

ALL FOR CHRIST

Philippians 3:1-8

In the first two chapters of this epistle we noticed how Paul endeavored to combat the forces within the church at Philippi which tended to destroy the unity of the church. He now turns his attention to a force outside of the church that has the same purpose in mind. The word "finally" is not used by way of conclusion, but rather by way of transition to another important phase of Christian experience. It has the force of "furthermore;" a full unfolding of the theme. He exhorted them to "rejoice in the Lord" as opposed to the many things in which men are prone to rejoice. A rejoicing in these other things results either in unrighteousness or in self-righteousness. In substance Paul said, "To sum up all I have said, be happy in the Lord." He meant that a very important thing in your Christian life is joy. If you have lost your joy, you have lost much, and you will soon lose your testimony. It is hard to testify for the Lord if you are not happy in Him. And it is easy to testify if you are, "rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

As a custodian of truth, Paul jealously guards the Christians from the emissaries of error. None would be led astray if he could avoid it. Repeatedly he sounds the note of warning, not as an irksome duty, but as a necessary precaution to insure their safety. This warning is introduced here with the admission that it has been given many times before. Paul declares that he does not hesitate to repeat because he knows the matter concerns the safety of his dear friends. Most speakers have a certain amount of hesitancy in repeating things to the same audience, though it is more or less necessary if one is to be effective. Especially teachers find repetition necessary. Some people are almost immune to new ideas. They must be taught line upon line, and precept upon precept.

In verses two and three, Paul contrasts professors and believers. He decisively denounces the Judaizers in the words "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." Thus he exposes their depravity, their deeds, and their doctrines. Concerning these troublers of the soul, Paul writes about:

1. Their character (self-ward).

"Beware of the dogs." The Bible is not complimentary of dogs. "Dog" was a term which was reserved as the strongest expression of contempt. It bespoke all that was foul and filthy. Its usage points to the depraved nature of these religionists. If one is shocked at Paul's use of the word "dog" for Judaizers, he may be reminded that this was a familiar term of reproach commonly used by the Jews to describe Gentiles.

Paul urges the Philippian Christian to keep their eyes on the "dogs", or those who are unrighteous in their nature, tastes and desires; degraded and degrading; wanting in spiritual nature and capacity for spiritual things. Paul insists that these false teachers are the real "dogs." They have followed him, growling, barking and snapping at his heels. Like the dogs of the East, these deceivers, who are unregenerated and entirely uncontrolled by the Lord, would disturb, divide and destroy the Lord's flock.

2. Their conduct (neighbor-ward).

Their true conduct is revealed in the warning, "Beware of the evil workers." Their depraved nature was manifested in their evil deeds. Under a false guise they hide their evil intent to spoil and to destroy.

Paul called them "evil workers" or mischief-makers. Their being flavors their doing. Not only are they immoral in character, but they are injurious in their influence. They can create only confusion of thought and perversion of truth. They are active, but their activity and zeal make for faction and disorder and unbelief. They are busy doing wrong, and are, therefore, specimen of wasted energy.

3. Their creed (God-ward).

Their creed comes out in the final warning, "Beware of the concision." "Concision"

means "a cutting off," or "to cut off partly," and is used by Paul as a term of reproach to disparage the almost fiendish delight that these Judaizers take in the rite of circumcision. They substituted a formalism for reality, and a ceremonialism instead of Christ. The world is satisfied simply to cut something off the life and thereby make it better.

In contrast with these professors, who made outward forms essential to salvation and boasted of their loyalty to the law of Moses, Paul declares that those who trust in Christ alone for salvation form the true Israel of God. He says, "We are the circumcision." He meant by that not an external rite but a cleansing of the heart as the real sign of a right relationship to God. Three proofs are given to support this claim, and they form an admirable description of the elements of a normal Christian experience.

1. "We worship God in (by) the spirit."

2. "We glory in Christ Jesus."

He could say as much because he had the triumphant assurance of His presence, of His power, and of His unfailing grace.

3. "Have no confidence in the flesh."

By "flesh" Paul means the fallen or unrenewed human nature. It denotes all that man is and all that he achieves aside from the Spirit of God. It might even include all the list of things in which Paul once trusted—his Jewish descent, his legal observance, his social standing and his moral attainments. In none of these does a Christian put confidence as he stands before God. He realizes his helplessness, his utter unworthiness, and his sin. He believes that nothing in his character or conduct has attained to the divine standard of righteousness.

If any man ever had any ground for self-righteousness or "confidence in the flesh," Paul was that man. If ever a man could hope to find favor with God in and of himself, it was he, according to this passage. The teachers against whom Paul was warning the Philippians were advocates of a false way of Christian living. It was also the flesh way. They were saying that faith in Christ alone was not enough.

In a ringing challenge to these legalists, Paul insists that if they are seeking justification through Judaism, they are ignorant of themselves and their system. He knows the exact worth of that religion, for prior to his experience of regeneration he had exceeded any in conforming to it. If the Judaizers had any reason to have confidence in the flesh, Paul had more than they. None of them could match him in legalistic righteousness. At Paul's birth, covenant compliance to the Mosaic law was given, and he was circumcized the eighth day. He was not a proselyte, but came from the original stock of Israel. His true descent could be traced back to the patriarch Jacob. He belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, and this was added reason for boasting for this tribe never wavered in its allegiance to the Davidic throne even when the ten/tribes broke away. He belonged to the most orthodox body of the Jewish faith. In every respect, by race and religion, he was the purest of the pure, "an Hebrew of the Hebrews!" Paul was not a half-hearted religionist, but he zealously propagated its doctrines and persecuted all opposers. And this zeal for his faith was coupled with blameless living. Racially he was as pure, religiously he was as sound, and resolutely he was as strong as any in this faith. He was an unexcelled example of Pharisaism.

Even though he was proud of his birth, of his position, and of his personal devotion, at the time to which he referred Paul was still without Christ. What greater example of the futility of the faith not based upon Christ can be found than this deluded disciple of a dead religion, fired with the utmost sincerity and clothed with personal purity! Surely no more is needed to convince men that all the religions in the world cannot save. Christ is the only Saviour of the soul. There is no redemption of righteousness apart from Him.

As soon as Paul comes to see that Christ is the answer to every need of the soul, only one course appears consistent to him: if Christ is everything then everything is for Christ. Nothing else is reasonable. To live for anything else is to dissipate his ransom power on transitory trifles. Christ is all, and He must have all. He becomes the supreme object of Paul's life, and the passionate pursuit of his soul, for Whom nothing is too dear to renounce or too great to attempt. Christ must have all of him and he wants all of Christ.

Paul knows that the extent of his participation in the blessings of Christ depends upon the measure of his dedication to Him. Any withholding on his part naturally limits his capacity to enjoy his Lord. He is to recede and the Saviour is to reign if he is to have the full enjoyment in his spiritual life. The things Paul cancelled in the previous summary of his attainments were not evil things. There was not one evil habit, or sin, or unworthy companionship in all that which he counted loss. The things he has been talking about were all good, but not good enough. The very best we can offer and the very best we can be are not sufficient.

Looking back to a definite time in his experience when he had weighed the matter of his personal relationship to Christ very carefully, he recalls his decision, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." He had made a calculated and definite choice when even the choicest assets, those things that would seem advantageous to him in the service of God, were surrendered to Christ. He had not found any assets in self, but had yielded himself in definite surrender to the Lord.

As soon as Paul turned his back on the balance sheet of the flesh, his eyes looked straight into the eyes of the Lord Jesus, and from his lips fell the words, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." The humility of Paul is a beautiful thing to behold, and his absolute sincerity of purpose sets him apart from all other men. Christians the world over have looked at Paul in admiration, and longed to have power with men for God. To this end Paul openly shows the way, but others do not seem to find it. Paul had a new standard of values. His change of values was due to his new knowledge of Christ.

All that he once regarded as grounds for boasting now seems worthless. Christ is now the basis of his confidence and his joy. The reversal of values is instant and complete. He has come to count, but not as he used to count. Now he counts "for Christ's sake," the new factor in the situation, the new standard of values, and the new reason for life. Because of Christ, Who has thus stepped in between the Apostle and his old ideals, Paul has reversed his entire outlook on life. He has changed the heading at the top of the ledger. He has erased "gains" and written "losses." For Christ's sake Paul suffered "the loss of all things," that is, the sum-total of his old life's values. His own family probably regarded him as a disgrace to Judaism. The Pharisees considered him a deserter of their cause. The Jews in general regarded him as a turn-coat and a renegade. He had paid the price for Christ's sake. But it was worth the price. He had no regrets about it.

"For Him I count as gain each loss,
Disgrace for Him renown;
Well may I glory in my cross,
While He prepares my crown."

Complete dedication to God leads to a life of usefulness for Him. We cannot please Him and be a power for Him unless we are definitely surrendered and dedicated to Him. Has the solemn transaction taken place in your life whereby you have yielded your all in utmost dedication to the Lord? Has the crisis been faced and the eternal "yes" been said? Can you say, "Christ is everything and everything for Christ"? Those things that formerly were gain to Paul, he counted loss for Christ. No matter how we may beautify it, the flesh cannot please God. Nothing is of advantage to us if we hold it in our own hands. Even

the highest and noblest gain will prove our undoing and count loss for Christ. He must have all there is of us. We must make good our former vows by daily living for Christ. Today things that we have never faced before are making their claims upon us; temptations that we never dreamed of before are tugging at our heart-strings; new-born aspirations of self-interests are crying lustily to survive.