

## Lesson Five

### (3:1-21)

#### **No Confidence In The Flesh (3:1-11)**

*1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and is safe for you.*

*2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. 4 Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, 6 as to zeal a persecutor of the church, and to righteousness under the law blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

**V. 1 Finally, My Brethren, Rejoice In The Lord** – In Paul’s mind, this was a fitting conclusion for all that preceded:

- 1:13 I am in prison
- 1:20 I may even die
- 1:29 You will struggle and suffer
- 2:7 Christ emptied himself and died
- 2:17 I am being poured out
- 2:30 Epaphroditus nearly died

So rejoice!

**To Write The Same Things To You** – In a previous personal note to the Philippians, or perhaps when he was there in person, Paul had warned them against the Judaizers. Now he would do it again.

**Not Irksome To Me, And Is Safe For You** – This was not “something causing fear or reluctance” for Paul, and it would work toward the “security” of the Philippians.

**V. 2 Look Out For The Dogs** – This was a term of supreme contempt for the Judaizers. Under the Levitical law, dogs were unclean animals. They were dirty scavengers like jackals and hyenas.

**Look Out For The Evil-workers** – This describes the same group of Judaizers, becoming more specific in its description.

**Look Out For Those Who Mutilate The Flesh** – The Judaizers insisted that faith in Christ was not enough. One must also earn God’s favor by keeping certain Old Testament laws, such as circumcision. Thus seeking to justify themselves by their own works, they were severed from Christ and fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

In this verse, Paul changed the regular word for circumcision (“around-cut”) to the word for mutilation (“down-cut”). This was to show that the ritual of circumcision was no longer a means of obtaining God’s favor. It did not secure righteousness; it merely hacked off some flesh.

**V. 3 For We Are The True Circumcision** – Christians are the covenant people of God. They are the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; Rom. 9:6-8, 25-26), circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands (Col. 2:11). God’s children are determined not by coincidence of physical ancestry, but by these factors:

They worship God in spirit (John 4:23)

They glory in Christ Jesus (Gal. 6:14)

They put no confidence in the flesh

**V. 4 Though I Myself Have Reason For Confidence In The Flesh Also** – Paul did not want anyone to cry, “Sour grapes!” He was not opposing Jewish legal righteousness just because he had never been able to obtain it. Quite the opposite was true—he had it all, but found it worthless.

**If Any Other Man Thinks He Has Reason** – Paul welcomed a contest of confidence with the Judaizers. He knew that such a comparison would demonstrate two things: he himself had more reason to boast than any Judaizer; and since all his self-righteousness was worthless, theirs was worth even less.

**I Have More** – Paul’s reasons for confidence in the flesh can be summarized as follows:

Advantages by Birth:

1. Circumcised on the eighth day
2. Of the people of Israel
3. Of the tribe of Benjamin
4. A Hebrew born of Hebrews

Advantages by Personal Attainment:

5. As to the law, a Pharisee
6. As to zeal, a persecutor of the church
7. As to legal righteousness, blameless

**V. 5 Circumcised On The Eighth Day** – The law required that the male baby be circumcised when eight days old (Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59). It is probably that the local Judaizers were born as Gentiles, “Johnny-come-lately” on the circumcision scene.

**Of The People Of Israel** – Not just a descendant of Abraham (as were also the Ishmaelites) or of Isaac (as were the Edomites), Paul was a true Jew—a descendant of Jacob.

**Of The Tribe Of Benjamin** – Benjamin was an honored tribe among the people of Israel. It was the tribe of the first king (I Sam. 10:20); it remained loyal to Jerusalem under Rehoboam (I Kg. 12:21); and it helped rebuild Jerusalem after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 4:1).

**A Hebrew Born Of Hebrews** – Paul was the Hebrew-speaking child of Hebrew-speaking parents.

**As To The Law A Pharisee** – Paul and his parents (Acts 23:6) were members of the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (Acts 26:5). The Pharisees faithfully observed the most minute detail of the law, scrupulously tithing even their garden spices (Matt. 23:23).

**V. 6 As To Zeal A Persecutor Of The Church** – Paul was not claiming perfect sinlessness. Rather, he was affirming perfect adherence to the external standards of legalistic righteousness. Every tithe, every feast, every sacrifice—all had been properly observed by the young Pharisee.

**V. 7 But Whatever Gain I Had, I Counted As Loss** – When Paul added up his virtues, he made a surprising discovery. The grand total was not just a small figure, or even just a zero, but a minus! The more he had worked to save himself, the farther he put himself from God.

It should be noted that Paul did not say that he decided to give up a number of valuable things to gain Christ. He said that he finally realized that all his “gain” was really “loss”!

**V. 8 Because Of The Surpassing Worth Of Knowing Christ Jesus My Lord** – Everything became “loss” in comparison with the excellency of knowing Christ. Furthermore, “knowing” Christ involved more than mere mental acquaintance. The word means “to have an intimate personal experience” with someone. To know Jesus is to be changed by him. To know Jesus is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3).

**For His Sake I Have Suffered The Loss Of All Things, And Count Them As Refuse** – Paul gave up nothing of value in order to gain Christ. It was only “refuse,” a word for excrement or garbage. The closest modern equivalent is “sewage.”

Paul’s loss was only sewage; his gain was the Son of God.

**V. 9 Not Having A Righteousness Of My Own, Based On Law** – As Paul made so plain in Romans 3:21-4:25 and Gal. 2:16-5:6, man is not justified by works of law. He cannot save himself. Neither can he combine his own merit with the ransom price paid on the cross, trying to “help” Jesus win salvation. Paul’s own righteousness was like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), and he was glad to take it off and throw it away.

**That Which Is Through Faith In Christ** – The only righteousness recognized by God is that which comes through faith in Christ. When Paul committed himself to Jesus, trusting in his death on the cross for justification, he put on a new nature—he put on Christ! (Gal. 3:27)

**V. 10 That I May Know Him And The Power Of His Resurrection** – Again the word for “know” means intimate personal involvement (v. 8). This participation in Christ would empower Paul with the same mighty strength which raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:18-20).

**Share His Sufferings, Becoming Like Him In His Death** – If Paul was to experience all that is Jesus, he had to have the same willingness to suffer. If Paul should ultimately suffer a martyr’s death, he would count it a privilege (1:29).

**V. 11 That If Possible I May Attain The Resurrection From The Dead** – Paul did not say this to express any lack of assurance in his own salvation. Rather, it is a humble statement of complete dependence upon God. It represents the complete and final rejection of all confidence in the flesh (v. 4-7).

#### **Press On Toward The Goal (3:12-21)**

*12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

*17 Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is their destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

**V. 12 Not That I Have Already Obtained** – In contrast to his former life of confidence in the flesh, now Paul exhibits complete humility.

**But I Press On** – Jesus had laid hold on Paul with a goal in mind for him, so now Paul was engaged in an all-out “pursuit” of that goal. To “press on” meant to “chase or pursue.”

**V. 13 Brethren, I Do Not Consider That I Have Made It My Own** – As if in penance for even having listed his one-time virtues, Paul again humbly renounces any self-attainment.

**But One Thing I Do** – The emphasis is on the word “one.” Paul had a single-minded dedication to this purpose.

**Forgetting What Lies Behind And Straining Forward To What Lies Ahead** – The picture is of a runner in a race. He may have made some serious mistakes in the early stages of the race, but he cannot dwell on that now. Instead, he “stretches out ahead” as he sees the finish line approaching.

**V. 14 I Press On Toward The Goal** – The goal is the “mark or target which one sets his sight on.” Paul fixed his vision on this mark and pressed on, “pursuing” it.

**For The Prize Of The Upward Call Of God In Christ Jesus** – He who reaches the “goal” will win the “prize.” In this case, the prize is an eternal one (I Cor. 9:24-27), the crown of righteousness (II Tim. 4:7-8).

**V. 15 Let Those Of Us Who Are Mature Be Thus Minded** – The word “mature” (KJV “perfect”) means “full-grown, complete, adult.” All those among the Philippians who had reached this maturity of faith were encouraged to be “thus minded,” to have the attitude or mind-set which pressed on toward the goal. (This is the same word as “have this mind” in 2:2 and 2:5.)

**If In Anything You Are Otherwise Minded, God Will Reveal That Also To You** – Anyone who didn’t see it this way should expect to get straightened out by God at some future time. How would God reveal it to them? By direct revelation? By further apostolic or prophetic teaching? By a rebuke on judgment day? Paul does not say.

**V. 16 Only Let Us Hold True To What We Have Attained** – Even though we have not yet attained all things, we have attained some things. Therefore, we must hold true (“stay in line with”) those things we have attained. In “forgetting what lies behind” (v. 13), we must not abandon such progress as we have made. We must forget our failures and preserve our successes.

**V. 17 Brethren, Join In Imitating Me** – Without any boasting or undue pride, Paul could point to himself as an example of Christian behavior (4:9). He was not guilty of the kind of inconsistency which says, “Do as I say, not as I do.” The secret to this kind of leadership by example is found in I Cor. 11:1, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

**And Mark Those Who So Live As You Have An Example In Us** – Paul did not consider his Christian life to be unparalleled. To the contrary, he knew there were many who followed the same example (“pattern”). He urged the Philippians to mark (“set their sight on”) such people and follow their example as well.

**V. 18 For Many, Of Whom I Have Often Told You And Now Tell You Even With Tears** – Paul was keenly aware that many people did not live exemplary lives. He did not brush this off as inevitable, but was moved to tears at their loss.

**Live As Enemies Of The Cross Of Christ** – Who were these enemies of the cross? The Judaizers? The heathen Gentiles? In the context of these verses (especially as a contrast to verse 17), these enemies were probably people who had once made a profession of faith in Christ, but now had fallen back into sensuality and self-indulgence. Such people are actually the worst enemies Christianity has.

**V. 19 Their End Is Destruction** – God is not mocked. Such people will reap their just reward—eternal destruction in hell. (See Rom 6:21, II Cor. 11:15; Heb. 6:8.)

**Their God Is The Belly** – Followers of the cross learn to deny, but the enemies of the cross live for self-gratification. Their lives are controlled by the lusts of the flesh. The word for “belly” includes much more than just the appetite for food and drink. All physical, sensual appetites are included.

**They Glory In Their Shame** – Such people not only live debased lives, they even take perverse pride in their wickedness. While they think they enjoy the freedom of permissiveness, they are actually in bondage to their lusts.

**With Minds Set On Earthly Things** – Such people do not have the mind of Christ. Whether or not they wallow in the filth of the most extreme sins, they have set their minds (see 2:2, 2:5, 3:15) on earthly things—and this is equally damnable! The Christian must set his mind on the things above (Col. 3:2).

**V. 20 But Our Commonwealth Is In Heaven** – Just as the Philippians were citizens of far away Rome, so the Christians are citizens of the “homeland” in heaven. Christians do not take an excessive interest in earthly affairs (“with minds set on earthly things”), because this is not their real home.

**From It We Await A Savior, The Lord Jesus Christ** – The Christian’s eyes are fixed on heaven. Almost as people held captive in a foreign land, they await their Deliverer. (See I Thess. 1:9-10; 4:16-17.)

**V. 21 Who Will Change Our Lowly Body To Be Like His Glorious Body** – The Savior will rescue them from their earthly captivity and will change (“transform”) their lowly bodies of flesh. The corruptible will become incorruptible (I Cor. 15:53) and the Christian will

appear with Jesus in glory (Col. 3:4). Then the Christian's body will be like ("conformed to") the glorious body of Christ. (See also I John 3:2.)

**By The Power Which Enables Him Even To Subject All Things To Himself** – The One who has the "effective, working power" to subject all the universe to his control will use that power to make our bodies changed and eternal.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. Why did Paul call certain people "dogs, evil workers, those who mutilate the flesh"?
2. Who are the true covenant people of God? Do They have a mark of circumcision?
3. Why did Paul list all his former virtues?
4. What is "a Hebrew born of Hebrews"?
5. How could Paul claim to have been blameless? Didn't he also call himself the "chief of sinners" (I Tim. 1:15)?
6. Did Paul have to give up a lot in order to gain Christ?
7. What is the difference between righteousness based on law and the righteousness that depends on faith?
8. How is the Christian life like a race?
9. Who were the "enemies of the cross"? Describe them.
10. Will we have bodies in heaven? Will our bodies be like the body of Jesus after the resurrection?

**A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Explain the meaning of the term “dogs” in verse 2
2. “The \_\_\_\_\_ insisted that \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ was not enough. One must also \_\_\_\_\_ God’s \_\_\_\_\_ by keeping certain \_\_\_\_\_ laws, such as \_\_\_\_\_.”
3. What is significant about Paul changing the regular word for “circumcision” to the word for “mutilation”?
4. List 3 factors which determine if one is a true child of God.
5. List 7 reasons why Paul could have put confidence in the flesh.
6. According to Leviticus 12:3, when was a male baby to be circumcised?
7. Paul was a direct descendant from Israel’s tribe of \_\_\_\_\_. What made this particular tribe so “honored” in the Old Testament?
8. Summarize the lawkeeping habits of the Pharisees.
9. What did Paul mean by the words, “as to righteousness under the law blameless”?
10. Explain Paul’s words, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss.”
11. What is the meaning of “knowing” in verse 8?
12. Explain the meaning of “refuse” in verse 8.
13. “Man is not \_\_\_\_\_ by works of law. He cannot \_\_\_\_\_ himself. Neither can he \_\_\_\_\_ his own \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_ price paid on the cross, trying to ‘help’ Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ salvation. Paul’s own \_\_\_\_\_ was like \_\_\_\_\_, and he was glad to take it off and \_\_\_\_\_.”
14. What is the only righteousness that is recognized by God?
15. Explain the meaning of the “know” and “the power of His resurrection” in verse 10.
16. Is the “power of Christ’s resurrection” available to Christians today? See Eph. 1:18-20.
17. What does it mean to “share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death”?

18. Is Paul questioning the assurance of his salvation in verse 11? If not, then what does he mean?
19. What is the meaning of the term “press on” in verse 12?
20. What picture is behind Paul’s words “Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead”?
21. Why is it so important for a Christian to forget past mistakes and focus upon “straining forward to what lies ahead”?
22. “In ‘forgetting what lies behind’ (v. 13) we must not \_\_\_\_\_ such \_\_\_\_\_ as we have made. We must \_\_\_\_\_ our \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ our \_\_\_\_\_.”
23. What did Paul mean when he wrote, “mark those who so live as you have an example in us”?
24. Who were the “enemies of the cross of Christ” in verse 18?
25. What is meant by the word “belly” in verse 19?
26. What do 1 Cor. 15:53, Col. 3:4, and 1 John 3:2 teach about a Christian’s future “transformed” body?
27. What is the most significant lesson you have learned from this study, and how will this improve your relationship with Jesus?