

# *Paul's letter to the Philippians*

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## **Warning against false teachers**

Philippians 3:1-16

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## 3:1 ~ Paul repeats his safeguard

- **“Finally”** (*loipos*) ~ “as for what remains.” Paul will now continue with the next thing he wants to tell them.
- He commands them to “continually **rejoice**” (*chairō*, <sup>present tense</sup>imperative) in the Lord despite their external circumstances.
- Several times Paul had shared his example of rejoicing or commanded them to rejoice (1:18; 2:17-18, 28; 4:4), so here he stated that it was no trouble for him to repeat himself.
- **“safeguard”** (*asphalēs*) ~ pictures something that is steady, immovable, secure, and something they can rely on in the future. By sharing these thoughts in writing, his insights could be preserved and circulated so that many other believers could also benefit from them.

## 3:2 ~ Warning to beware of false teaching

- **“Beware”** (*blepō*, <sup>present tense imperative</sup>) ~ “keep on watching out,” continually taking heed to guard against something.
- Paul identified this threat using three descriptive phrases:
  - **“the dogs”** ~ a term the Jews applied to Gentiles because dogs are unclean animals (Matt 15:26). Paul turned the tables by labeling them as the dogs.
  - **“evil workers”** ~ bad or wicked workmen. In his earlier letter to the Corinthians, Paul referred to these people as “deceitful workers” (2 Cor 11:13).
  - **“the false circumcision”** (*katatomē*) ~ literally, “cutting down” or cutting off.
- These descriptions identify a well-known group called **Judaizers**. They were professing Christians who acknowledged Jesus as Messiah but insisted that He is the Savior of Israel only. One could enter Christ’s kingdom only through Judaism, and God would accept only circumcised converts.

# The Judaizers

- In the early days of the church there was confusion about the relationship of the Mosaic Law to the salvation provided by Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. The Judaizers insisted that salvation depended upon becoming a Jew and submitting to the Law of Moses.
- Immediately after Peter saw the salvation of the first Gentiles (Acts 10), the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem “took issue with him” (Acts 11).
- The Jerusalem Council determined that Gentile converts were **not** required to submit to the Law of Moses (Acts 15), but some disagreed with the Council’s judgment and continued their Judaizing.
- The error of the Judaizers involved insisting on a legalistic basis for justification and reconciliation with God.

## 3:3 ~ True circumcision

- **“true circumcision”** = “circumcision of the heart,” a concept with clear precedent in the Old Testament (Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4). But the Judaizers ignored the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament revelation regarding justification solely by grace through faith in Christ.
- Believers **“worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus”** because their salvation is found in their relationship with Christ Jesus by grace through faith, rather than being based on adherence to a set of external rites and rituals.
- No one is able to attain righteousness by human effort through works of the flesh. Fleshly **“confidence”** is useless for gaining a right standing before a holy God

## 3:4-5 ~ Paul's example of fleshly confidence

- Paul will use himself as an example of fleshly pride as well as an example of why confidence in the flesh is worthless.
- He would have been well qualified to put confidence in his fleshly heritage and accomplishments. Every aspect of Paul's life provided evidence that he not only met but exceeded the highest standards of Judaism:
  - **"circumcised the eighth day"**
  - **"of the nation of Israel"**
  - **"of the tribe of Benjamin"**
  - **"a Hebrew of Hebrews"**
  - **"as to the Law, a Pharisee"**



## 3:6 ~ Paul's former zeal for Judaism

- **"zeal"** (*zēlos*) ~ figuratively used to express extreme passion and intensity of spirit, depicting Paul's fierce loyalty to the principles of Judaism. He demonstrated the highest possible zeal in defending the Jewish religion from those he viewed as heretics.
- Paul went so far as to persecute Christians when he began "ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison" (Acts 8:3).
- **"blameless"** (*amemptos*) regarding external obedience to the rules and commandments demanded of him as a Pharisee. If anyone could have gained salvation on the basis of obedience to the Law of Moses, it was Saul of Tarsus (now the apostle Paul).

## 3:7-8 ~ Those things are not “gain” but “loss”

- He formerly viewed all of those things as “**gain**” (*kerdos*), being of great value for attaining a right standing before God. “**But**” (*alla*) ~ Paul came to see that “all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” (Isa 64:6). There is no act of fleshly human achievement that is able to gain any merit in the sight of a holy God. Consequently, “**those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**”
- They were nothing compared to the “**surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.**” He now considered them useless “**rubbish**” (*skubalon*) ~ what is “thrown to dogs,” especially meaningful in light of Paul’s reference to the Judaizers as “**dogs**” (3:2). Paul focused solely on “**knowing Christ**” in order to “**gain**” (*kerdainō*) the true righteousness that Christ alone can provide.

## 3:9 ~ Righteousness comes from God on the basis of faith

- Paul realized that justification before God can only be found **“in Him.”**
- It is impossible for a sinful human being to gain a right standing before God on the basis of his own work ~ **“not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law.”**
- Salvation can come only **“through faith in Christ.”** This crucial concept of **“faith”** (*pistis*) involves *knowing* the facts about who Christ is and what He accomplished for us, *agreeing* that those facts are true, and *trusting* solely in Christ for gaining a right standing before God.
- Righteousness is something that only God can provide by imputing it to a person who is simply trusting Christ.

## 3:10-11 ~ Goals for this new life in Christ

- Here Paul moved beyond the basis of his initial salvation, justification, and reconciliation to God. As he lived his new life in Christ, he desired to know several things more intimately:
  - **“the power of His resurrection”** ~ the same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to believers as they live their daily lives.
  - **“the fellowship of His sufferings”** ~ Christ’s resurrection puts suffering and death into proper perspective. Endure them to reach the goal.
  - **“being conformed to His death”** ~ In the battle to gain mastery over the flesh, Paul exhorted believers to consider themselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ (Rom 6:11).
  - **“attain to the resurrection from the dead”** ~ he was hoping that he would be alive to experience the resurrection of church-age saints.

## 3:12-14 ~ No perfection this side of glory

- **“Not that I have already obtained”** or have already completely fulfilled all the things mentioned in 3:11. **“perfect”** (*teleioō*) ~ brought to completion or to a finished state. There is no perfection until glory. **“I press on”** (*diōkō*) ~ “run swiftly to acquire something,” being in constant forward motion to **“lay hold”** (*katalambanō*) of the goal for which Christ **“laid hold”** (*katalambanō*) of him.
- **“forgetting** what lies behind” (*epilanthanomai*) ~ to disregard or put out of one’s mind. **“reaching forward”** (*epekteinomai*) ~ stretching out or leaning toward something with a determination to reach it.
- **“the prize”** (*brabeion*) ~ a crown or garland awarded to participants in the athletic games. **“upward call”** may refer to the time when Christ will call church-age saints upward to meet Him in the clouds (1 Thess 4:13-18).

## 3:15-16 ~ A mature attitude about the Christian life

- Paul had shared his spiritual goals (3:10-11) and his attitude about his progress toward those goals (3:12-14). He desired to grow in his knowledge of Christ and to keep pressing toward the finish line.
- “as many as are **perfect**” (*teleios*) ~ “spiritually mature” believers will probably have the same “**attitude**” that Paul shared. If some believers do not think this way, Paul leaves it up to God to reveal the truth to them.
- “**keep living**” (*stoicheō*) ~ a military term, “to march in rank, keep in line, or walk in an orderly manner.” This is another way of saying that we are to “*press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (3:14).