



A Spiritual Testimony

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Even though the Sunday School lesson quarterly indicates the study of verses seven through sixteen, we will instead cover the natural unit of thought expression, which includes the first six verses of chapter three as well. Again the most natural division of the biblical language text that is followed by most printed Greek texts is 3:1-11 and 3:12-4:1. The first segment is subdivided into 3:1 and 3:2-11. Given this rather universally followed division of thought, the way the lesson quarterly has the text divided up doesn't make a lot of sense and risks a proof-texting approach by taking a segment from the first division, vv. 7-11, and another segment from the second section, vv. 12-16, and then combining them as though they create a nature unit of scripture text. Thought progression does exist between vv. 7-11 and vv. 12-16, but by lifting them out of their context and re-contextualizing them, an illegitimate meaning can be easily ascribed to these verses, as well as loosing important elements of meaning that come from the natural context. Our approach will be to avoid this artificial reconstruction of the thought structure of the scripture passage.

I. **Context**

Again emphasis will be placed first on understanding both the historical and literary settings for these verses of scripture. Once that is established, then the analysis of the words of the passage can be more accurately studied.

a. **Historical**

The external history of the book of Philippians has already been treated in the two previous studies of Philippians and thus will not be repeated here. For details on this, refer to either of those two lessons: "Living in Joy" ([Phil. 1:1-30](#)), or "Living Like Christ" ([Phil 2:1-11](#)). Both are located under [Bible Studies](#) at [Cranfordville.com](#).

The internal historical aspects of 3:1-16 center mainly on the identification of those people that Paul called 'evil workers' in 3:2 (NRSV): "[Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!](#)" Here, he alluded to individuals evidently inside the Christian community whom he considered to be dangerous teachers of false doctrine about the Gospel. Later in 3:17-19, Paul referred to individuals he considered also to be dangerous (NRSV): "[17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.](#)" These people are labeled 'enemies of the cross of Christ' by Paul. The question that has been extensively discussed by New Testament scholars for several centuries is whether these references indicate two separate groups of people or do they both characterize the same group with slightly different perspectives.

Leander Keck in the Philippians discussion of the *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* has a helpful discussion of the viewpoints:

Against whom is this polemic addressed? Clearly vss. 2-11 are attacking Jews and vss. 17-21 oppose libertines. Most commentators, unable to reconcile these descriptions, have assumed there must be 2 different groups, the 2nd being Gentiles belonging to some sort of religious movement with libertine ethics. Many of them have taken vs. 3 to indicate that the Jews were non-Christian but have judged from Paul's distress in vs. 18 that the Gentiles must be Christians. What is not obvious, however, is which of these 2 groups Paul has in mind in vss. 12-16. More important, nowhere does he give any indication of turning from one group to another. The structure of the passage gives no clear evidence of 2 groups, and it reads more naturally as a unified polemic against a single, though complex, front.

Those who see a single front, however, do not agree on its identity. Some see it as made up of Judaizers — Christian Jews who demanded that all Christians become practicing Jews in order to be the Messiah's people (see Intro. to Gal. and comment on Acts 15:1). A serious flaw in this theory is that such ardent proponents of the Jewish law could scarcely be described as libertines.

Others maintain that the polemic is aimed throughout at non-Christian Jews and reflects bitter tensions that had already developed between church and synagogue. Since the evidence is that there were virtually no Jews in Philippi (see Intro.) adopting this view would require us to assume that Letter B was addressed to some other city — which is not impossible, for there is no specific reference to the Phil. church or, for that matter, to Paul's imprisonment in ch. 3. It is questionable, however, whether vss. 17-21 would describe loyal members of the synagogue.

A 3rd view, which seems more probable, is that the opponents Paul is writing about were gnosticized Jews who had become Christians — part of the same movement that penetrated his churches in Corinth and Asia Minor (see Intros. to Cor., Gal., Col.). Gnosticism, as known from its serious threat to the church in the 2nd cent., was a syncretistic philosophy which viewed all matter as evil and thus saw the soul as suffering imprisonment in the body—a plight from which it could be saved only through knowledge (Greek *gnosis*) of the self. The ethics resulting from this view of the body tended either toward ascetic efforts to control the imprisoning body or toward libertine excesses intended to demonstrate that the body was really irrelevant to a saved soul. In this ch. Paul may have in mind both these ethical consequences and oppose them both on the basis of God's grace.

Every reconstruction of Paul's opponents is conjectural, of course, since he did not need to describe them to his readers.

Regardless of which conclusion we draw regarding the 'opponents' that Paul addresses in chapter three, the fact remains that he perceived the presence of some with connections to the Christian community who had serious misunderstandings of the Gospel message. Their viewpoint needed countering and Paul attempted to do just that in chapter three.

b. Literary

Chapter three falls in the body section of the letter, but its literary setting in the letter has occasioned considerable discussion during the modern era of NT interpretation. Again, Prof. Keck's summation helps to set the stage:

That ch. 3 interrupts the flow of thought and changes the mood is recognized by all interpreters and has convinced many that Phil. incorporates 2 or more separate letters of Paul (see Intro.). If this is true, Letter B begins with either 3:1b or 3:2 (see below on 3:1) and continues at least through 4:1 and probably farther. In this passage Paul's pastoral concern issues in a polemic against positions which he considers as alternatives to Christianity even though they may be put forward in the name of Christ.

Even though the postulation of Philippians as a composite of two previously written letters is held by some NT scholars -- in part going back to the comments of Polycarp in the second century AD -- it is not an essential view. Many other NT scholars will argue convincingly for the unity of Philippians, i.e., that it was written at one time as a single letter.

But the fact does remain that the material in 3:1-4:1 does represent a shift of thought in the letter, somewhat like a parenthetical interruption of the train of thought. Psychologically, that Paul could have shifted to a dominantly negative tone here when positive tones surround this material is not hard to understand, given his love for the church and concern that they continue on the proper track of Christian growth and service. Very naturally we want to protect those we love from being deceived about important issues.

The internal structure of this material is relatively easy to understand. The standard text division fol-

lowed by most printed Greek texts of the NT is as follows: 3:1-11 and 3:12-4:1. But these two sections subdivide into multiple units of thought: 3:1; 2-11; 12-16; 17-21, 4:1.

Since our focus is on 3:1-16, we will limit our detailed study to those verses.

II. Message

In these sixteen verses Paul first encourages the Philippians to rejoice (3:1), and then he begins a severe critique of some who were opposing the apostolic gospel that was the foundation of his preaching ministry (3:2-16). Significant autobiographical material (3:3-16) forms the core of his critique as an appeal to the Philippians to understand who he is and how God has worked in his life.

a Rejoice in the Lord, v. 1

The Greek New Testament

3:1> Τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί μου, χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ. τὰ αὐτὰ γράφειν ὑμῖν ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐκ ὀκνηρόν, ὑμῖν δὲ ἀσφαλές.

NRSV

1 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard.

NLT

1 Whatever happens, dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord give you joy. I never get tired of telling you this. I am doing this for your own good.

Comments:

The beginning words, Τὸ λοιπόν, can be taken to signal the conclusion (the Conclusio) of a letter (cf. [2 Cor. 13:11](#)). They also can serve to indicate a transition to a new topic (cf. [1 Thess. 4:1](#); [2 Thess. 3:1](#)). Thus, the NRSV translation above, “Finally,” is correct but must be taken in the latter sense of the term. Paul is moving to a new topic that is toward the end of the body of the letter. This particular spelling of the Greek word surfaces again in [4:8](#) with a similar meaning. The context seems to indicate a summing up of the preceding discussion that marks a transition into the next topic.

Paul thus concludes the discussion up to this point in the letter with an admonition to rejoice. This admonition occurs three times in Philippians: 2:18; 3:1; and 4:4. In [2:18](#) it stands as the climax of Paul’s discussion of living as faithful Christians (NRSV): “[17 But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you— 18 and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.](#)” In [4:4](#) it stands as the header admonition for a series of encouragements Paul gave to the Philippians (NRSV): “[Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice](#)”. As such, this word stands as a major emphasis of the entire letter. The present tense imperative mood form of the Greek verb underscores joy as an ongoing experience, rather than just as a momentary occurrence.

The second sentence in verse one asserts Paul’s delight in writing to the Philippians. Exactly what “the same things” alludes to is not real clear. Gerald Hawthorne in the Philippians volume of the *Word Biblical Commentary* (p. 124) takes the stance that “these things” refer to his repeated admonition to joy (2:18 and 3:1). Thus, the point is that adoption of a posture of joy and rejoicing in the Lord is an important safeguard against the ills that could derail the Philippian Christians. Other NT scholars will, however, take “the same things” to refer to either the subsequent warnings (vv. 2ff) or perhaps to some warning found in a now lost letter of Paul to the Philippians. The point of this interpretation is that Paul found it important to warn the Philippians about spiritual and doctrinal dangers facing the Philippian Christians.

What can we learn from these two sentences? Most importantly is the principle of joy in our Christian life. God desires his people to be a happy people. Joy and rejoicing are important traits for believers, as [the 56 uses](#) of the word “joy” in the NRSV of just the NT indicate as well as [the 40 uses](#) of the word ‘rejoice.’ To be sure, this emotion and its expression especially during worship needs to be genuine and not artificial. W.T. Conner, who taught theology at SWBTS during the 1920s through the 1940s, had a saying about joyous worship: “I don’t mind someone’s cup overflowing; I just don’t want them shaking the cup to make it overflow.” Artificially created joy turns worship into a shallow spiritual pep rally. The destructive impact of this is substantial. Careful thinking is diminished if not forgotten. Little or no genuine spiritual growth takes place. Christianity then comes to the place of having to have frequent ‘revitalizations’ through these spiritual pep rally experiences. From my observation of over forty years in ministry, ethical behavior frequently takes a back seat to these superficially induced moments of joy. Paul, however, saw genuine joy as an

important aspect and spiritually nourishing part of Christian living. We could learn much from him here.

b. Be careful, vv. 2-16

The Greek New Testament

〈3:2〉 Βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν. 〈3:3〉 ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἐσμεν ἡ περιτομή, οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες, 〈3:4〉 καίπερ ἐγὼ ἔχων πεποιθήσιν καὶ ἐν σαρκί. εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἄλλος πεποιθέναι ἐν σαρκί, ἐγὼ μᾶλλον· 〈3:5〉 περιτομῇ ὀκταήμερος, ἐκ γένους Ἰσραὴλ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος, 〈3:6〉 κατὰ ζήλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος. 〈3:7〉 [ἀλλὰ] ἅτινα ἦν μοι κέρδη, ταῦτα ἤγημαι διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν ζημίαν. 〈3:8〉 ἀλλὰ μενοῦνγε καὶ ἡγοῦμαι πάντα ζημίαν εἶναι διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου, δι' ὃν τὰ πάντα ἐζημιώθην, καὶ ἡγοῦμαι σκύβαλα, ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω 〈3:9〉 καὶ εὕρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει, 〈3:10〉 τοῦ γνῶναι αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ καὶ [τὴν] κοινωνίαν [τῶν] παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ, 〈3:11〉 εἴ πως καταντήσω εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν.

〈3:12〉 Οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, διώκω δὲ εἰ καὶ καταλάβω, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ κατελήμφην ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ]. 〈3:13〉 ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ ἐμαυτὸν οὐ λογίζομαι κατεληφέναι· ἐν δέ, τὰ μὲν ὀπίσω ἐπιλανθανόμενος τοῖς δὲ ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος, 〈3:14〉 κατὰ σκοπὸν διώκω εἰς τὸ βραβεῖον τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. 〈3:15〉

NRSV

2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh — 4 even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what

NLT

2 Watch out for those dogs, those wicked men and their evil deeds, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. 3 For we who worship God in the Spirit are the only ones who are truly circumcised. We put no confidence in human effort. Instead, we boast about what Christ Jesus has done for us. 4 Yet I could have confidence in myself if anyone could. If others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! 5 For I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real Jew if there ever was one! What's more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. 6 And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault. 7 I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ 9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. 10 As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with him, sharing

Ὅσοι οὖν τέλειοι, τοῦτο φρονῶμεν· καὶ εἴ τι ἑτέρως φρονεῖτε, καὶ τοῦτο ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἀποκαλύψει· <3:16> πλὴν εἰς ὃ ἐφθάσαμεν, τῷ αὐτῷ στοιχεῖν.

Philippi valley
to east of the acropolis



lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. 16 Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

in his death, 11 so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead!

12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14 I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven. 15 I hope all of you who are mature Christians will agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. 16 But we must be sure to obey the truth we have learned already.

Comments:

These verses, 2-16, are arranged around the foundational warning given in verse two. Notice the threefold repetition of the warning 'beware' (Βλέπετε). Each verb object characterizes the dangerous people in a distinctive way: as 'dogs,' as 'evil workers,' and as 'those who mutilate the flesh.' There is an intentional phonetical play on sounds in the Greek text with the letter kappa: κύνας (dogs); κακοὺς ἐργάτας (evil workers); κατατομήν (flesh choppers). This adds intensity to the admonition, but is impossible to reproduce in English translation.

The sarcastic use of the [image of dogs](#) was a frequent Jewish term of contempt for Gentiles, since dogs -- particularly wild dogs -- were viewed as unclean animals with whom a faithful Jew avoided contact. Paul uses this image to characterize these dangerous people in Philippi, who ironically had most likely a Jewish heritage. Next, these people are characterized as 'evil workers' (κακοὺς ἐργάτας). Given the Jewish preoccupation with Torah obedience, perceived as workers of good before God, the characterization takes on additional sting. These people are doing the opposite of obeying God. The third characterization is that of mutilators of the flesh (τὴν κατατομήν). This is a sarcastic reference to the Jewish practice of circumcision of the male. [Circumcision](#) in certain strains of ancient Judaism had become necessary for one's salvation, because it identified one as belonging to the covenant community of Israel. For Paul the external physical act had no spiritual value for the Christian. What mattered was the inner identification with Christ that in [Rom. 2:28-29](#) he labeled as circumcision of the heart (NRSV): "28 For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. 29 Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God." But these dangerous people at Philippi were insisting on the Jewish tradition as an essential part of salvation. These three characterizations are so general in nature that it is impossible for us to know with precision who they were.

The basis for these admonitions is set forth by the causal conjunction 'For' (γάρ) in verse three. That defense runs through verse sixteen. It takes an interesting twist, in that through these verses Paul asserts

the superiority of his Christian experience over the viewpoint of these dangerous people. These verses stand as a testimony of Paul's religious experience, first as a Pharisee (vv. 4b-6) and then as a Christian (vv. 7-16). His Christian emphasis is centered on two things: (1) the superiority of the knowledge of Christ over against fleshly achievements as a Pharisee (vv. 7-11), and (2) the continued need for Christian growth (vv. 12-16).

In this approach, Paul did not choose to attack the inadequacies of his opponents' teaching, as he did in Galatians. Nor does he attack their character, as will be done in the pastoral letters of 1-2 Timothy and Titus. Rather, he decided to contrast the superiority of his experience over against the implicit inadequacy of their religious experience. One important principle to be learned here is to match your strategy with the individual situation being addressed. On some occasions, one approach is the best, but at other times different approaches are more appropriate.

The superiority of Paul's religious experience is directly stated in verse three and includes the Philippian readers -- the significance of the "we" verb frame (NLT): "we who worship God in the Spirit are the only ones who are truly circumcised. We put no confidence in human effort. Instead, we boast about what Christ Jesus has done for us." The circumcision that ultimately matters is the inward mark of being God's child. Believers in Christ are those who genuinely worship God through the Spirit's leadership. Instead of boasting about fleshly achievements for God -- a part of the false religious orientation -- believers take their pride in the achievements of Christ for them. No confidence in fleshly accomplishments is the order of the day. Thus Paul asserted the superiority of authentic Christian experience over that being advocated by his opponents. The Philippian readers had participated in such, and thus they had no need of anything else from an alternative approach to religious commitment.

Tacked to the end of Paul's devaluing of fleshly achievements is a proviso indicating that he did have some basis for bragging about fleshly accomplishments during his Pharisee days. In verses five and six he lists seven (number not an accident) fleshly accomplishments that could comprise bragging rights: (1) properly circumcised on the eighth day after birth; (2) born in the covenant people of Israel; (3) born of the tribe of Benjamin (one of the two tribes of the southern kingdom); (4) an outstanding Jew who achieved above average things; (5) in regard to Torah obedience a member of the Pharisees who were considered the most devoted to observing God's law; (6) an extraordinarily devoted Pharisee who persecuted heretics; (7) one who lived so righteously that he could claim to be blameless by divine law. These represent unusual levels of religious commitment to God, and are similar to Paul's earlier declaration to the Galatians (1:13-14; NRSV): "13 You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. 14 I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors."

In verses seven through eleven, however, he debunks all of these fleshly achievements in favor of the knowledge of Christ. First, these pre-Christian achievements, "whatever gains I had," he now counts as liabilities, "loss," (ζημίαν) rather than credits, "gain," (κέρδη). In fact, he further castigates these accomplishments as worthy nothing more than "rubbish" (σκύβαλα). The Greek word means 'manure.' The backdrop here is final judgment before God. When the Pharisee contemplated that day, his concern was to make certain that the credit side of the divine ledger, his good works, far outweighed the debit side of the ledger, his disobedience. (I'm using credit/debit in the popular sense of the terms, rather than with the technical accounting meanings.) But now as a Christian, Paul came to the conclusion that all those 'good deeds' in reality fell on the debit side of God's accounting scale. The credit side contained only one thing: the accomplishments of Christ for believers as their Redeemer. Thus, everything hinged on coming to know, through religious experience, this Christ.

For Paul and for true Christians, the passionate objective is to develop a deep spiritual relationship with the resurrected Christ. This Paul declares as his objective in verses nine through eleven (NRSV): "in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead." The cultivation of that relationship through spiritual growth and maturity became the sole objective for the apostle. In that deepening relationship came God's power that enables one to live victoriously over sin and with substance to life. Key to deepening that relationship is the dying to self, that

often comes through suffering. The conclusion is the ultimate experience of resurrection from death.

Verses twelve through sixteen turn a somewhat different direction but one that builds on verses seven through eleven. Paul spoke of the deepening of his spiritual relationship with Christ as the sole objective of his life. When writing these words, he had been pursuing this objective for almost three decades and was rapidly moving toward the end of his life. This final segment, vv. 12-16, makes an adamant point that the aged apostle was continuing to pursue this objective just as vigorously after decades of faithful service as he had at the beginning of his Christian experience. With the metaphor of the ancient Olympic games as the backdrop for his words, he characterizes himself as a sixty plus old runner who hadn't yet crossed the finish line, but instead was running as hard as he could with his eyes focused upon the upward calling of God as the prize at the finish line. This is much more than merely looking forward to Heaven. That's one a small part of the picture. The central focus of these verses is on Paul's continued spiritual growth and deepening of his relationship with Christ. A full experience of it Paul had not had; there was yet room for growth (vv. 12-13). He refused to look back on fleshly achievements (v. 13), and instead focused on the future, the new experiences with Christ that lay ahead (v. 13). The prize, the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus (v. 14). Every new day offered a new experience with Christ, one that could make Paul more like Jesus and bring the resurrection power of God into Paul's life. This was the apostle's objective; to not waste a single opportunity to get to know Christ better. Death? All that meant for Paul was a deepening of this relationship with Christ, as he had already declared in 1:21: "for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

In verses fifteen and sixteen, Paul applies the spiritual principles expressed in his testimony to his readers. For mature believers, Paul admonishes, "Let us set our focus on this." For less mature believers who may not have yet seen the importance of this, his word is that God will show them the truthfulness of this kind of focus on Christ, and thus they will get in this same race with the mature believers. He concludes with the admonition to continue marching forward in lock step unified commitment to this objective making progress toward realizing more and more of Christ day by day.

What lessons are found in verses two through sixteen? Many! At the heart is for each of us to focus on our relationship with Christ. That relationship is the only thing that matters on the credit side of God's ledger book on the day of judgment. Fleshly achievements that lead us to bragging about what we have done for God stand on the debit side of that divine ledger book and will come back to haunt us in that judgment day.

The deepening of that relationship is to be our number one priority in this life. A key means of deepening that is suffering. Even in that moment, the basic attitude is joy and rejoicing. Every experience that brings us closer to our Lord is an occasion for rejoicing.

Any approach to Christianity that adds to this focus on Christ represents a distortion of the gospel and poses a danger to spiritual healthiness. To saddle down Christianity with fleshly achievements orientation is dangerous and risks corruption of the gospel with eternal consequences. This lack of central focus on a deepening relationship with Christ lays as the major source, in my opinion, of most of the problems congregations experience today. Too often our priorities center elsewhere, and we find ourselves in trouble spiritually without knowing why. If every member of First Baptist Church adopted the goal that Paul lays out here and made as deep a commitment to it as Paul reflects, a spiritual awakening would take place in our church that would astound the surrounding world.

Appendix 1:
Block Diagram of the Greek Text

- 3:1 Τὸ λοιπόν,
ἀδελφοί μου,
(1) χαίρετε
ἐν κυρίῳ.
(2) τὰ αὐτὰ γράφειν ὑμῖν (ἐστίν)...οὐκ ὀκνηρόν
ἐμοὶ
μέν
δὲ
(3) ----- (-----) ...ἀσφαλές.
ὑμῖν
(4) 3:2 Βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας,
(5) βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας,
(6) βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν.
3:3 γάρ
(7) ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἡ περιτομή,
οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες
καὶ
καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
καὶ
οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες,
3:4 καίπερ ἐγὼ ἔχων πεποίθῃσιν καὶ ἐν σαρκί.
(8) εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἄλλος πεποιθέναι ἐν σαρκί,
ἐγὼ (ἔχω) μᾶλλον.
(9) 3:5 (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) περιτομῇ ὀκταήμερος,
ἐκ γένους Ἰσραὴλ,
φυλῆς Βενιαμίν,
Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων,
κατὰ νόμον
Φαρισαῖος,
3:6 κατὰ ζῆλος
διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν,
κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος
ἁμεμπτος.
3:7 ἀλλὰ
ἄτινα ἦν μοι κέρδη,
(10) ταῦτα ἤγημαι...ζημίαν.
διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν
3:8 ἀλλὰ μενοῦνγε καὶ
(11) ἡγοῦμαι πάντα ζημίαν εἶναι
διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως
Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου,
δι' ὃν τὰ πάντα ἐζημιώθην,
καὶ
ἡγοῦμαι σκύβαλα,
ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω
3:9 καὶ

- εὐρεθῶ
ἐν αὐτῷ,
μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην
τὴν ἐκ νόμου
ἀλλὰ
τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ,
τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει,
3:10 τοῦ γινῶναι αὐτὸν
καὶ
τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ
καὶ
τὴν κοινωνίαν τῶν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ,
3:11 συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ,
εἴ πως καταντήσω
εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν
τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν.
- (12) 3:12 *Οὐχ (ἐστὶν) ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον*
ἢ
ἤδη τετελείωμαι,
δὲ
(13) *διώκω*
εἰ καὶ καταλάβω,
ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ κατελήμφθην
ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ.
- 3:13 ἀδελφοί,
(14) *ἐγὼ ἐμμαντὸν οὐ λογίζομαι κατειληφέναι·*
δὲ
(15) *(ἐστὶν) ἐν*
τὰ μὲν ὀπίσω ἐπιλανθανόμενος
δὲ
τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος,
3:14 κατὰ σκοπὸν
διώκω
εἰς τὸ βραβεῖον
τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.
- 3:15 οὖν
ὅσοι τέλειοι,
(16) *τοῦτο φρονῶμεν·*
καὶ
εἴ τι ἐτέρως φρονεῖτε, καὶ
(17) *τοῦτο ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἀποκαλύψει·*
- 3:16 πλὴν
εἰς ὃ ἐφθάσαμεν,
(18) *τῷ αὐτῷ στοιχεῖν.*