

## PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY

Philippians 3:1-21

Lesson #17

### KNOWING & DEFENDING THE GOSPEL

*1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write to you again about this is no trouble for me and is a protection for you.*

*2 Watch out for “dogs,” watch out for evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh.*

Phil 3:1-6 (HCSB)

After his admonition to all think alike and have the same goal, and to maintain the attitude of Christ Jesus, putting others concerns before their own, Paul adds this next paragraph to make certain that no one thinks that he's telling them that such a unity is gained apart from, or at the expense of, the truth of the gospel. All of those high and lofty attributes of Christ Jesus were grounded and supported on the truth that He had been sent by His father to proclaim. When it came to compassion for mankind, and forgiveness for their weaknesses, Jesus was ever gentle and willing to forgive. But, when it came to defending the truth, Jesus was the original “zero tolerance” teacher. He pulled no punches and He tolerated no error or ambiguity.

When He debated with those false religious leaders who were teaching lies and leading the people astray, He called them vipers, whitewashed tombs, liars, and sons of the devil. Listen to the following words of gentle Jesus:

*33 “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. 34 Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.*

Matt 12:33-34 (HCSB)

*27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and every impurity. 28 In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

Matt 23:27-28 (HCSB)

*43 “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44 “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies . 45 “But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”*

John 8:43-47 (NASB)

So now, immediately coming off of those wonderful verses about the humility and gentleness of Christ Jesus; about everyone thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, and seeking the same goal, Paul qualifies those attributes as residing in an envelope of absolute conformity to the pure truth of the gospel. These attributes are not an end unto themselves, they are the end result of a church that has been taught to know and love the truth, and has been willing to earnestly contend for that truth, because they recognize the value of it. And, they know the consequences of losing or perverting it. Those who are truly of God know and love His word.

The scriptures teach that it's truth that sets us free (from sin), not love. (Jn 8:32) Love doesn't free us from sin's hold on us, neither does uniformity of thinking, only the truth does that. So, our love and uniformity of thinking is rightly focused on that truth that sets us free. Jesus said that He himself was that truth which provided the way of salvation and eternal life. (Jn 14:6)

There is no salvation without the presence of the pure and undefiled truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot substitute another gospel, regardless of how nice it might sound. Remember what Paul told the Galatians?

*6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to **distort** the gospel of Christ.*

Gal 1:6-7 (NASB)

(Use example of alien seeking to gain their citizenship by keeping our laws)

What Paul had warned about in that epistle, he was warning about again in this one. Because, it was the very same thing. There were some who were willing, even desiring to spin the gospel to fit their own perceptions. Some because they thought they were right, but others just to achieve some self serving motives.

In this case the Jews were trying to **add provisions** to the gospel. In other cases there were those who wanted to **remove some of the restrictions** to allow their worldly lusts to remain. (vv.18,19) But in either case, it's a perversion of the gospel, and Paul pronounces a curse on those who dare to treat divine truth so frivolously. (Gal 1:8-9)

But, what some don't seem to understand, is that even if the goal of unified thinking and feeling is achieved, but that unity is based on a false or twisted body of information that isn't really true, or, on no information at all, then that unity isn't a beautiful result of divine truth, but rather a perverted and deadly **substitute for it**. A perverted or meaningless unity is Satan's most popular substitute for divine truth. And you can find it everywhere you look.

Just like Satan used a twisted and perverted form of God's words to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the result of that was death for mankind, so do many deceivers twist and pervert the word of God today; and when God's word is perverted, death is the result. This happens because there is no fear of God before their eyes. (Rom 3:18) But according to scriptures, some day there will be. (Mat 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30) Albeit then, it'll be too late to help those who are found wanting of it. Now, moving on to the next set of verses:

### **Verses 3-11:**

*3 For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh— 4 although I once had confidence in the flesh too. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.*

*7 But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 [My goal] is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.*

Phil 3:3-11 (HCSB)

Now, in verse 3, Paul uses the background of those false teachers to present his description of those who are true followers of Christ. He says, "We are the circumcision." By that he meant that we are truly those in covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 11:25) Which is made evident by the fact that we serve in the Spirit of God, as opposed to the will power of man to attain righteousness in the eyes of God. We boast in Christ Jesus' work of righteousness that has been imputed to us by faith, not in our own ability to keep all the rules we've been taught, and often don't even understand the meaning of in the first place. We put our confidence in Christ's work being made effectual for us, not in our own works of human efforts. This confidence that we're talking about, is that we are righteous in the sight of God, and will receive that promise of eternal life with Him in His eternal kingdom. (Jn 3:16, 36)

In verses 4-6 Paul uses himself as an example of one who might consider his own righteousness as sufficient. But then in verses 7-11 he declares that even though he might have very impressive credentials, he nonetheless counts all of this as a total loss as far as it comes to achieving righteousness in the sight of God. In fact he calls it refuse, if it's counted on as establishing one's status before God.

Why is it refuse? Because, when compared to the surpassing value of knowing the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, such meager earthly things are not fit to be offered to a perfect and holy God. God accepts only that which is perfect and without blemish, and finds anything less to be offensive to His character. (He 9:14; 1Pe 1:19; 2Pe 3:14) Therefore, what we offer to God as our offering of righteousness, must be perfect and undefiled, lest we offend a holy God, and rightly incur His wrath and indignation.

Obviously, we don't have any such offerings of our own to present, and we can't possibly obtain any, even if we're the wealthiest ones on the earth. This is Paul's point. Everything that he counted on, before he knew Christ Jesus, was simply defiled and damaged goods. Totally unacceptable as an offering of righteousness to God, even offensive to Him. But then he came to know Jesus Christ, the perfect and acceptable offering that God loves and joyfully accepts. And this Jesus has made Himself available to us as our offering of righteousness to God, by repentance and faith in Him.

God the Father, knowingly and purposely, had Him put to death in our place to satisfy His own demands for justice. And then He raised Him from the dead as a testimony, both to His own power to raise the dead, and to authenticate His Son as that unique propitiation that He had designated as mankind's one and only acceptable offering. (Jn 14:6; Act 4:12; 1Tim 2:5) For mankind to ever offer any other kind of offering to God is not just unacceptable, it's viewed as an insult by God upon His beloved Son, who paid so dear a price, and then is substituted or ignored.

All religions are not the same. All roads do not lead to God. (Mat 7:13-14) These are human rationalizations made by those who are ignorant of the truth, and wish to fashion a substitute method of righteousness that accommodates their own fleshly lusts. But alas, they are all but refuse in the sight of God, who has personally testified through His holy scriptures, that He has sent His Son, and we are to listen to Him exclusively. (Mat 17:5)

Let me add here just a few more comments to any of those who believe that there just might be some other roads that lead to God. In man's own human reason this might seem sensible, but God has given mankind the holy scriptures, as His sworn testimony to humanity, and He holds us mortally accountable to what they teach. God has determined to have His own beloved Son offer Himself as mankind's only Savior from their sins, and has rewarded Him for doing so. To ignore this divine testimony of God, or to invent something else, isn't just to miss the mark, but is a slap in the face to the Son of God, for all His sacrifice on our behalf. And, a declaration that God's own testimony about His son is false. For this, there will be consequences so dire as can only be imposed by an omnipotent and sovereign God. This isn't just an innocent mistake, it's a direct insult both to the Father and His beloved Son, and is inexcusable, since the scriptures reveal the truth to any who care to know it. The problem isn't that man can't know the truth, but that he doesn't **want to**.

We have an earthly expression that says "ignorance of the law is no excuse" which means we will not be exonerated by the authorities for disobeying a law, even if we really didn't know about that law. Why is this fair? Because we are all responsible to our ruling authorities to **make ourselves knowledgeable** of the laws, and then **to observe them**. And any failure to do so falls on us, for not knowing that which we were responsible to know. We all understand this and accept it. This is exactly the same situation with the truth about Jesus Christ. The information is there for any to know, and every human is responsible to know it. None will ever be exonerated for ignorance of that truth.

Furthermore, just like we are responsible to both know and observe the earthly laws, likewise we are responsible both to know and to observe the divine laws. Divine law says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It says that this is sin, and the wages of sin is death. (Ro 3:23, 6:23) Then it says that there is but one possible remedy to save us from our just sentence of condemnation, and that is to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. (Mk 16:16; Act 2:38, 16:31) Any failure to know this, and to observe it, will fall directly on that individual, for their own dereliction of the duty to make themselves knowledgeable of these things. No excuses, of any kind, will ever be accepted, period. Harsh, perhaps? But, absolutely true nonetheless. Sometimes life's truths are harsh - but that doesn't mean they're not true.

So now I hope we can see clearly why Paul could say that for him, he counted all earthly accomplishments as refuse, and wrote them off as a total loss, when compared to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ our Lord, and being found in Him. Not having a righteousness of our own works, but that righteousness which is of Christ, which is obtained by the gift of faith in Jesus Christ.

When one fully comprehends the precarious situation that he is in as a condemned sinner in the eyes of God, only then can he comprehend the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. This knowledge, when believed, is the difference between God's favor and God's wrath. It is the difference between eternal bliss in a perfect heavenly kingdom and an eternal existence of condemnation in an inescapable lake of fire called hell.

For those who have come to faith, like Paul, our goal is to know Him (thoroughly and intimately). Which means knowing both His sufferings on our behalf, and His resurrection to glory, where we will someday accompany Him. But like Christ himself, there is first the sufferings that are determined by the sovereignty of God. By which He refines and purifies all who are His. There's a popular saying among athletes, "no pain, no gain", and this is probably true. And likewise, any study of the scriptures will unmistakably show that this saying might well be the motto of all who have ever followed God, or believed in Jesus Christ. The same God who has graciously gifted us with saving faith (Eph 2:8-9) has also predetermined that having received it we will be purified and matured through many tribulations, before we are ready to take our place with Him in His eternal kingdom. (Acts 14:22) But we willingly endure such tribulations, if in fact, we have the same hope of resurrection unto eternal life that was demonstrated by Jesus Christ or Lord. Our hope is to be with Him, and behold His glory in our new resurrected body that is freed in every way from sin and disobedience.

#### **Verses 12-14**

*12 Not that I have already reached [the goal] or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, 14 I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.* Phil 3:12-14 (HCSB)

As Paul says in verses 12-14, we haven't yet attained to our goal, but we press on toward it, for that prize of this heavenly calling of God, that is promised through faith in Christ Jesus.

#### **Verses 15-17**

*15 Therefore, all who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this to you also. 16 In any case, we should live up to whatever [truth] we have attained. 17 Join in imitating me, brothers, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.*

Phil 3:15-17 (HCSB)

In verses 15-17 Paul says that all who are maturing in their faith should think this same way as he has described, and if any don't think this way yet, God will reveal it to them also in due time. But nevertheless, we are all to live up to that level of understanding that we have attained thus far by imitating the life and thinking of Paul and the other mature brothers who set godly examples by their behavior that is in keeping with the things they teach. He has said this first so that he can then again address those who are living a life **that is contrary** to the teachings of Christ, as described in the next verses.

#### **Verses 18-19**

*18 For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things,*

Phil 3:18-19 (HCSB)

By their worldly living Paul assesses their motives as evil, and says they are thusly demonstrating themselves to be enemies of the cross of Christ, not partakers of it. By that he means that continuing in a life of sinful indulgences is diametrically opposed to the whole point of the cross, which is to put to death all such practices, not to continue to promote and practice them. Their focus on earthly things has given them away. They desire the treasures that are of this world instead of those that are of the heavenly realm. Does this sound familiar? Listen to these verses from Romans 8:

*12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

Romans 8:12-14 (NASB)

In verse 19 Paul says that their glory is in their shame. This is a perfect assessment of the ungodly. Not only do they do the things that are forbidden by God, but they actually boast in the doing of it. It is their glory to excel in sinful behaviors, and they're actually proud and boastful of how well they do it. We expect the world to behave this way, but Paul is indicating that some of those who called themselves Christians were living this way, and he wasn't the least bit hesitant to label them as deceivers, whose end was destruction. (V.19) Paul warns to watch out for these, not to tolerate them.

Finally, in verses 20-21 he changes the emphasis back onto the true believers, and closes this thought with a reminder of that precious and glorious hope of every believer.

**Verses 20-21**

*20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*

Phil 3:20-21 (NASB)

We do indeed all understand that eager anticipation of the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ back from heaven to the earth, to take His place as King. This is what we have all set our hope upon, and what we all eagerly hope for every new day.

But I think It might be more difficult for us to really capture the full significance of this last sentence, that says, that He will transform our bodies from the humble state in which we are now, into conformity with the body of His glory. What exactly does that mean? Well, for one thing, it means that the new body will be eternal in its nature and composition. There will be no more ageing or decaying of the new bodies. They will be designed for existence in an eternal universe where all the old laws of physics are no longer applicable. This is quite exciting to us, and we can't wait to see just what that looks like, because all we can do is speculate at the present. We've never seen anything that's eternal in our lifetimes, so we have no points of reference. That's one aspect of this transformation.

But there is yet another aspect, and with this one we have a much closer relationship. This new body will be entirely free from any, and all, desires and temptations to sin against God, forever. The constant dealing with the temptations of the flesh will have been put to an end, and this new creation will be for us, as it is with our Lord, a place where there is no sin, nor any temptations for it, at all - forever. This is mentioned in Romans 8 where it says:

*19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

Romans 8:19-21 (NASB)

The time for which we eagerly await, and that's prophetically described here in this passage from Romans, is further described in its final reality in these next verses from the book of Revelation:

*1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."*

*5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said\* , "Write, for these words are faithful and true." 6 Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. 7 "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.*

Rev 21:1-7 (NASB)

Every destructive element of sin, that even affects the entire creation itself, will be gone completely, and we will walk in the very presence of God, without fear or harm. Mankind will commune with his maker, in perfect holiness, in a perfect creation, for eternity without end. He will be our God, and we will be His people, as He planned and predestined from eternity past, and brought about, by the omnipotent power that He has to subject all things to Himself.

The God who originally spoke all creation into being, will once more speak a brand new one into being, and the old sin damaged creation will forever pass away, having done its job for which it was specifically designed. The God who has this power of creation also has the power to create for us a new body as well, in which only righteousness dwells. This is the nature of that power that He has to subject all matter and life unto Himself.

To God Be The Glory Forever, Amen

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