

*Nuggets and Gems from the Bible*

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OF THE  
SPIRITUAL  
BELIEVERS

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# THREE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL BELIEVERS

The book of Philippians was not written in logical order according to doctrine. For this reason, it is rather difficult to divide the book into sections. We may even wonder why Paul, after speaking of the mutual fellowship between him and the believers in Philippi in [chapter two](#), goes on to speak of other matters, which he refers to as “the rest” ([Phil. 3:1](#)). I believe that the reason for this change of subject lies in the fact that Paul was deeply troubled by the activity of the Judaizers. He knew that the Judaizers were disturbing the churches, damaging the church life, and trying to turn the saints away from the faith.

The Epistle to the Philippians was written when Paul received material supply from the believers in Philippi. Through Epaphroditus they had sent this supply to care for Paul’s need during his imprisonment. After receiving their gift, Paul wrote them this Epistle.

In the first two chapters we see the believers’ concern for Paul and Paul’s concern for the saints. According to [Philippians 1:7](#), Paul realized that

the believers in Philippi had him in their heart and that they were partakers of his grace. Paul went on to say that he longed after them all “in the inward parts of Christ Jesus” (1:8). Thus, there was a mutual care between the apostle and the believers.

Toward the end of chapter two, Paul speaks of sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to Philippi. Remarks about the sending of co-workers to visit the saints are usually found at the very end of Paul’s Epistles. This may indicate that Paul was planning to close this Epistle at the end of chapter two. Paul, however, was obviously burdened to write more. After he spoke of Timothy and Epaphroditus, his burden still was not discharged. Deep in his heart he was troubled by the Judaizers. I believe that this is the reason for the change of subject at the beginning of chapter three.

## REJOICING IN THE LORD

In Philippians 3:1 Paul says, “For the rest, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not irksome, and for you it is safe.” The Greek word rendered irksome also means wearisome, tedious, troublesome. Paul did not find it irksome or wearisome to write the same things to the saints.

Paul here charges the saints to rejoice in the Lord. To rejoice in the Lord is a safeguard, a security. For Paul to write the saints about rejoicing in the Lord was safe for them. Paul's use of the word "safe" points to the connection between [verses 1 and 2 of chapter three](#). There must have been a situation in Philippi which required a safeguard, some kind of protection. The situation Paul had in mind was the trouble caused by the Judaizers. Therefore, after telling the believers to rejoice in the Lord, he charges them to beware of the dogs, the evil workers, the concision ([v. 2](#)). The Greek word for beware means to keep a watchful eye ever upon. On the one hand, the apostle advises the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord; on the other hand, he warns them to beware of, to keep a watchful eye ever upon, the Judaizers.

## THE THREE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE RELIGIOUS JUDAIZERS

In [Philippians 3:2](#) Paul says, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision." Since there is no conjunction used between these clauses, they must refer to the same class of people. Dogs are unclean ([Lev. 11:4-8](#)), the workers are evil, and the concision

are those deserving contempt. (Concision, meaning mutilation, is a term of contempt, used in place of circumcision.) The “dogs” refer to the Judaizers. In nature they are unclean dogs, in behavior they are evil workers, and in religion they are the concision, people of shame. In such a book concerning the experience and enjoyment of Christ, the apostle warns the Gentile believers to be wary of such unclean, evil, and contemptible people.

## THE THREE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL BELIEVERS

In [Philippians 3:3](#) Paul continues, “For we are the circumcision, who serve by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Those who are the circumcision here are the New Testament believers, the ones genuinely circumcised by Christ’s crucifixion. They are absolutely different from the Judaizers. They serve as priests by the Spirit of God, not by the ordinances of law; they boast in Christ, not in the law; and they have no confidence in the flesh, but have their confidence in the Spirit.

In [verses 2 and 3](#) there is a threefold contrast: believers who serve by the Spirit of God

in contrast to the dogs; believers who boast in Christ in contrast to evil workers; and believers who have no confidence in the flesh in contrast to the concision. The Judaizers lived by their fallen nature, whereas the believers in Christ serve by the Spirit of God. Thus, the Spirit of God is in contrast to the nature of the “dogs.” The Judaizers did evil things and even boasted in them, whereas the true believers boast in Christ. They glory and rejoice in Him. As used here, the word “boast” implies not only boasting, but also rejoicing and glorying. Our boasting, glorying, and rejoicing are not in our outward deeds, not in our behavior or conduct, but in Christ alone. The Judaizers had confidence in the flesh, whereas the true believers in Christ have no confidence in the flesh.

The flesh in 3:3 comprises all that we are and have in our natural being. The fact that the Judaizers had confidence in their circumcision was a sign that their confidence was in their flesh. They trusted in their natural qualities and qualifications, not in the Spirit. Their confidence was in what they were by nature. They trusted in the fact that they were Jews. By contrast, Paul says strongly that we who believe in Christ do

not have any confidence in the flesh. Our confidence is wholly in the Lord.

What a contrast we see in [verses 2 and 3](#)! We serve by the Spirit of God, we boast in Christ, and we have confidence not in the flesh, but only in the Lord. Because we deny our old nature, we are the true circumcision. The denial of the flesh is the real circumcision, the true cutting off of the flesh as revealed in [Colossians 2:11](#).

## SAUL OF TARSUS AS A MODEL OF THE JUDAIZERS

According to [verses 4 through 6 of Philippians 3](#), Paul had been a model of the Judaizers: “Though I myself could have confidence also in the flesh; if any other man thinks to have confidence in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day; of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness which is in the law, become blameless.” When Paul used to be among the Judaizers, he had been very active and had many outstanding qualifications.

A former leading one among the Judaizers, Paul had more reason than others to have confidence in the flesh. In [Galatians 1:14](#) he tells

us that he “advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my race, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” In a very real sense, Paul had been a “top dog” among the Judaizers.

In [Philippians 3:5](#) Paul says that he was circumcised the eighth day, the day for a genuine Israelite to be circumcised ([Gen. 17:12](#)). This day distinguished him from the Ishmaelites and proselytes, who were circumcised later. Paul was a typical Jew, not a proselyte. This gave him ground to boast when he was a Judaizer.

Paul was also of the race of Israel, God’s called race, the genuine seed of Abraham ([Rom. 11:1](#); [2 Cor. 11:22](#)). He was not a descendant of the proselytes grafted into the race of God’s covenant.

Paul could also be confident in the fact that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. This was a lovely and faithful tribe, among whom was the royal city of Jerusalem with the temple of God ([Deut. 33:12](#)).

Paul also says that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents with Hebrew ancestry on both sides. Furthermore, his grandparents on both sides were Hebrews as well. Only such a one could say that

he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. A full-blooded Hebrew, he could boast that he was of pure Hebrew blood.

In [Philippians 3:5](#) Paul tells us that, as to the law, he was a Pharisee. The law here is the law of Moses respected by all orthodox Jews. As a Pharisee, Paul was a member of the strictest sect of the Jewish religion ([Acts 26:5; 23:6](#)), a sect exceedingly zealous for the law of Moses. The Pharisees were proud of their superior sanctity of life, devotion to God, and knowledge of the Scriptures.

Out of zeal for the law and Judaism, Paul persecuted the church. When Paul says in [Philippians 3:6](#), “as to zeal, persecuting the church,” he refers to zeal for the law of Moses and the Jewish religion ([Gal. 1:14](#)). Those Jews who persecuted the church were certainly among the leading ones in Judaism. No one could surpass them in their zeal. Paul boasted in his zeal in persecuting the church.

Finally, Paul says that “as to the righteousness which is in the law,” he was found, or proven, blameless. This, of course, was in the eyes of man according to man’s judgment. In the eyes of God, according to His righteous law, no flesh is blameless ([Gal. 2:16](#)).

Paul presented this list of qualifications for the purpose of showing the Philippians that they should not have any trust in the Judaizers. Paul once had been a leading Judaizer, but a radical change had taken place in him. Now he was very different from what he had been before. This was a strong indication to the believers in Philippi not to follow the Judaizers.

Paul's word in [Philippians 3:1-6](#) is also related to the experience of Christ. Had Paul remained a Judaizer, it would have been impossible for him to experience Christ. But because he became another kind of person, one who served by the Spirit of God, boasted in Christ Jesus, and had no confidence in the flesh, he could enjoy Christ and experience Him in a very rich way. We also should be those who have no confidence in the flesh, in our natural ability, or in our heritage or tradition. Rather, we should be those who serve God by the Spirit, who boast in Christ, and who put no trust in the flesh. If we are such persons, we shall have the genuine experience of Christ.

Although we are not Judaizers, in principle we may actually be the same as the Judaizers were. Even though we have been regenerated, we may continue to live in our fallen nature, boast in what we do in the flesh, and have confidence

in our natural qualifications. We have pointed out that in [Philippians 3:2](#) the dogs, the evil workers, and the concision refer respectively to the fallen nature, deeds, and religion. If we continue to live according to our old nature, boast in what we do in ourselves, and have confidence in our qualifications, we shall be the same as the Judaizers. As a result, we shall cause problems in the church, and we shall not be able to progress in the experience of Christ. In order to experience Christ, we must serve by the Spirit of God, not by our fallen nature; boast in Christ, not in our own doings; and not trust our natural qualifications, but trust only in the Lord. This is a secret to the experience of Christ.

We may consider within ourselves that we are different from the Judaizers. However, we may still live in our old nature, boast in our deeds, and have trust in our natural qualifications. I do not have the assurance that most of the saints fully condemn their fallen nature. Instead, many may still live, move, and act according to the “dog” nature. Furthermore, to some extent at least, we may still boast in our deeds, considering ourselves intelligent and capable. Moreover, we also may have confidence in our flesh, in our natural qualifications.

It is important that we all be deeply and personally touched by these verses in [Philippians 3](#). We need the Lord's light to shine on us concerning our nature, our deeds, and our confidence in the flesh. If we are enlightened by the Lord, we shall confess that although we have been regenerated to become children of God with the divine life and nature, we still live too much in our "dog" nature. Yes, we have a right to proclaim the fact that we are children of God. But if this declaration is contrasted with our daily experience, it may be little more than a doctrine to us. One day, when the light shines on you concerning this, you will want to prostrate yourself before the Lord and confess how unclean your nature is. Then you will condemn everything you do by your fallen nature. You will see that in the eyes of God whatever is done in the fallen nature is evil and worthy of condemnation. Formerly, we boasted in our deeds and qualifications. But the time will come when instead of boasting in the flesh with its qualifications, we shall condemn it. Then we shall boast in Christ alone, realizing that in ourselves we have absolutely no ground for boasting.

Only when we have been enlightened by God shall we be able to say truly that we have no trust

in our natural qualifications, ability, or intelligence. Only then shall we be able to testify that our confidence is wholly in the Lord. After we are enlightened in this way, we shall be able to experience Christ. I hope that many among us will see this light and turn from a mere objective understanding of these verses to the subjective enjoyment and experience of Christ.

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