

Philippians 3:1-3

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul exhorts the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord and warns against false teachers, while sharing his own example of renouncing his Jewish heritage and upbringing for Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 19:10, Matthew 19:24, Ephesians 4:29, Philippians 3:1-7

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Heavenly Treasures"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of rejoicing in the Lord, warning against false teachings and emphasizing the true circumcision of the heart through worshiping God in spirit. He urges believers to have no confidence in the flesh but to focus on spiritual growth and service to others. Chrysostom highlights the dangers of being attached to worldly possessions, stressing the need to prioritize heavenly treasures over material wealth and to use God's gifts for His glory and the benefit of others.

Transcript

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not irksome, but for you it is safe. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Dejection and care, whenever they strain the soul beyond due measure, bereave it of its native force. And therefore Paul relieves the Philippians, who were in great despondency, and they were in despondency because they did not know how matters were with Paul; they were in despondency because they thought that it was already over with him, because of the preaching, because of Epaphroditus. It is in giving them assurance on all these points that he introduces the words, Finally, my brethren, rejoice. You no longer have, he says, cause for despondency. You have Epaphroditus, for whose sake you were grieved; you have Timothy; I am myself coming to you; the Gospel is gaining ground. What is henceforth wanting to you? Rejoice!

Now he calls the Galatians indeed children Galatians 4:19, but these brethren. For when he aims either to correct anything or to show his fondness, he calls them children; but when he addresses them with greater honor, brethren is the title. Finally, my brethren, he says, rejoice in the Lord. He said rightly in the Lord, not after the world. for this is no rejoicing. These tribulations, he says, which are according to Christ bring joy. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not irksome, but for you it is safe. Beware of the dogs. Do you mark how he forbears to bring in the exhortation at the beginning? But after he had given them much commendation, after he had shown his admiration of them, then he does this, and again repeats his

commendation. For this mode of speech seems to bear somewhat hard upon them. Wherefore he overshadows it on every side. But whom does he style dogs? There were at this place some of those, whom he hints at in all his Epistles, base and contemptible Jews, greedy of vile lucre and fond of power, who, desiring to draw aside many of the faithful, preached both Christianity and Judaism at the same time, corrupting the Gospel. As then they were not easily discernible, therefore he says, beware of the dogs: the Jews are no longer children; once the Gentiles were called dogs, but now the Jews. Wherefore? Because as the Gentiles were strangers both to God and to Christ, even so are these become this now. And he shows forth their shamelessness and violence, and their infinite distance from the relation of children, for that the Gentiles were once called dogs, hear what the Canaanitish woman says, Yea, Lord: for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Matthew 15:27 But that they might not have this advantage, since even dogs are at the table, he adds that, whereby he makes them aliens also, saying, Beware of the evil workers; he admirably expressed himself, beware of the evil workers; they work, he means, but for a bad end, and a work that is much worse than idleness, plucking up what is laid in goodly order.

Beware, he says, of the concision. The rite of circumcision was venerable in the Jews' account, forasmuch as the Law itself gave way thereto, and the Sabbath was less esteemed than circumcision. For that circumcision might be performed the Sabbath was broken; but that the Sabbath might be kept, circumcision was never broken; and mark, I pray, the dispensation of God. This is found to be even more solemn than the Sabbath, as not being omitted at certain times. When then it is done away, much more is the Sabbath. Wherefore Paul makes a concision of the name, and says, Beware of the concision; and he did not say that circumcision is evil, that it is superfluous, lest he should strike the men with dismay, but he manages it more wisely, withdrawing them from the thing, but gratifying them with the word, nay, rather with the thing too, in a more serious way. But not so in the case of the Galatians, for since in that case the disease was great, he immediately adopts the remedy of amputation with open front and with all boldness; but in this case, as they had done nothing of the sort, he vouchsafes them the gratification of the title, he casts out the others, and says, Beware of the concision; for we are the circumcision-- how?-- who worship God in spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh. He said not that we test the one circumcision and the other, which is the better of the two; but he would not even allow it a share in the name; but what does he say? That that circumcision is concision. Why? Because they do nothing but cut the flesh up. For when what is done is not of the law, it is nothing else than a concision and cutting up of the flesh; it was then either for this reason that he called it so, or because they were trying to cut the Church in two; and we call the thing cutting up in those who do this at random, without aim and without skill. Now if you must seek circumcision, he says, you will find it among us, who worship God in spirit, i.e. who worship spiritually.

For answer me, which is superior, the soul or the body? Evidently the former. Therefore that circumcision is also superior, or rather, no longer superior, but this is the only circumcision; for while the type stood, He rightly brought it forward in conjunction, writing, For you shall circumcise the foreskins of your hearts. Jeremiah 4:4 In the same way in the Epistle to the Romans he does away with it, saying, for he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter.

Romans 2:28-29 And lastly, he takes from it the very name, neither is it circumcision, he maintains; for the type while the reality is yet to come, is called this, but when the reality has come, it no longer retains the title. As in delineation, a man has drawn a king in outline; so long as the colors are not put on we say, Lo, there is the king, but when they are added, the type is lost in the reality, and ceases to show. And he said

not, for the circumcision is in us, but we are the circumcision, and justly; for this is the Man, the circumcision in virtue, this is really the Man.

And he did not say, For among them is the concision; for they themselves are henceforth in a condition of ruin and of wickedness. But no longer, says he, is circumcision performed in the body, but in the heart. And have no confidence, says he, in the flesh; though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. Philippians 3:4 What does he call confidence here, and in the flesh? Boasting, boldness, a high tone. And he did well to add this; for if he had been of the Gentiles, and had condemned circumcision, and not only circumcision, but all those that adopted it out of place, it would have seemed that he was running it down, because he lacked the high ancestry of Judaism, as being a stranger to its solemn rites, and having no part therein.

But as it is, he, who, though a sharer, yet blames them, will not therefore blame them as having no share in them, but as disowning them; not from ignorance, but most especially from acquaintance with them. Accordingly observe what he says in his Epistle to the Galatians also; having been brought into a necessity of saying great things about himself, how even in these circumstances does he manifest nought but humility. For you have heard, of my manner of life in time past, he says, in the Jews' religion Galatians 1:13; and again here; if any other man thinks to have confidence in the flesh, I more.

Philippians 3:4. And he immediately added, a Hebrew of Hebrews. But if any other man, says he, showing the necessity, showing that it was on their account that he spoke. If you have confidence, he says, I also say so, since I am silent. And observe the absence of all ungraciousness in the reproofs; by forbearing to do it by name, he gave even them the opportunity of retracing their steps. If any one thinks to have confidence; and it was well to say thinks, either inasmuch as they really had no such confidence, or as that confidence was no real confidence, for all was by necessity, and not of choice.

Circumcised on the eighth day; and he sets down the first that wherein they chiefly boasted, viz. the ordinance of circumcision. Of the stock of Israel. He pointed out both these circumstances, that he was neither a proselyte, nor born of proselytes; for from his being circumcised on the eighth day, it follows that he was not a proselyte, and from his being of the stock of Israel, that he was not of proselyte parents. But that you may not imagine that he was of the stock of Israel as coming of the ten tribes, he says, of the tribe of Benjamin.

So that he was of the more approved portion, for the place of the priests was in the lot of this tribe. An Hebrew of Hebrews. Because he was not a proselyte, but from of old, of distinguished Jews; for he might have been of Israel, and yet not an Hebrew of Hebrews, for many were already corrupting the matter, and were strangers to the language, being encircled by other nations; it is either this then, or the great superiority of his birth, that he shows. According to the law a Pharisee.

He is coming now to the circumstances dependent on his own will; for all those things were apart from the will, for his being circumcised was not of himself, nor that he was of the stock of Israel, nor that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. So that, even among these he has a larger share, even though there were really many who partook with him. Where then are we to place the rather? Particularly herein that he was not a proselyte; for to be of the most distinguished tribe and sect, and this from his ancestors of old, was a thing which belonged not to many.

But he comes to the things which are matters of choice, wherein we have the rather. As touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the Church. But this is not sufficient; for it is possible to be a

Pharisee even, and yet not very zealous. But this also he adds; behold the rather. According to righteousness. It is possible, however, to be adventurous, or to act thus from ambition, and not out of zeal for the law, as the chief priests did. Yet neither was this the case, but, according to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless.

If then both for purity of descent, and earnestness, and habits, and mode of life, I surpassed all, why have I renounced all those dignities, he asks, but because I found that the things of Christ are better, and better far? Wherefore he added; howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Philippians 3:7

Such a course of life, so strictly regulated, and entered upon from earliest childhood, such unblemished extraction, such dangers, plots, labors, forwardness, did Paul renounce, counting them but loss, which before were gain, that he might win Christ. But we do not even contemn money, that we may win Christ, but prefer to fail of the life to come rather than of the good things of the present life. And yet this is nothing else than loss; for tell me now, let us examine in detail the conditions of riches, and see whether it be not loss accompanied with trouble, and without any gain.

For tell me, what is the advantage of those stores of costly garments, what good do we gain when we are arrayed in them? None, nay, we are only losers. How so? Because even the poor man, in his cheap and threadbare clothing, does not bear the scorching in time of heat any wise worse than yourself; nay, rather he bears it better, for clothes that are threadbare and worn single allow more ease to the body, but not so with those which are new made, though they be finer than the spider's web.

Besides, you, from your excessive self-importance, wear even two and often three inner garments, and a cloak and girdle, and breeches too, but no one blames him if he wears but a single inner garment; so that he is the man that endures most easily. It is owing to this that we see rich men sweating, but the poor subject to nothing of the sort. Since then his cheap clothing, which is sold for a trifle, answers the same or even a better purpose to him, and those clothes, which oblige a man to pay down much gold, do only the same thing, is not this great superabundance so much loss?

For it has added nothing in respect of its use and service, but your purse is emptied of so much the more gold, and the same use and service. You who have riches have purchased for a hundred pieces of gold, or even more, but the poor man for a trifling sum of silver. Do you perceive the loss? No, for your pride will not let you see it. Would you have us make out this account in the case of the gold ornaments too, which men put alike about their horses and their wives? For besides the other evils, the possession of money makes fools of men; they account their wives and horses to be worthy of the same honor, and the ornamentation of both is the same; and they would make themselves finer by the same means as the very beasts that carry them, or as the very skins of the awnings, wherein they are borne.

What now is the use of decking out a mule or a horse with gold? Or the lady, that has such a weight of gold and jewels about her person, what does she gain? But the golden ornaments are never worn out, he answers. Assuredly this also is said that in the baths and many places both precious stones and gold ornaments lose much of their value. But be it so, and grant that they are not injured, tell me, what is the gain? And how is it when they drop out, and are lost? Is there no loss sustained?

And how when they draw down upon you envy and intrigues? Is there no loss then? For when they do the wearer no good, but rather inflame the eyes of the envious, and act as an incitement to the robber, do they not become loss? And again, say, when a man may use them for a serviceable purpose, but is unable on

account of the extravagance of his wife, and is obliged to starve and to stint himself, that he may see her arrayed in gold, is it not a matter of loss? For it was on this account that goods have their name from use, not that we should use them thus like goldsmiths' samples, but that we should do some good therewith; so then when love of gold does not allow this, is not the whole thing loss? For he that dares not use them forbears the use as if they were another's property, and there is no use of them in any way.

Again, how is it when we erect splendid and spacious mansions, decorated with columns, marbles, porticos, arcades, and in every possible way, setting images and statues everywhere? Many indeed even call demons out of these, i.e. the images, but let us omit the examination of those points. What too is the meaning of the gilded ceiling? Does it not supply the same need as to him, whose house is on a moderate scale? But there is great delight in it, he says. Yes, for the first or second day, and afterwards, none at all, but it stands merely for nothing. For if the sun does not strike us with wonder, from its being customary, much more do works of art fail, and we only look at them like things of clay. For tell me, what does a range of pillars contribute to make your dwelling superior to others, or the finest statues, or the gilding spread over the wall? Nothing; rather, these come of luxury and insolence, and overweening pride and folly; for everything there ought to be necessary and useful, not superfluous things. Do you see that the thing is loss? Do you see that it is superfluous and unprofitable? For if it supplies no further use or delight, (and it does, in the course of time, bring satiety,) it is nothing else than loss, and vainglory is the hindrance, which will not let us see this.

Did Paul then forsake those things which he counted gain, and shall not we even quit our loss, for Christ's sake? How long shall we be riveted to the earth? How long till we shall look up to heaven? Do ye not mark the aged, what little perception they have of the past? Do ye not mark those that are finishing their course, both men in age, and men in youth? Do ye not see persons in the midst of life bereft of them? Why are we so wedded to unstable objects? Why are we linked to things that are shifting? How long before we lay hold of the things that last? What would not the old give, were it granted them to divest themselves of their old age? How irrational then to wish to return to our former youth, and gladly to give everything for the sake of this, that we might become younger, and yet when it is ours to receive a youth that knows no old age, a youth too, which, joined with great riches, has far more of spirit, to be unwilling to give up a little trifle, but to hold fast things that contribute not a whit to the present life. They can never rescue you from death, they have no power to drive away disease, to stay old age, or any one of those events, which happen by necessity and according to the law of nature. And do you still hold to them? Tell me, what do you gain? Drunkenness, gluttony, pleasures contrary to nature and various in kind, which are far worse torturers than the hardest masters.

These are the advantages which we gain from riches, nor is there one besides, since we are not so minded, for if we had had the mind, we might have won heaven itself for our inheritance by our riches. So then riches are good, he says. It is not riches, but the will of the possessor that effects this, for because it is the will that does this, it is in the power even of a poor man to win heaven. For, as I have often said, God does not regard the amount of the gifts, but the will of the givers; it is possible even for one in poverty, who has given but little, to bear off all, for God requires a measure proportioned to our ability, neither will riches secure heaven to us, nor poverty, hell; but a good or a bad will, either one or the other. This then let us correct, this let us repossess, this let us regulate, and all will then be easy to us.

For as the artificer works the wood the same, whether his axe be of iron or of gold, or rather he does it the better with an implement of iron, so here too, the straight path of virtue is more easily kept in a state of poverty. For touching riches we read, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich

man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 19:24 But He has made no such declarations about poverty; nay, the very reverse. Sell your goods, and give to the poor, and come follow Me Matthew 19:21; as if the act of following were to spring from the selling.

Never then let us flee from poverty as an evil, for it is the procurer of heaven. Again, let us never follow riches as a good; for they are the ruin of such as walk unwarily, but in everything directing our eyes to God, let us, as occasion requires, use those gifts which He has vouchsafed us, both strength of body, and abundance of money, and every other gift; for it is unnatural that we, who have our being for Him, should make these things serviceable to others, yet not to Him who has made us.

He formed your eye: make it serviceable to Him, not to the devil. But how serviceable to Him? By contemplating His creatures and praising and glorifying Him, and by withdrawing it from all gaze at women. Did He make your hands? Preserve them for His use, not for the devil, not putting them out for robbery and rapine, but for His commandments and for good deeds, for earnest prayers, for holding out help to the fallen. Hath He made your ears? Give these to Him, and not to effeminate strains nor to disgraceful tales; but let all your communication be in the law of the Most High.

Sirach 9:15 For stand, he says, in the multitude of the elders, and whoever is wise, cleave unto him. Sirach 6:34 Did he make your mouth? Let it do nought that is displeasing to Him, but sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, says the Apostle, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear Ephesians 4:29; for edification and not for subversion, for fair words and not for evil speaking and plotting against other, but the very opposite.

He has made your feet, not that you should run to do evil, but to do good. He made your belly, not that you should cram it to bursting, but to practice lessons of wisdom. For the production of children, He implanted desire in your mind, not for fornication, nor for adultery. He gave you understanding, not to make of you a blasphemer or a reviler, but that you might be without falsehood. He gave us both money to be used on fitting occasion, and strength likewise to be used on fitting occasion.

He instituted arts, that our present state of existence might be held together by them, not that we should separate ourselves from spiritual things, not that we should devote ourselves to the base arts but to the necessary ones, that we might minister to one another's good, and not that we should plot one against another. He gave us a roof, that it might afford shelter from the rain, and no more, not that it should be decked out with gold, while the poor man perishes with hunger.

He gave clothing to cover us, not to make a display withal, not that things like these should have much gold lavished upon them, and that Christ should perish naked. He gave you a place of shelter, not that you should keep it to yourself, but to offer it to others also. He gave you land, not that, cutting off the chief portion of it, you should spend the good gifts of God upon harlots, and dancers, and actors, and flute players, and harp players, but upon those that hunger and are in want.

He gave you the sea to sail on, that you might not be wearied with journeying, not that you should pry into its depths, and bring up thence precious stones and all the other things of the same kind, nor that you should make this your business.

Why then are there precious stones? he says. Nay, do you tell me why these stones are such, and why one class are regarded as of great value, while the others are more useful? For these may be conducive

to building, but those to no purpose; and these are stronger than those. But they, he says, produce a beautiful effect. How so? It is a matter of fancy. Are they whiter? No, they are not whiter than pure white marble, nor nearly equal to it. But are they stronger? Not even this can be said for them. Well then, are they more useful? Are they larger? Not even this. Whence then are they so admired, save from fancy? For if they are neither more beautiful, (for we shall find others more shining and more white,) nor useful, nor stronger, whence came they to be so admired? Was it not from mere fancy? Why then did God give them? They were not His gift, but it is your own imagination that they are anything great. How is it, then, he answers, that even the Scripture shows admiration of them? So far it addresses itself to your fancy. As a master too in talking to a child often admires the same object as it does, when he desires to attract and engage it.

Why do you aim at finery in your clothing? He clothed you with a garment and with sandals. But where is there any reason for these things? The judgments of God, he says, are more to be desired than gold; yea than much fine gold. Psalm 19:10 These, beloved, are of no use. Had they been of use, he would not have bidden us despise them. And for Holy Scripture, it speaks with reference to our notion, and this too is an instance of God's lovingkindness. Why then, he asks, did He give purple and the like? These things are products of God's gift. For He has willed by other things also to show forth His own riches. And He gave you grain too by itself; but from this you make many things, cakes and sweetmeats, of every sort and variety, having much enjoyment. Pleasure and vainglory give rise to all these inventions. It pleased you to set them before everything. For if a foreigner or a rustic, who was ignorant of the land, should put the question, and, seeing your admiration, were to say, Why do you admire these? What have you to say? That they are fair to look at? But not so. Let us then give up such notions; let us lay hold of the things that are truly real. These are not, but simply pass away, only flowing past like a river. Wherefore I charge you, let us take our stand upon the rock, that we both escape being easily turned about, and that we may obtain the good things to come, by the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, etc.

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