

# PHIL. 3:7 – 4:23

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## C. Paul's radical reversal of values (3:7-11)

1. But these privileges and accomplishments, which he formerly considered to be assets or pluses for the heavenly audit, he has come to regard as one great loss, a change in perspective that was motivated by the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. As must be the case, Christ had displaced all else at the center of Paul's life, all else in which he trusted for "rightness" with God.

b. As he placed exclusive trust in Christ, he came to recognize all other things as illusions which distract one from the truth, and from that perspective he considered them to be positively harmful.

2. Paul emphatically reinforces this in 3:8, making clear that he *continues* to regard all his past privileges and achievements, and anything else in which he might place his confidence (e.g., Roman citizenship or material possessions), as loss for the sake of the incomparable value of his personal relationship with Christ Jesus his Lord. "Knowledge" in the O.T. signified living in a close relationship, such as to cause what may be called communion.

3. Paul adds that for Christ's sake he not only *considered* all things loss but actually accepted the loss of all things. He lost all status within Judaism, so the human assessment of his righteousness was stripped from him. He may also have suffered confiscation of property and disinheritance by his family.

4. Not only did Paul consider all things in which he might be tempted to trust to be a loss, he considered them to be utterly repulsive, to be like dung. He had no secret longings for the things he had rejected.

5. Paul has done this, has completely rejected all other seeming gains, in order that he may gain Christ as his all sufficient Savior and be found in him on "that day," the day when everyone will acknowledge that Christ is all that matters (see 2:10-11).

6. Being found in Christ on that day, he will not have the flawed or illusory righteousness of his own that comes from the law, a righteousness generated by human performance, but will have the righteousness God requires, the righteousness that God gives through faith in Christ. Humans are incapable of generating the righteousness of God.

7. Paul rejects all avenues of human status and achievement in order to have a personal relationship with Christ (to know him), a concomitant of which is to experience the power of Christ's resurrection and sharing of his sufferings through being conformed to his death (i.e., through living a crucified life). The hope of this knowing of Christ is that, by the amazing grace of God, he will reach the resurrection from the dead.

#### D. Digression: Pressing on toward the goal (3:12-16)

1. Paul makes clear that he has not already obtained or reached the perfection that will be his at the resurrection. Despite what some may have been saying, final perfection cannot be expected in this life; it comes only at the consummation. See 1 Jn. 3:2; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:17-18.

a. At Christ's second coming, not only will our bodies be changed to be like his glorious and immortal body, as Paul indicates in 3:21 (see also 1 Cor. 15:50-55; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17), but the sanctification that began at our conversion, our transformation into Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18), will be brought to completion. We then will be fully "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). We will be physically and spiritually prepared for eternity in the immediate presence of God Almighty.

b. This transformation will in some sense be effected by our seeing Jesus "as he is," seeing him in his returning glory as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Thomas Johnson writes in his commentary on 1 John (NIBC, 68-69), "There will be a transforming vision at the return of Jesus in which believers will be purified of all that still separates them from complete likeness to Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18)."

2. Though he has not reached the blessed perfection of the resurrection, he presses on in faithful service so as to lay hold of it, and the full laying hold of Christ which it implies (for we shall be like him). He does so because he was wholeheartedly laid hold of by Christ on the Damascus Road.

3. In running the race of his Christian life, Paul forgets the part of the track he's already covered and focuses on the finish line. He doesn't dwell on past accomplishments or failures in his ministry, but strains to be faithful till death (see 1 Cor. 9:24-27). He labors to finish the race so that he might gain the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ. 2 Timothy 4:6-8 is a commentary on this verse delivered right at the finish line.

4. All who are mature should have this mindset. Their lives should reflect the same ambition Paul has of fully laying hold of Christ in the consummation.

5. If they disagree with him on some matter *other* than this fundamental orientation, details or particulars within this basic way of thinking, God will lead them into his truth in that matter as well. God in his grace will grant them growth in spiritual understanding.

6. In any case, we all are to live up to whatever truth we have attained. We are to guide our lives by the light we have received. We cannot allow our questions to keep us from doing what we know we should do.

#### E. Imitate servants of the cross, not its enemies (3:17-21)

1. Paul urges them to imitate him and to carefully observe those among them who have patterned their lives after Paul and his associates. They are to follow the path Paul and his associates have modeled, the path of exclusive, intense, and wholehearted reliance on Christ, which will end in the perfection of the consummation.

2. This was necessary because there were many Judaizing missionaries who lived as enemies of the cross.

a. Paul often spoke to the Philippians about such people and was grieving as he wrote about them now. It tore him up that they misrepresented the gospel. It's in some sense more tragic for someone to cling to a bogus life preserver than not to have one at all. It also grieved him that they posed such a threat to those who already were saved (see Gal. 5:2-4).

b. They lived as enemies of the cross by their preaching of a different gospel. By relying, at least in part, on obedience to the Law of Moses for their righteousness before God, they denigrated Christ's atoning death (the cross). As Paul wrote in Gal. 2:21: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing."

#### 3. Description of their destiny and character

a. Their destiny is destruction – By trusting in their own performance and on an obsolete covenant they have cut themselves off from the saving grace of Christ (Gal. 5:2-4). They will be eternally condemned (Gal. 1:6-9).

b. Their god is the belly – Their binding food requirements beyond the time and sphere intended by God is tantamount to having made their bellies their god. It is the source of their prescriptions (since God himself is not).

c. Their glory is in their shame – This may mean either that they glory in their private parts via their exaltation of circumcision or that the very things in which they glory will be bring them the shame of condemnation.

d. Their mind is on earthly things – They are focused on the righteousness of men, not the righteousness of God that comes solely through faith in Christ. As Paul made clear in Col. 2:16-17, the O.T. regulations belong to the old age which has passed away with the coming of Christ (see Heb. 10:1). Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism (see Gal. 3:23-25).

4. Paul and his kind, not the Judaizers, are to be imitated because it is they whose commonwealth or "governing force" is in heaven. Accordingly, it rules their way of life. The allegiance of the Judaizers is elsewhere. Fee writes (p. 379):

Although Paul's language will not quite allow the translation, "we are a colony of heaven" (Moffatt), the point of the imagery comes very close to that. Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome in the province of Macedonia, so the citizens of the "heavenly commonwealth" were to function as a colony of heaven in that outpost of Rome.

5. And part of the blessing shared by Paul and his kind is the anticipation Christ's return and the glorious resurrection which he will bring about by his incredible power. At that time, their (and our) earthly bodies will be transformed "to be conformed to the body of his glory" (see 1 Cor. 15:35-56; Rom. 8:11, 23).

## VI. Closing Exhortations

### A. To stand firm (4:1)

1. Paul very warmly refers to the Philippians as "my beloved and sorely missed brothers" and as "my joy and crown." He cared for them deeply, and they were a source of joy and honor for Paul (and would be even more so on the day of Christ's return).

2. They are to stand firm by imitating the pattern of exclusive, intense, and wholehearted reliance on Christ demonstrated by Paul, his associates, and a number in Philippi. They are to trust in nothing else for their relationship with God and are to strain to be faithful to Christ until death.

### B. Appeal for Euodia and Syntyche to be united (4:2-3)

1. Paul publicly begs these two women to be like-minded in the Lord. They were apparently active members in the church, and their discord was a threat to the unity of the church as a whole. Unresolved conflict, especially between two respected or high-profile Christians, can polarize a congregation. People begin to take sides. That explains why their names were mentioned in a letter to be read publicly in church.

2. This is so important that Paul begs another individual in the congregation, simply identified as "loyal companion" (possibly *Syzygos* is a proper name), to help these women come to peace with one another. There's a place for a third party helping to resolve conflicts in the church.

3. Paul mentions a personal reason for helping these women reconcile: they had struggled beside him in the work of the gospel. There's something especially tragic about a split

between two Christians who once labored together in harmony for the glorious gospel. It's sad in its own right, but also the division hinders their effectiveness in blessing others.

4. Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, and others had served as Paul's fellow workers. Whatever role you assign to them, they were intimately involved in Paul's apostolic labors.

5. Paul adds that all of these co-workers are listed in God's book of life. This conflict between Euodia and Syntyche needed to be resolved, but these women were by no means apostates. They loved the Lord; they simply needed help working through this problem.

### C. Rejoice, be gentle, don't be anxious (4:4-7)

1. Having just mentioned the "book of life," Paul commands them to rejoice in the Lord always. This is reminiscent of Jesus in Lk. 10:20 where he told the Seventy (or 72) not to rejoice that the spirits submit to them but to rejoice that their names are written in heaven.

a. A Christian's relationship with Christ, that priceless treasure, is always to be a source of joy, whatever the world may throw at him. No circumstance or situation can be allowed to strip us of this higher joy. Since no power can snatch us from his hand (Jn. 10:29), the joy of that relationship is immune to worldly pressures. That joy is a constant backdrop of the Christian's life.

b. This doesn't mean there is no sadness or discouragement in the Christian life. It means that Christ must never cease to be a joy for the believer. Sadness and discouragement are part of life in this fallen world.

(1) Paul just finished telling them that he wrote "with tears" about the Judaizers, and he earlier mentioned the great grief God had spared him by sparing Epaphroditus.

(2) Elsewhere Paul says that the Corinthians caused him "great distress and anguish of heart" (2 Cor. 2:4) and that he faced daily the pressure of his concern for all the churches (2 Cor. 11:28).

(3) Jesus himself wept over Lazarus (Jn. 11:35) and in the Garden of Gethsemane he said that his soul "was overwhelmed with sorrow" (Mat. 26:38).

2. Paul commands them to let their graciousness or magnanimity or forbearing spirit be evident to all. One scholar defined this slippery word in this way: "fairmindedness, the attitude of a man who is charitable toward men's faults and merciful in his judgment of their failings because he takes their whole situation into his reckoning" (Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, 168 [quoting L. H. Marshall].) It often is translated "gentleness."

3. The Lord is near means that he is aware of their conduct and available to come to their aid. He is not an absentee deity.

4. Paul commands them not to fret about anything.

a. Instead, in every circumstance they are to seek the peace that only God, in answer to grateful prayer, bestows on his people. They are to cast their cares on him (1 Pet. 5:7). In this Paul is echoing the teaching of Jesus in Mat. 6:25-34.

b. The tranquility of God's own eternal being, the serenity that characterizes his being, is what is beyond understanding. That peace will guard grateful, trusting Christians because they are welcome to share in it (to some extent) through prayer.

D. Focus on what is excellent and follow Paul's model (4:8-9)

1. Paul lists six positive ethical qualities and then summarizes them, thus describing the characteristics they are to reflect upon to shape their character. He is not urging them simply to contemplate these attributes but to manifest them in their lives. They are to focus on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable – on anything that is excellent or praiseworthy.

2. Paul displayed these virtues in his own life and so could appeal to the Philippians to put into practice what he had taught them (learned and received) and what they had observed of him (heard and saw). Those who model their lives on the pattern of apostolic teaching and example are assured that God, who provides true peace, will be with them.

VII. Thanksgiving, Praise, and Final Greetings (4:10-23)

A. Paul's thanks for the Philippians' gift (4:10-18)

1. Paul rejoiced greatly when he received from Epaphroditus this most recent expression of the Philippians' concern for him. Their concern for him "bloomed again" in the form of this tangible gift.

2. Paul immediately makes clear that there was no suggestion of reproach in what he just said. There was no implied "It's about time!" They had been concerned for him all along but did not have an opportunity to express that concern until recently. The nature of the circumstances that prevented them from expressing their concern are not spelled out, but several possibilities have been suggested:

a. They were poor. As a poor church, they may have been tapped out by giving beyond their resources for several years to contribute to the collection Paul had organized for the church in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:1-4).

b. They were unsure of Paul's situation during his imprisonment in Caesarea.

c. They had no one to send with their gift.

d. Paul had requested that they not send him money after he was falsely charged with sponging off them (see 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10; 1 Cor. 9:3-18; 2 Cor. 12:13-18).

3. Paul's joy over their gift was not because it met his material needs; it was because of what it said about their commitment to him and to the gospel. For Paul had learned to be satisfied in whatever circumstance he found himself.

a. Verse 12 elaborates on this. He writes, "I know how to be deprived, and I know how to abound. In any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret – both to being well fed and to being hungry, both to having plenty and to having need."

b. Paul's peace of mind, his satisfaction or contentment, was not tied to his material circumstances. His contentment came from his relationship with God through Jesus Christ; everything else was secondary. Because that relationship was constant, his contentment did not fluctuate with his financial condition.

c. Note that this went both ways. Not only did he know how to be deprived, he also knew how to abound. He not only learned the secret to being hungry but to being well fed; he not only learned the secret to having need but to having plenty.

(1) We understand how deprivation can disturb one's contentment and why one would need to learn the secret of coping with that circumstance, but our reaction is "who needs a secret to cope with abundance – what's to cope with?"

(2) Having plenty carries the danger that one will be lured into the spiritual trap of thinking that one's life consists in the abundance of one's possessions, and from that warped perspective flow all kinds of discontent. One then lives with the anxiety of protecting one's wealth and with the insatiable desire to accumulate more. If wealth is the measure of a man's life, one is doomed to the dissatisfaction of trying to keep up with a never-ending line of Joneses. If contentment is found in having X amount of stuff, then greater contentment lies in having X + 1 amount of stuff, which is more than you presently have.

d. Finding contentment in Christ regardless of his material circumstances is something Paul *learned* over the course of his Christian life. Think of all Paul endured in learning this lesson (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:23-28). Pain and hardship often are necessary to teach us the truly important lessons of life. That is the only way some lessons can be learned. That's the point of Heb. 12:7-11.

4. In this context, 4:13 needs to be understood as "I am strong enough for all these circumstances through him who empowers me." Paul learned to be content in these diverse circumstances, but he understood that it was only through Christ that such contentment was possible. He was Paul's power source. D. A. Carson comments (*Basics for Believers*, 119-120):

This verse is often wrenched out of its context. Paul is not claiming to be a kind of superman because he is a Christian and God is on his side. . . .

Paul's "everything" is constrained by the context. His point is that whatever the circumstances in which he finds himself, whether with the rich and the powerful or with the poor and the powerless, whether preaching with unction to substantial crowds or incarcerated in a filthy prison, he has learned to cast himself on God *and to be content*. He can do all these things, *everything* that God assigns him to do, through the one who gives him strength. Let the gospel advance, let God's will be done in me and through me, Paul is saying, I am content, for I can trust the one who invariably strengthens me to do what he assigns me.

5. Paul makes clear that, despite his contentment with his material situation, it was good for them to share with him in his hardship. It was a loving thing to do and a genuine blessing for Paul (though not in the same sense as for someone else who had material needs).

6. Paul praises them for their past generosity in supporting his missionary effort. In 4:17 he makes clear that his focus is not on the gift *per se* but on the faithfulness they thereby exhibit ("but I seek after the credit that accrues to your account").

7. Paul lets them know that he received their recent gift in full and that he now is fully supplied. He thus acknowledges their generosity and expresses his appreciation for it.

8. In 4:18c he refers to the things they sent as "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, something well-pleasing to God." The financial contributions we make to those who spread the gospel are offerings that please God.

B. Expression of praise to God (4:19-20) – Paul declares that his God will richly supply every need of theirs, but remember how Paul has just defined true needs. He himself learned contentment independent of material needs. Verse 20 is an expression of praise to our God and Father.

C. Final greetings (4:21-23) – Paul says to greet (give regards to) *all* the saints in Christ Jesus from all the saints with him. He closes with a prayer that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with them.