring to are now inward (works of the Spirit):

We have the mark of worshipping God in the Spirit (all are one in the Spirit)

We have the mark of rejoicing in Christ Jesus (in the finished work of redemption)

We have the mark of placing no confidence in the flesh (understanding that my standing with God will never be related to or dependent on my performance or adherence to the law)

This is a picture of the circumcision that God is looking for: one of the heart!

Deut 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (This is a picture of obedience compelled by love)

John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

This has always been what God was looking for in His people—that they would be separated to Him out of love, not out of compulsion to follow established rules and regulations. The Judaizers were putting confidence in the flesh, which made them “man centered” instead of “God centered.”

Now let's look at Paul's fleshly credentials:

Read verses 3(b)-6

For sake of time, I'm not going to go over in detail each of these attributes. In summary, he had the pedigree through his lineage and the prestige of a high office through his personal achievements. He considered himself blameless according to the law. He had zeal, which compelled him to persecute the Church of God. Paul is saying here that he was THE standard bearer of a high achiever according to the law. He was, as he noted about his fellow Jewish countrymen, a man who had zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2). Paul had knowledge of the law but that knowledge would not lead to eternal life. That road leads straight to Hell and that is what the Judaizers were trying to do, lead others off the path that leads to life!

Prov 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.

Read verses 7-11

Barnes-Phil 3:7

[But what things were gain to me] The advantages of birth, of education, and of external conformity to the law. "I thought these to be gain-that is, to be of vast advantage in the matter of salvation.

[Those I counted loss] "I now regard them all as so much loss. They were really a disadvantage-a hindrance-an injury. I look upon them, not as gain or an advantage, but as an obstacle to my salvation."

The idea here seems to be, "What I might obtain, or did possess, I regard as loss in comparison with the knowledge of Christ, even as seamen do the goods on which they set a high value, in comparison with their lives. Valuable as they may be, they are willing to throw them all overboard in order to save themselves."

Paul counted those things (which the Judaizers considered essential to salvation) as rubbish!

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown

Dung - 'refuse (excrements, dregs) cast to the dogs,' as the derivation expresses. A "loss" is of something having value; but 'refuse' is thrown away as a nuisance.

I find it interesting that the term Paul used relates to dogs! He was throwing what the Judaizers considered valuable for salvation right back in their faces!!

What was Paul gaining? CHRIST, the pearl of great price!! And with Him, he gained true righteousness that is not derived from the law, but from God by faith. Righteousness that was imputed to him, not earned!

He was also gaining the excellence of the knowledge of Christ.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may **know You**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

As Pastor George was sharing in his Baptism message; to know Christ is not just knowledge, but a commitment to Him. The most important part of our journey as new creatures in Christ is that we grow to know Him (experientially) more and more each and every day of our pilgrimage on earth.

Paul sought to know Him in three aspects: The power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.

(1)The power (JFB-flowing from) His resurrection

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

We have the hope of our future resurrection by God's power, but we also have the hope of this same resurrection power working in us today. The benefits are long term and short term.

Rom 6:4-5 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life.** 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

This is what Paul was referring to when he noted in this passage that he wanted to know what it meant to be **(3) conformed to his death.**

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ **lives in me;** and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

And certainly, Paul was experiencing the **(2) fellowship of Christ's sufferings** in prison!

Read verses 11-14

What does Paul mean when he says that he **may, by any means,** attain to the resurrection from the dead? This is not a statement of doubt in his salvation; this is a humble assessment of his progress towards maturity in Christ. Paul had not arrived at perfection, there was still work to do, as it is in all of us.

1 Thess 4:1-2 (NASB) Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may **excel still more.**

David Guzik-*Real spiritual maturity carries within it the passion to press on.*
(Press on in our service, knowledge and love, obedience, watchfulness, etc...)

Paul's passion was such that he sought to apprehend or seize upon that which Christ had laid hold of him.

David Guzik-*The term "lay hold" can be described as a desire to **gain mastery** of the things that Jesus had in mind when He laid hold of him.*
(He sought to further his education-AA, BA, Masters, PHD)

We see what Jesus had in mind for Paul:

Acts 9:15,16 But the Lord said to him, "he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Paul considered the upward call of God on his life to be the prize he was focusing on and he stayed true to it, even in his prison cell. And if fulfilling that upward call landed him in prison, he could still rejoice!! Why? Because he had disciplined himself to look ahead in hope, knowing that it was God who began that good work in him and it was up to HIM to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ, according to Philippians 1:6.

Paul is saying, "I heard the call, I accepted the call, I pursued the call, I gave up all for the call, I will devote myself to the call until the Lord calls me home.

Then he says that this is the **mark of maturity** and encourages his readers to be of the same mind.

Read verse 15-16

What is our calling?

Rom 8:28-30 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the **called according to His purpose**. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined **to be conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

I love that he includes the promise that God will enlighten us if we are going off track in our calling!!

So let us be of the same mind towards each other!

Heb 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

