

Handout: Philippians Lesson 3

The Jews are no longer children. The Gentiles were once called dogs but now these [Judaizing Christians] are. Why so? Because, just as the Gentiles were once strangers to Christ and God, so these have now become. And he alludes to their stubborn shamelessness and their great tenacity against the faithful.

St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on Philippians*, 11.2.1-3

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the inspired writers mentioned three kinds of wisdom:

1. *sophia* is long-term wisdom,
2. *phronesis* is practical wisdom, and
3. *sunesis* is the kind of wisdom that promotes unity

St. Paul encourages the Philippians Christians to practice all three forms of wisdom in seeking knowledge of Christ and for the good of the Church.

2 Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil-workers! Beware of the mutilation!

Jesus used the same term when testing the faith of the Gentile woman who came to Him with a petition to heal her daughter, referring to the Gentiles as “dogs” (Mt 15:26; Mk 7:27). Although in Mark 7:27, Jesus softened the rebuke by calling Gentiles “little dogs” or “puppies.” However, for the Gentile Roman Christians, it was a reminder of the common Roman custom to have a notice at the entrance of houses that read “*Cave canem*,” or “Beware of the dog” (*Navarre Commentary: Philippians*, page 444).

3 For we are the circumcision, we who worship through the Spirit of God, who boast in Christ Jesus and do not put our confidence in flesh...

Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Romans 2:25-29; Galatians 5:1-6; Hebrews 8:13; CCC 1962-64.

In verses 4b-6, Paul provides his credentials as a Jew:

1. He was born into the tribe of Benjamin of Hebrew parents.
2. He was circumcised on the eighth day of life according to the Law.
3. As a Jew, he observed the Law of Moses in the strict code of the Pharisees.
4. He testifies that in his zeal/commitment, he not only persecuted Christians but was blameless in his observance of Mosaic Law.

None of his Jewish credentials could give Paul eternal salvation. The Old Law was limited in that it could only promise the hope of salvation. It was the precursor and preparation for revealed Law the New Covenant (CCC 1962, 1964). The Old Law could not obtain for the faithful entrance into Heaven, nor could it provide the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. These were only gifts of grace provided through Jesus Christ in the New Covenant (CCC 73, 1023, 1026, 1965). Concerning the New Covenant, Hebrews 8:13 refers to Jesus’ announcement at the Last Supper in Luke 22:20 (repeated by Paul in 1 Cor 11:25): *When he speaks of a “new” covenant, he declares the first one obsolete.*

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15 Let us, then, who are “perfectly mature” adopt this attitude. And if you have a different attitude, this too God will reveal to you. 16 Only, with regard to what we have attained, continue on the same course.

The Greek word for having an attitude is *phroneo* and recalls Paul’s use of the same word in 2:5 in his exhortation to put on the attitude of Christ manifested in His self-emptying and obedience to the Father (2:6-11). Anyone who thinks he or she is already fully mature in faith needs to understand that putting on “the mind of Christ” is a matter of lifelong learning and submission to the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life.

In 3:18-19, Paul describes those who are “enemies of the Cross”:

1. They are gluttons.
2. They are shameless to the point of taking pride in doing wrong.
3. Their minds and actions are only on earthly things.
4. Their end will be the destruction of eternal death.

20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

See Hebrews 12:21-24 and CCC 2795: “...refers us back to the mystery of the covenant we are living when we pray to our Father. He is in heaven, his dwelling place; the Father’s house is our homeland. Sin has exiled us from the land of the covenant, but conversion of heart enables us to return to the Father, to heaven. In Christ, then, heaven and earth are reconciled, for the Son alone ‘descended from heaven’ and causes us to ascend there with him, by his Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension.” And Catechism # 2796 assures us that Christians “... are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh. They spend their lives on earth, but are citizens of heaven.”

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