

CHRIST'S PERFECTION IN THE BELIEVER

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scriptures for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

Paul demonstrated to the church at Philippi in chapter one that Christ was to be magnified in the life of the believer, and then in chapter two he exhorted the believers to have the mind of Christ. Now in chapter three his emphasis was to challenge the believers to strive for perfection in Christ. This was a goal worthy of their total effort (3:8, 10, 12-14).

In this chapter Paul warned the believers about the legalism of the Judaizers (3:1-6). Their efforts were a worthless exercise in religion. He knew, because he once was deeply involved in their cause. However, when Christ became his Savior, all of his values changed and Christ became all-important to him (3:7-11).

The goal of Paul's life in Christ was to be perfect. He knew he had not attained it, but he pressed toward that mark as he came closer and closer to the upward calling of God (3:12-14). He also urged other Christians to strive toward this godly perfection in order to keep the unity of believers (3:15, 16).

Finally, he sounded a warning against the enemies of Christ who lived lawless lives. They let their fleshly desires dominate them and it caused them to live shameful, sinful lives (3:17-19). In direct contrast to these people, who lived after the world, were those believers whose citizenship was in heaven. They looked for the coming of Jesus Christ, Who would transform their bodies and make them like His glorious body (3:20-21). Then they would attain perfection in Christ.

Outline

- I. The Believer's Choice — 3:1-11
- II. The Believer's Challenge — 3:12-16
- III. The Believer's Change — 3:17-21

Study Notes

I. The Believer's Choice — 3:1-11

A. His Warning against Legalism — 3:1-3

1. Danger of Legalism — 3:1

3:1 — It was not tiresome for Paul to repeat things he had already told them, but for them it was necessary. They needed to have these things repeated. They faced a real danger. The Judaizers wanted Christians to keep the Mosaic Law and the traditions of the Jews. They taught that certain works were necessary for salvation.

2. Characteristics of Legalists — 3:2

3:2 — "Beware" - "Be constantly observing"; "look out for"; "keep your eye on." "Beware" is repeated three times for emphasis. All three warnings were against the Judaizers.

"Dogs" — This described the character of the Judaizers. In Matthew 15:26, 27 - the Gentiles were referred to as "dogs" by the Jews. In the Old Testament, dogs were scavengers, an

unclean animal, and an abomination to the LORD God - Deut 23:18. Now, however, Christians were feasting at the spiritual banquet table of God's grace and the Judaizers were eating the garbage of legalism. Therefore, they were called "dogs" by Paul.

Their conduct — They were "evil workers," a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel.

Their creed — "Concision"; it is a play on the word, "circumcision." Circumcision had a spiritual significance to the true Jew, and, so Paul did not use that word when referring to the Judaizers. Instead he used a word that sounded like "circumcision" when he used "concision" (the two words sound alike in Greek, too). "Concision" means mutilation. The Judaizers mutilated the Gospel when they added circumcision to the message of salvation. Circumcision under these circumstances was a mere mutilation of the flesh as well as of the Gospel.

3. Inadequacy of legalism — 3:3

3:3 — Those circumcised in the heart have three characteristics not found in legalists:

- a. They worship God in the Spirit, not in religious rituals.
- b. They rejoice in the finished work of Christ Jesus, not in their legalistic works.
- c. They trust fully in God and have no confidence in their ability to please Him.

B. His Experience with Legalism — 3:4-6

1. His argument — 3:4

3:4 — If anyone had a reason to glory in the flesh, Paul had more reason to do so than these legalists that were in Philippi. He had been an extreme legalist before he was saved.

2. His basis — 3:5, 6

3:5 — "Circumcised the eighth day" - He was a pure-blooded Jew.

"Stock of Israel" — He was born a Jew, not a proselyte.

"Tribe of Benjamin" — Tribe from which came the first king of Israel, faithful tribe in the southern kingdom.

"Hebrew of the Hebrews" — His family retained the Jewish customs.

"Pharisee" — Strict religious sect - Acts 26:5.

3:6 — "Zeal" - He earnestly persecuted the Christians because he thought he was right - Acts 22:3, 4; Rom. 10:2.

"Blameless" — Perfect before men, but not before God. Later, when he knew what was right, he changed his ways.

C. His Rejection of Legalism — 3:7-11

1. His change of values — 3:7-8

3:7 — What Paul thought was a gain in his legalistic pursuits, was really a loss in his knowledge of Christ.

3:8 — Anything that kept Paul from being closer to Christ, he counted as loss. He gladly suffered the loss of many things - wealth, position, self-righteousness, respect, and name. He counted them worthless in his attempt to gain Christ. ("Win" is the same word as "gain")

in v. 7.)

2. His divine righteousness — 3:9

3:9 — By faith he exchanged self-righteousness for God's righteousness. He put his faith in Christ's works instead of his own.

3. His new goals — 3:10-11

3:10 — "That I may know Him" - A person needs to know Christ for salvation-righteousness and then for sanctification-righteousness. Here sanctification is in Paul's mind.

"Power of His resurrection" — Righteousness was provided by the death and resurrection of Christ. The greatest power of God was demonstrated in the resurrection of His Son. Paul wanted to experience the power of that resurrection in his life and thus know Christ better.

"Fellowship of His sufferings" — He wanted to participate in Christ's sufferings (Col. 1:24), so that he might experience what He felt when He was rejected by sinners..

"Being made conformable unto His death" — He wanted to be conformed to Christ in every way, even in His death. To prepare himself for physical death, he died to his selfish desires daily and submitted himself to obey God's will as Christ did - cf. 2:8; Gal. 2:20. He wanted to walk in the steps of Jesus so he might know Him in every way possible.

3:11 — "Resurrection" - For believers this refers to the high calling or rapture (3:14; cf 1 Thess. 4:16, 17). He knew this is when he would be judged by Christ for his works as a believer and his goal was to win His approval by being like Him.

II. Challenge — 3:12-16

A. Recognition of His Imperfection — 3:12

3:12 — "Not ... already attained" - Paul had not yet reached the goal he set forth in 3:10-11. He was still seeking after it.

"Either were already perfect" — Paul admitted he was not perfect. In fact he would not reach perfection in this life, but that would not stop him from trying to be like Christ.

"Follow after" — "Pursue." "I keep pursuing" (present tense).

"Apprehend" — "Grasp," "lay hold of," "seize." Paul wanted to grasp the very purpose for which God had grasped him.

B. Recognition of His Goal — 3:13-14

3:13 — "Not . . . apprehend" - He had not grasped a state of perfection yet (perfect tense).

"This one thing" — It refers to a singleness of purpose.

"Forgetting" — This was not forgetting his life before he became a Christian, but forgetting those things he had accomplished after he became a Christian. As a runner running a race - he could not be concerned with those things behind him.

"Reaching" — It is used of an athlete with his eye on the goal.

3:14 — "Press" - "Pursue." It is the same word as "follow after" in v. 12 - it is also in the present tense, "I am pursuing."

"Mark" — Target or goal. The goal is stated in 3:10-11.

"High calling" — This refers to the upward calling, the rapture.

C. Recognition of Their Responsibility — 3:15-16

The responsibility of the members of the church was to settle their differences and live in harmony with each other.

3:15 — "Perfect" - It refers to a mature person. This is an adjective, which describes a Christian that is mature; whereas "perfect" in v. 12 is a verb, and indicates the maturing process. Paul was addressing those Christians who were mature.

"Otherwise minded" — Some Christians had a different mind on how to live the Christian life than Paul. He depended on God to change their minds by revealing the truth to them.

3:16 — Paul urged the believers to walk together in the maturity they had already reached.

III. A Believer's Change — 3:17-21

A. Proper Examples — 3:17

3:17 — Believers were to follow Paul as their example (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). They also were to follow the example of Christians such as Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30).

B. Improper Examples — 3:18, 19

3:18 — There were men the believers were not to follow. Their lives were patterned after an Epicurean philosophy - Gal. 5:13; Rom. 6:1, 15; 16:18. They were not born again, but were enemies of the cross.

3:19 — The result of their lifestyle was destruction in Hell, because they lived by the desires of their flesh. Their fleshly desires were shameful and worldly.

C. Proper Remedy — 3:20, 21

1. Realizing their citizenship — 3:20

3:20 — "Conversation" - It should be "citizenship." The believers' citizenship is in heaven.

"Look" — "Intense yearning," "waiting." They were waiting for Jesus Christ to return from Heaven.

2. Anticipating their change — 3:21

3:21 — "Change" means "transform." Christ will transform a believer's earthly body into one which is like His glorious body.

"Vile" — means lowly; not dirty. It refers to our earthly bodies which are weak and sickly, and ready to die.

"Working" — Christ will perform this transformation by his divine energy and power.