

From Religion to Rest

Sunday, January 8th, 1989

Philippians 3:1-14

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, for which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, An Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as thought I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting these things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

I've got a most interesting topic today. I'm going to speak to you on this subject: "FROM RELIGION TO REST." I'm talking about religion, it's activities, it's endeavors, it's wheel spinning, and its uncertainty from religion to rest to peace.

If you are interested in this subject, I want you to open your Bible to Philippians Chapter Three. I am going to be dealing individually with each verse. Turn to Philippians 3: verses 1 through 14.

I do not know of a Chapter in God's Word which has a clearer message for this particular religious day, like Philippians Chapter Three. I do not know of a Chapter in God's Word that has a clearer message for this day and a Chapter of which is most applicable to this day than Philippians Chapter Three. This will help you if you are taking notes. Write these three things down.

We have in verses 1, 2 and 3, Paul's exhortation, or advice. We have secondly, in verses 4, through 7, Paul's experience. Then, in verses 8 through 14, we have Paul's

expectation. That is my outline. We have Paul's exhortation, Paul's experience and Paul's expectation.

Now, here is my prayer. This is what I am asking God. I am asking the Lord, the Spirit of God today if He will anoint this particular message and make it a special blessing to everyone who hears it. The poet put it this way and I know it to be true:

"We have listened to the preacher and truth by Him has been shown. But, we need a greater Teacher from the everlasting throne, because application is the work of God alone."

I can tell the truth straightly, Scripturally, and Biblically. It will reach these ears, but it will never reach a man's heart, unless God by His Spirit reveals it to the heart.

Let's look at verse 1 in Philippians 3: In Paul's exhortation, he says; "*Finally my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.*" This is the theme and watchword of every believer. "*Rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ.*" He is my joy, He is my song; He is my cause for rejoicing.

This rejoicing is not in myself, but is in Him. I have no cause to rejoice except in Christ. I rejoice in Him. He is my only cause of rejoicing. He is my source of joy. He is the fountain of joy. He said, "*That My joy may be in you, that your joy may be fulfilled.*"

I rejoice in the greatness of His person. I rejoice in His Incarnation. I'm so glad that He came to earth. I rejoice in His Righteousness. I'm so glad that I don't have to look to my own righteousness, aren't you?

I rejoice in His Atonement. I rejoice in His sin offering. I rejoice in His ascension. I rejoice in His intercession. I rejoice in His return. I rejoice in His presence.

Paul said, "*We can even rejoice in afflictions.*" We can rejoice in our trials knowing that they come from Him. "*We know that they are working together for His glory and our good.*" In fact, David said, "*Rejoice in the Lord at all times. Let His praise continually be in your mouth.*"

So, that is the first exhortation or word of advice that Paul gives to us, the believers. He says, "*Rejoice in the Lord.*" You're not going to find much outside of Christ in which to rejoice. There is nothing in you. You rejoice in Him.

Then, he says this in continuing his exhortation; *“To write the same things to you, to Me is not grievous or tiresome, but for you it is profitable.”* They must have said about Paul what they say about me. They say of me, “Well; if you have heard Mahan once, you’ve heard all that he has to say. He preaches the same gospel all the time.”

That is what Paul said he did. He preached the same things and *“To write the same things, to declare the same gospel is not tiresome to me. I will not only rejoice in the person and work of Christ, I will rejoice in the gospel over and over and over again. It is never tiresome.”*

I will tell you this, he said; *“Not only is it not tiresome to me it is profitable for you.”* The reason is because hearing the gospel over and over again will keep your mind on Christ. Hearing the gospel over and over again, will keep you from self-righteousness. Hearing the gospel over and over again, will keep you from errors of Spirit.

How can you hear of His love and not love? How can you hear of His mercy and not show mercy? How can you hear continually of His grace and not be gracious? How can you hear over and over again how He was rich and for your sakes He became poor, and not be generous? Do you see what I am saying?

Hearing the gospel over and over again will keep you from false doctrine. You won’t be susceptible to every wind of doctrine that passes over your head and comes near you. So, Paul says; *“Rejoice in the Lord. To preach and write and declare the same gospel to you, the gospel of Jesus Christ, over and over again, I will never get tired of it and it is profitable for you.”*

Then, He says, *“Beware of dogs; beware of evil workers; beware of the concision.”* What is he talking about? He is talking about false preachers. He calls them, *“dogs.”* That is what Isaiah calls them; he calls them *“dumb dogs.”* That is what you call dumb watchdogs that don’t bark.

They are greedy dogs that care only for themselves.

He calls them *“Evil workers of iniquity.”* That is what Christ called them at the Judgment in Matthew 7. They said, *“We have preached in your name. We did many wonderful works; we cast out devils.”* He said, *“I never knew you.”* These are workers of evil, workers of iniquity.

Beware of these dogs. Beware of these evil workers. Beware of these workers of iniquity. Beware of the concision, the circumcisers, and the false preachers who glory in

the flesh. They glory in numbers. They glory in outward show. They glory in vain shows of the flesh.

They glory in these things. They glory in vastness, greatness, how many there are and they glory in how much, how big, and how long they are. He said, *“Rejoice in the Lord.”* Beware of these fellows, now. Don’t be taken in by them.

He says, *“We are the true circumcision; we are the true Israel; we are the true Sons of God.”* He gives in verse 3, three marks of those who are who true preachers, who are true Israel and who are true Sons of God. He says, *“Here are the three marks of those people who belong to God, and who glory in God, who are servants of Christ.”*

First of all, they worship God in Spirit. They worship God in their heart and not in form. I’m not talking about uniforms, ceremony and processions. Worship is not in tradition, candle burning and fleshly displays. That is not how they worship God.

They don’t have to all stand at the same time, or sit at the same time, or hold up your hands at the same time, or say the same things. It’s not in eating at the same time or forming a procession. They worship God in heart wherever they are, with whoever they are.

They worship God in Spirit. God is a Spirit. God is Spirit. *“They that worship God, worship Him in Spirit.”* It’s not in form and tradition, fleshly displays and all these sorts of things. This is not worshipping God. Worshipping God is when my heart adorns God, when my heart praises God, when my heart bows to God.

Second, not only do they worship God in Spirit, *“They rejoice in Jesus Christ”* and in Christ alone. *“He is their Wisdom. He is their Sanctification and He is their Righteousness, and He is their Redemption.”* They rejoice in Christ, they look to Christ and rest in Christ. They trust in Christ, and have faith in Christ.

Thirdly, *“They have no confidence in the flesh,”* none at all. What flesh are we talking about here when it says, *“They have no confidence in the flesh.”* We are not saying that we don’t have any confidence in any man living. I do. I have confidence in my wife, I have confidence in my son, and I have confidence in my daughter and folks at the church. They are people of their word.

He is talking about putting no confidence concerning your relationship with God, as far as the forgiveness of your sins, as far as your acceptance with God; put no spiritual confidence in the flesh.

Don't put confidence in your works of righteousness. Don't put any confidence in your religious feelings, and your religious emotions, or your religious professions. Don't put any confidence in the morality of this flesh. This flesh is not moral; this flesh is not spiritual. This flesh is carnal and it is fleshly.

Could my tears forever flow?
Could my zeal no languor know?

These for sin could never atone,
God must save and God alone.

So, when Paul says that this is the mark of a true believer, he will worship God in Spirit. He will not worship Him in tradition, form, ceremony and outward show. He won't call Him, "Lord God with his lips." His heart loves God. He rejoices only in Christ and has no confidence in any religious experiences, duties, works, doings, or feelings to appease a Holy God, or anyone else's doings. Do you see what I am saying?

This is a good exhortation. Paul says, "*Rejoice in the Lord, keep to the gospel.*" Don't you put any confidence in the flesh as far as God is concerned. The Scripture says, "*In the flesh no man can please God. In the flesh dwelleth no good thing.*" Christ said, "*The flesh profiteth nothing; all flesh is grass.*"

Isaiah exhorting the preacher says, "*Comfort my people and cry out.*" And the servants said, "*What shall I cry? Cry, He said; somebody cry.*" He said, "*What shall I cry? What do they need to hear?*" There are two things. "*All flesh is grass and behold your God.*" That is the two-fold message from the pulpit.

There is nothing good in man and all good is in God. There is no light in man; God is Light. There is no truth in the flesh; truth is in God. There is no power in the flesh; all power is of God. "*He is able to save. All flesh is grass and behold your God.*" Isn't that a good exhortation?

Look at verse 4; let's look at Paul's experience. He had just said, "*Have no confidence in the flesh.*" He is speaking here of (religious) flesh. We can't have any confidence or peace before God in our religious works, deeds and duties.

We can certainly have some confidence in men as far as men and women are concerned. Many people are true to their word or they will die trying to be true to their word. They

will die trying to fulfill their promises. You can believe them. It would be an awful situation if you couldn't believe anybody.

I am talking about as far as God is concerned. *"Before God there is none good, no not one."* Before God, there is *"None righteous, no not one."* Before God, there is *"None that understandeth."* Before God, *"The flesh profiteth nothing."*

He just said, "Have no confidence in the flesh." All right, he asks them in verse 4; *"Do any of you boast in your flesh? If any man think he has whereof to glory in the flesh, read it there, 'I more.'* Do any of you glory in your religious works, your traditions, in your denominations, in your heritage, in your profession, in your righteousness, in your gifts, your abilities, or your talents?

Do you have confidence in your old profession, in your old experience? Do you have confidence in your religious background? Do you think that you can bring these things before God and say, "God, I went to church all of my life. My father and mother were Christian people and they raised me right. I never did do this, and never did do that, or the other."

I heard a preacher on TV a few nights ago and he said that he had never tasted whiskey, he had never tasted wine, and he had never smoked a cigarette. Do you think these things are going to have any weight with God?

Do you have any confidence in your flesh? Paul said, "If you do, than I have more to boast of than you ever thought of." He said, "I was born of the tribe of Benjamin; I was a Hebrew of Hebrews. I was a Pharisee and I was a member of the Sanhedrin. I graduated from the leading seminary of my day. I went to the school of Gamaliel. I was zealous for the law and for the truth of the Old Testament. I was blameless before the law. I was the most respected, moral, religious teacher in my whole nation."

So, there you have it! But, look at the next verse, verse 7; "But, all of these things that were so important, all of these things that were gain to me, I thought they were good. I thought they were good and I thought they were gain. All of this flesh and all of these duties, all of this self-righteousness I found to be utterly worthless, lost in the light of God's Holiness and God's Justice."

I found that these professions, experiences, gifts, doings and righteousness; *"I found them rather than helping me, they were a stumbling block."* They were keeping me from God's mercy. They were keeping me from God's Messiah. They were keeping me away from Jesus Christ and the true Righteousness of God.

So, I heaped all of these things together, these big, great and powerful, important aspects of my whole life in every area of religion. I heaped them all together and I said, *“I count them loss for the Excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.”*

I will tell you this, I have found that in almost 40 years of preaching the gospel, there are people who come to see, and there are those who come to understand through the Word of God. By the power of the Spirit, they quit playing the game of religion. They quit going through the motions, they quit looking back to old experiences that have stayed old.

They have quit trying to find peace and works of self righteousness. People come to see through the Word of God the awesome, infinite Holiness of God and the righteousness of God. People who come to see through the Word of God, see the awful, utter ruin of humanity who are spiritually dead. They come to see the inability of this flesh, (at its best state) to please a Holy God.

People come to see the glorious gift of God’s grace, the unspeakable gift of God’s love. They come to see Christ Jesus in His Person and work, in His obedience and death, in His suffering and sacrifice. They come to see Him in His Mediatory Intercession. All who see Him turn their backs on their own traditions and on their old experiences. They turn their backs on their old religion and on their old works and *“Count all those things but loss. that they may win Christ and be found in Him.”* It is always true.

Our repentance not only includes repentance for sin, but it includes a repentance of dead works and repentance of our righteous rags. We turn loose of all of our idols, and return only to Christ.

That is what Paul says and that is his experience. He is saying, *“We are the true Israel, who worship God in Spirit and heart, who rejoice only in Christ who have no confidence in anything.”* That is anything identified with or related to the flesh where God is concerned, *“no confidence.”*

Do you have any confidence in the flesh? Are you going to try to go back and prove that you are saved by something that happened 30 years ago? Are you relying on a feeling, an experience, or a profession? Are you going to go back to when you were a preacher, or a teacher, or Sunday school teacher, or choir leader?

Are you going to go back to an experience down in the woods behind the barn, under the shed, at front of a church or at the mourner’s bench? Are you going to try to bring that

before Almighty God as your hope for eternity? Are you going to go back to see the fact that you never did this or you never did that? Are you trying to say that you lived right?

Are you going to bring those fleshly, rotten rags before God as your covering? He said, *"You can put all of yours together and I will top every one of them. I was this, that and the other. "I was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, and the law. I was before the law, blameless."* Those things that were gain that I held to, that I looked to, that I rested in, that I built upon, *"I counted them loss, that I may win Christ."*

You just think about that. You might say, "But preacher, I've given my life to religion." Paul was 40 years old. He had not only given his life, but he had given his soul. He killed for what he believed. He had blood dripping from his hands because of what he believed.

All right, let's look at his expectation. He said, "Yea, doubtless, without doubt, I count all these things but loss." He's talking about his family, his friends, his future, his works, his deeds and his efforts. He is also talking about his tradition, his learning and his heritage. He is even talking about his profession, his experiences and his morality.

My friends, if you want me to make it stronger, he said, *"I'm not only counting these things but loss but I count them but dung, (garbage and rubbish) that I may win Christ and be found in Him."*

At one time, Paul felt he could find favor with God, by who he was and what he did. That is right! Oh, but when God revealed His Holiness, Paul said; *"I died."* When Paul saw his own sin, the sin of his religion, and where he lived, he saw the worthlessness of all his deeds, of all these years.

He saw Christ as His perfect righteousness. He saw Christ as His redemption, Christ as his sanctification, and saw Christ as the fulfillment of all God's requirements. Paul said, *"I renounce everything I have ever done, ever said, or ever given or ever claimed to be, I renounce it. I count it but dung."*

He lost ceremonial bondage, and gained Christ's freedom. He lost the false peace, a phony peace and he gained real peace. He lost pretended glory, and he gained eternal glory.

Do you know where all the fullness of God dwelleth? Do you know where all the fullness of God dwelleth? It is not in your water baptism, it is not in your mourner's bench, it is not in your preacher's hand, and it is not in your religious denomination.

Do you know where all the fullness of God dwelleth, all the fullness of His love, the mercy of His grace, of His forgiveness, of His power, of His Deity, of His Kingdom? *“All fullness dwelleth in Christ and you are complete in Him.”* That is as plain as I can make it.

Let me give you something here. Here is Paul’s expectation. In these verses, Paul declares that he has three goals. This man was wrapped in religion. This man was wrapped in the false rags of religious tradition. This man gave his very life to religion, morality, laws, do’s and don’ts, the misery of all that religious tradition.

God broke the shackles and God set him free in Christ. God brought him to the Redeemer. He made him a new creature in Christ.

Now he loved God from the heart. Now he served God, not for reward, and not out of fear for he loved the Lord. He had three goals. When he was awakened to the Holiness of God and saw Christ as his righteousness, he said, “I’ve got three goals.”

Look at it! First of all, *“That I may win Christ and be found in Him.”* That is my goal. *“Not having my own righteousness which is of the law.”* The law does nothing but expose my corruption and confusion, yours too if we get a good look at it. So, *“I want to win Christ and I want to be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which is by the faith of Christ and the obedience of Christ and the faithfulness of Christ.”*

Second, *“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrected life.”* You might say, “Didn’t Paul know Christ? Oh, yes! What is he saying here? He is saying that he wants to know Him better.

I get the idea that some people walk down an aisle, make a profession, accept Jesus and then they say, “Good bye Lord, see you in heaven; I am all fixed up now.” Paul wanted to learn of Christ and to know Christ. He wanted to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. He said, “I want to know Him; I seek after Him. I want to know something about the power of His life, of His resurrected life, of His glorified life.”

Christ laid our sins aside and died for them. He came out of the tomb, in the power of God, in a glorified body. Paul said, “I want to know something about the power of that resurrected life. I want to know something about the fellowship of His sufferings. I want to be counted worthy to suffer for His sake. I want to bare in my body the marks, the scars of the Lord Jesus Christ”

I don't want to sit on the sideline and watch others engage in this battle of truth, and this battle for the glory of God. I want to be right there in the middle of it. I want to know the fellowship of His saints. I want to walk with Him, like Enoch of old. That is my goal, "*To win Christ and be found in Him.*" This is to know Him.

Do you have a friend that you have known for two, three, four or five months? When you have known him for five years, will you know him better? Will you walk closer? You will, if he is a real friend.

That is the way that Paul is talking about Christ. "I want to know Him better and I want to know the power of His resurrected life and I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings."

Do you know his third goal, "*That I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead?*" He said, "I haven't already attained; I am still in the flesh, I'm not perfect.

You know, these people who claim to be without sin and claim to be perfect never read God's Word. Paul said, "I'm not perfect." He also said, "*I haven't laid hold, apprehended, laid hold of upon that of which I have apprehended of Christ.*" Nevertheless, he said; "*Forgetting those things which are behind, I press forward toward the mark and the prize of the high calling of Christ my Lord.*"

Those are my goals. Did you notice that he didn't mention a thing about a crown or a reward in heaven? He said, "I want to win Christ, know Christ, and rise from the dead in His glory."