

# PRESSING ON: GUARDING ONESELF

## PHILIPPIANS 03:01–03

### *Introduction*

This chapter is one of the great chapters of the Bible, a chapter that needs to be studied time and again. It includes the great personal testimony and ambition of Paul. It gives us some of the great principles that governed Paul's life. The subject of the chapter is "The Pressing On of the Christian Believer." These are some things the Christian believer must do as he presses on for Christ. First, he must guard himself.

- I. By rejoicing in the Lord (v. 1).
- II. By heeding what is written (the Scripture) (v. 1).
- III. By watching out for false teachers (v. 2).
- IV. By knowing that you are the true (spiritual) circumcision (v. 3).

### **I. *Philippians 03:01 Rejoicing in the Lord***

Guard yourself by rejoicing in the Lord. A person who is always rejoicing in the Lord will not go astray. As the believer walks through life, two things are always confronting him: circumstances and false teaching. No matter where he goes, the trials of life, both minor and major, confront him. He has to stand face to face with the awful trials of life including...

- enticing temptations
- lust of the eyes
- divisions
- inhuman behaviour
- lust of the flesh (sinful nature)
- criminal acts
- death
- greed
- accidents
- selfishness
- disease
- arguments

The list could go on and on. No person escapes the trials of life — not if he walks upon this earth. He is confronted with the awful reality of trials every day of his life. Note another fact as well. No matter where he walks, the false teachings of this life confront him. No matter which way the believer turns, he is confronted with different ideas about how to handle life and its great trials.

=> There is the teaching that says, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Ignore the trials and problems of life. Life is to be enjoyed by those who have the health and money to enjoy it, so get all the gusto out of life possible. Do your own thing."

=> There is the teaching that says, "Discipline and control yourself. Take care of your body and mind. Don't give in to the lusts and passions of this life. The abuse of a mind and body is a waste. Live as long and contribute as much as you can by walking a disciplined and controlled life.

=> There is the teaching that says, "Don't go overboard. Enjoy life — join in — do what you want; but do it within reason. Don't overly abuse your mind and body. It's all right to join and indulge occasionally; just don't do it too often and hurt yourself."

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=> There is the teaching that says religion is the answer to both life and death, “Join a religious body, undergo its rituals, adopt its beliefs and live the best you can. This will give you a strong self-image and confidence that God will accept you. Just be as good as you can and God will accept what goodness you are able to build up.”

The list of false teachings could go on and on. The point is this: the believer is bombarded by both trials and false teachings every day of his life. He must, therefore, guard himself; and the first guard is to rejoice in the Lord. If he walks throughout the day rejoicing in the Lord, his mind is upon the Lord. He rejoices over what Christ has done for him — rejoices over the Lord...

- justifying him
- adopting him
- reconciling him
- saving him
- loving him
- delivering him
- guiding and directing him
- securing righteousness for him
- dying for him — bearing his condemnation and judgment
- arising for him — giving him a new life
- looking after him
- giving him the privilege of knowing God
- giving him victory over sin
- giving him an eternal hope and the glorious confidence of eternal life

The believer just walks about rejoicing in all that the Lord has done and is doing for him. This is essential if the believer is to guard himself against the onslaught of trials and false teaching in this life. If the believer is to press on in his Christian life, he must walk about rejoicing in the Lord.

Now note: the great thing that rejoicing does is this: it places and keeps a person in the presence of Christ. No matter what confronts the believer — no matter how terrible the trial — he knows that he is being looked after by Christ Jesus his Lord. He knows that nothing can separate him from the Lord and His love — that he shall never die, but rather live eternally. Therefore, he knows that whatever comes upon him can never conquer and overcome him. Christ will give him supernatural power and strength to overcome it. And if he is called upon to lay down his body and move on to heaven, he knows that he shall never taste or experience death; he knows that Jesus Christ is going to escort him right on into God’s presence immediately — quicker than the eye can blink — about 11/100 of a second. The believer is forever secure in the keeping power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, he walks rejoicing in the Lord: he rejoices no matter what confronts him.

***Rom 8:35-39** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor*

*anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Thought 1.** Rejoicing in the Lord is one of the very best ways to guard oneself against the trials of life and false teaching. When a person rejoices in the Lord, his mind is focused upon the Lord, upon what the Lord has done for him. And the mind cannot be two places at once. If it is upon the Lord and His glorious salvation, then it cannot be upon the trials and false teachings of this world.

**Luke 10:20** *“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”*

**John 15:11** *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*

**Rom 12:15** *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

**2 Cor 6:10** *Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

**Phil 4:4** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

**1 Th 5:16** *Be joyful always.*

**1 Pet 4:12-13** *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

**Deu 12:7** *There, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.*

**Psa 5:11** *But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.*

**Psa 32:11** *Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!*

**Hab 3:17-18** *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.*

**Isa 29:19** *Once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.*

## **II. Philippians 03:01 Heed the Scriptures**

Guard yourself by heeding what is written, that is, the Scriptures. Note: Paul says that he is writing some things that he had apparently written before. What he is about to write is so important that it has to be repeated. The church must do what is being said.

The point is this: the writings of Paul and of Scripture must be heeded. What Scripture says was written to instruct us and to help us in *pressing on* for Christ. No person can press on apart from heeding the Scriptures. If he fails to study and obey the Scripture, he will cave in either to the trials of life or to false teaching. Only as we obey the Scripture — the commandments of the Lord — can we show our love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

**John 14:15** *“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”*

**John 14:21** *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*

**John 14:23** *Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”*

**John 15:10** *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”*

**Acts 17:11** *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

**Acts 20:32** *“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

**2 Tim 2:15** *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

**2 Tim 3:16** *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

**2 Pet 2:2-3** *Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*

### **III. Philippians 03:02 Watch out for False Teachers**

Guard yourself by watching out for false teachers. Paul was always facing false teachers who were savage in their attacks upon him. He mentions three groups of false teachers in this verse.

1. Beware of false teachers who act like *dogs* (kunas). It should be noted that both Jew and Gentile called each other dogs as a term of contempt. The word *dogs* was the lowest title possible to convey contempt and ridicule. Dog does not refer to the house pet of today, but to the wild dogs that roamed in the forests by day and the city streets by night. They were scavengers and snarlers who could be very vicious and dangerous.

The point is descriptive: there are some false teachers who are just like wild dogs.

⇒ They are scavengers who seek out all whom they can consume with their false teaching. And if any step forward to defend the sheep and the truth, they snarl and often become vicious and dangerous, ready to attack the defender and destroy him.

*Mat 7:6* “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”

*Mat 7:15* “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”

*Mat 10:26* “So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.”

*Phil 3:2* Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.

*2 Pet 2:19-22* They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”

*Rev 22:15* Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

*Psa 22:16* Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.

2. Beware of false teachers who are evil workers. The world is full of people who work evil things.

⇒ This refers to those who hold to and teach high standards of righteousness, morality and religion. They are absolutely sure they are righteous and good — at least good enough to be acceptable to God. There is just no way God would ever reject them — they think.

⇒ This also refers to those who live and teach evil by the way they live and talk about morality, righteousness and religion. Some live base, immoral, indulgent and extravagant lives, while others try to mix both a religious and indulgent life-style together.

The point is this: there are those who are always opposing the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation by grace alone. They do not accept that He is God’s Son — that He is the Lord of man’s life: the Lord who is to be given all we are and have. Therefore,



they accept His teaching, but ignore or deny salvation by His blood. They stand opposed to the gospel of salvation by His grace alone. They go about establishing their own way to God, doing whatever good they feel is needed to make themselves acceptable to Him. The result is false teaching — a way to God that stands against the Lord Jesus Christ and His way. Such false teachers are evil workers — workers who stand opposed to the truth.

3. Beware of false teachers who are mutilators of the flesh. The mutilators refer to the Judaizers (see note, *Judaizers*, Gal. 2:3-5; see *Judaizers, Legalists*, Gal. 2:4. It is important to read this note before proceeding with this point.)

**Mat 5:19-20** *“Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

**Rom 10:3-5** *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.”*

**1 Tim 1:7** *They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.*

**1 Tim 6:3-5** *If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.*

**2 Tim 4:3-4** *For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

**2 Pet 2:1** *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves.*

#### **IV. *Philippians 03:03 Believers, the True Circumcision***

Guard yourself by knowing that you are the true circumcision (see *Circumcision*, Ph. 3:3). Note that believers are called the circumcision. What does Paul mean?

1. Believers are those who worship God as He really wishes to be worshipped: in the spirit; that is, they have circumcised or cut away the flesh as the means by which they worship God. Think for a moment: How do most people attempt to worship God?

=> By attending church services

=> By praying

=> By making occasional gifts to needy causes

=> By thinking of God occasionally

=> By being circumcised or baptised or undergoing some other ritual

=> By keeping the rituals and ceremonies of a church

=> By joining a church

=> By observing special days

But note a critical point: as good as all of these are, they are not the basis of true worship. They are things that we do *because* we worship; they are the result and activities of worship. They are not the basis or spirit of worship. True, they may help us to focus upon God and stir us to worship Him, but as stated, they are not the basis and spirit of worship.

=> The basis of worship is the Spirit of God, and the spirit of worship is the Spirit of God.

To worship God, man must have the Spirit of God living within his body and spirit. He no longer worships God externally through rituals and ceremonies. He now worships God inwardly through the Spirit of God who lives within him. True worship is no longer through anything that is of the physical or material world, no longer of anything that is of man's flesh. True worship is of the spirit.

**Thought 1.** True worship has to be of the heart and spirit. Why? Because a man can attend church, keep all the rituals and ceremonies, and still be living in the depths of sin. But if a man's spirit is right with God, he worships God with a clean and pure heart, free from all sin and defilement. The truly circumcised person is the person who worships God in spirit.

**John 4:24** "God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."

**1 Cor 6:19-20** Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

2. Believers are those who rejoice as God really wants us to rejoice: in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus...

- is God's one and only Son.

- is the Person who gave Himself to die for us, bearing our sins and condemnation.

- is the Person who has saved us, made it possible for us to live forever in the presence of God.
- is the only Saviour, the only acceptable way to enter God's presence.

Therefore, it is only natural that God expects us to rejoice in Christ Jesus. How could we boast and rejoice in ritual and ceremony and religion? The Source — the Author and Finisher — of our faith is Christ Jesus. Therefore, the true circumcision, the true believer does not boast in anything physical or material — not in ritual or ceremony or religion. The true circumcision rejoices and boasts in Him who has given us salvation and access to God, even in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**John 15:11** *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*

**Phil 4:4** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

**1 Pet 1:8** *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*

**Isa 61:10** *I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

**Jer 15:16** *When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.*

3. Believers are those who have no confidence in the flesh (body). The flesh or body...
- is only physical and material.
  - can only handle physical and material things.
  - can only do good works and keep external rituals and ceremonies and religious practices.
  - can do nothing beyond the physical and material.
  - cannot penetrate the spiritual world or dimension of being.

The flesh ages, deteriorates and corrupts. Therefore, the flesh goes the way of all material and physical substances: it dies and decays. And no matter what the flesh has done and accomplished in this physical world, it takes all its works to the grave with it. The flesh dies and all that concerns the flesh dies with it. Therefore, the true circumcision, the true believer, has no confidence and puts no stock in the flesh. He has confidence only in Jesus Christ.

**Rom 7:18** *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*

**Rom 7:25** *Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*



**Rom 8:8** *Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*

**Rom 8:13** *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

**Gal 5:17** *For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*

**Gal 6:8** *The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

**1 John 2:15-16** *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. ■*

### PHILIPPIANS 03:03 CIRCUMCISION

*For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.*  
**Philippians 03:03**

Before Christ, circumcision was the physical sign that a man was a follower of the true God. It was the sign that a man believed the promises that God had made to Abraham and Israel (see Gen. 17:10-14; Rom. 4:11). God never intended circumcision to have any value other than being a sign. It was not to bring righteousness to any man — not even to Abraham (Rom. 4:9-10). It was given only as a sign - a sign of the faith that a man already had in God's promises. Righteousness was imputed to the man because he believed God's promises; then the man was circumcised as a sign of his faith in God (see Rom. 4:11).

However, many abused God's purpose for circumcision.

1. Some made circumcision a substitute for true righteousness. A man was thought to be safe and secure in the arms of God if he was circumcised. Believing God and loving men had little to do with being a child of God. Many forgot the circumcision of a pure heart and became Jews of the circumcision in name only. Circumcision became merely an external and physical sign.
2. Some used circumcision as a way to divide and categorize people. A great wall of division was thrown up around the uncircumcised (cp. Acts 10:1; 1 Sam.17:26, 36; 2 Sam. 1:20). Any man who was uncircumcised was thought to be *cut off* and *far off*, not only from those thought to be the people of God (the Jews and the circumcised) but from God Himself. (See Acts 10:1-33.) An uncircumcised man

was looked upon with bitter contempt. In the mind of the Jew, God was thought to love only Israel, despising and rejecting all other people (the Gentile nations).

3. God has done away with circumcision as a sign of righteousness since Christ has come (Gal. 5:6; 6:15; Col. 2:11). Righteousness is now of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter of rules and regulations (see Rom. 2:25-29; 4:8-12, 23-25). The truly righteous man is the man who is God's *inwardly* — the man whose spirit has been recreated into the very nature of God. God's very own righteous nature is implanted into the very nature of man when he is *born again*. A man *born again* by the Spirit of God is God's "new creation" (Jn. 3:3f; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 1:4). □