

## “REJOICE IN THE LORD”

### Philippians 3

The word fundamentalist has come to mean a narrow-minded, rigid, zealous person who only accepts people whose beliefs conform to their own definition of the truth. In the beginning of the twentieth century there was an attempt to have some kind of unity among all Christian believers who hold to what was considered the fundamentals of the Christian faith. In 1910 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church defined these five fundamentals as:

Inerrancy of the Scriptures

The virgin birth and deity of Jesus

The doctrine of substitutionary atonement

The bodily resurrection of Jesus

The bodily second coming of Jesus Christ.

At that time the vast majority of Christians held these beliefs as their own. Sadly, the word fundamentalist has come to be an exclusionary term. We think of Protestant fundamentalists, Islamic fundamentalists, and Hindu fundamentalists as extremists, separatists.

You probably know some people who belong to churches that believe that no one outside of their church can go to heaven. That was what Paul was battling in the Philippian church, the Galatian church, and possibly other churches. A group of Christians were going around to the various churches teaching that you were not a true Christian if you had not been circumcised. Indeed, that you had to be a Jew first before you could become a Christian. After all, they argued, weren't Jesus and all His disciples Jews before they became Christians?

1.) 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. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. (Philippians 3:1-7 NKJV)

The extent of Paul's vexation and repudiation of these false teachers is shown by the names he calls them here. He calls them dogs. That was a term of derision which Jews called Gentiles. He calls these false teachers who claimed that you had to become Jews in order to become Christian – Paul is saying that by turning from the truth they have become Gentiles. He is calling them evil workers because they are upsetting the faith of the Christians at Philippi. He calls them the mutilation. Once circumcision was the sign of the covenant for the descendants of Abraham, but it has been superseded by baptism as the sign of being a covenant child of God. It no longer has any spiritual value. It is no more than a superstitious mutilation of the body.

Paul goes on to say that if anyone could be confident because of being a Jew, then he of all people could be confident. He had been born a Jew, had been circumcised when he was eight days old. He had been born into the tribe of Benjamin, raised and educated a Pharisee. He had even been active in persecuting the church; he kept the Law blamelessly. Now all these points that he used to boast about and depend upon for salvation he counted as worthless. They once were his spiritual treasury and inheritance, but now he considered them loss and his faith and knowledge of Christ as gain.

2.) 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 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; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 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. 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, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 3:8-14 NKJV)

Jesus told this parable-

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

(Matthew 13:45-46 NKJV)

For Paul, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ which he defines as having the righteousness which is from God by faith, knowing Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, and attaining to the resurrection from the dead – this is the pearl of great price. For this pearl of great price Paul is willing to give up all that he had trusted in before he knew Christ, his Jewish heritage, circumcision, zealously keeping the Law and the rules of Pharisaism.

Now he is putting all his efforts into laying hold of all for which Christ has laid hold of him. Paul knows that he is not perfect. In one place he writes that he is the chief of sinners. In fact while he was still following the ways of the Jews he probably had less awareness of his imperfections and sinfulness than he does now. Now he has the Holy Spirit dwelling in his heart and giving him a true knowledge of God's Law rather than legalistic interpretations that made him feel holy.

3.) 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. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 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: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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. (Philippians 3:15-21)

Paul has emphasized throughout this letter that Christians should strive to be of one mind.

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, (Philippians 1:27 NKJV)

fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. (Philippians 2:2 NKJV)

Here in this chapter he exhorts let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Here in the United States we have hundreds of Protestant denominations. Obviously we are not of the same mind and we do not follow the same rule.

Paul says to be careful whose example we follow. It may not be so serious if we follow a Baptist instead of a Presbyterian. What about those who followed Jim Jones? We could make a list of dozens of false teachers who led Christians who were weak in faith away from Christ and into error - they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things. The worst of following a false teacher is not that they do not lead us in ways that make our life happy and prosperous. It is that they lead us in ways of treason against our Lord and Master. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ