

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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FOR THE
TRANSEFIGURATION
OF OUR BODY

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Living Stream Ministry

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In [chapters one and two of Philippians](#) Paul's intention was to have communication, fellowship, between him and the believers in Philippi that he might share his experience of Christ so that the believers might be encouraged to have a full participation in his enjoyment of Christ. At the beginning of [chapter three](#), Paul changes his emphasis. Although it is rather difficult to trace Paul's thought in this chapter, my burden in this message is to consider Paul's basic concept in [Philippians 3](#).

If we read this chapter carefully, we shall see that Paul refers to two groups of people who were exerting a strong influence in the Mediterranean area. The first group was the Judaizers, the Jewish religionists, who were zealous for their traditional religion. In [Philippians 3:2](#) Paul speaks of them as dogs, evil workers, the concision. The second group consisted of those who held to the Epicurean philosophy, which promoted

indulgence in the pleasure of eating and drinking and self-gratification in other things, all of which are contrary to the cross of Christ ([Phil. 3:18-19](#)). From [verse 2](#) we see that Judaizers were causing damage to the Philippian believers. From [verse 18](#) we see that those who practiced according to the Epicureans were also causing damage to them. The former was of Jewish origin; the latter, of a heathen source. Paul's underlying thought in this chapter is related to these two groups. As we shall see, in speaking of the Judaizers, Paul deals with the soul, especially with the mind, but in speaking of the Epicureans, he deals with the body. The Judaizers did not promote the enjoyment of material things. Rather, they zealously promoted their particular religious philosophy. Both religion and philosophy involve the mind. For the most part, religious people and philosophical people are not occupied with material things. They do not care to indulge themselves in such things as eating and drinking. On the contrary, they may even restrict themselves in these matters. The things to which Paul refers in [Philippians 3:3-7](#) are not material things, but things related to religion, philosophy, and culture, things which have much to do with our mind.

The believers in Philippi had been saved and regenerated in spirit, but there was still the need for them to care for their soul and body in a proper way. As Paul was writing [chapter three](#), deep within him was the intention to give certain instructions to the Philippian believers concerning how to deal with the soul and the body. Therefore, he first spoke of the Judaizers in order to edify the Philippians in dealing with the soul. Then he referred to the Epicureans in order to instruct the believers in dealing with the body.

TRANSFORMATION AND THE RENEWING OF THE MIND

If we would deal with the soul, we need to count as refuse all religious matters, philosophical things, and cultural elements, and we need to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. According to [Romans 12:2](#), the renewing of the mind is a basic aspect of transformation. The transformation of our soul depends to a great extent on the renewing of our mind. If our mind is not renewed, our soul will remain unchanged.

To say that our mind is renewed means that a change has taken place in our way of thinking. The thoughts of many believers are still occupied with religious, philosophical, and cultural

things, the very things mentioned by Paul in [Philippians 3:7 and 8](#). These matters are related to the psychological world, to the world of the soul. Many are also taken over by a natural way of thinking. Such saints may be good, but they are the same in soul today as they were many years ago. A primary reason for our lack of transformation is that a huge rock, the rock of national characteristics, is occupying our soul, taking the place that belongs to Christ. In the case of every one of us, national characteristics occupy our soul. Our soul has been taken over by this rock.

THE NEED FOR SURGERY ON OUR SOUL

We may also liken national characteristics that occupy our soul to a tumor which grows in a person's stomach until there is room for little else. In our psychological stomach a tumor has grown and has taken over nearly all the room which should be reserved for Christ. For this reason, our inner being cannot contain much spiritual food and it cannot function normally. Believers from every country, and even from different regions in a particular country, have a tumor characteristic of them. This tumor grows especially in our natural mind. It has grown to

such a degree that it has become part of our very constitution. Only the most skillful Surgeon—the Lord Jesus Himself—is able to remove the tumor hidden within us.

In [Philippians 3:1-16](#) Paul deals with this tumor; he operates on our soul, especially on our thinking. When he was Saul of Tarsus, Paul had a large tumor in his soul. This tumor influenced Paul's thoughts about the Jewish religion, law, circumcision, and tradition. But one day the Lord Jesus, the greatest Surgeon, operated on Paul, and a huge tumor was removed from his mind. However, with most of us, this surgery has not yet taken place. The tumor is still in our soul.

For a number of years I was bothered within by a question for which I was not able to find an answer. Why do Christians who truly love the Lord and seek Him earnestly go on year after year without growing in life? Even though they read the Bible faithfully, they do not see anything. Now I have at least part of the answer. The lack of growth in life and shortage of revelation in reading the Word are caused by a tumor in their psychological stomach.

In [Philippians 3:15](#) Paul says, “Let us therefore, as many as are full-grown, have this mind.” If we would have “this mind,” we must have a

mind without a tumor, a mind filled with Christ and occupied with seeking Christ, gaining Him, and enjoying Him. In order to have such a mind, we must be operated on by the Lord and have our psychological tumor removed. Oh, may the Lord show us how we need such a mind!

THE PHYSICAL BODY AND ITS ENJOYMENT

After dealing with the soul in [Philippians 3:1-16](#), Paul goes on to deal with the body in [3:17-21](#). These five verses deal with physical enjoyment, especially as practiced by the Epicureans. As genuine seekers of Christ, we need surgery to eliminate our religious and philosophical thoughts, and we also need a proper dealing with the physical body. In [verse 19](#) Paul speaks of those “whose god is the belly,” but in [verses 20 and 21](#) he says that we are awaiting the Lord Jesus Christ, “who will transfigure the body of our humiliation, conforming it to the body of His glory.” In these verses Paul deals with the physical body and its enjoyment.

Paul says in [verse 17](#), “Be imitators together of me, brothers, and observe attentively those who thus walk as you have us for an example.” The example here does not refer to what Paul

has covered in the foregoing verses. Instead, it is the example set by those who deal with the physical body in a proper way. How do we know that [verse 17](#) refers not to the things of the soul, but to the things of the body? We know it by the fact that [verse 18](#) begins with the word “for,” indicating that this verse is an explanation of [verse 17](#). [Verse 18](#) says, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” They were enemies of the cross of Christ, which has terminated the indulgence of the lusts of the physical body.

As we have pointed out, the Epicureans care for indulgence in the enjoyment of eating and drinking. Paul refers to this in [verse 19](#), which says, “Whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” In promoting the enjoyment of eating and drinking, the Epicureans were more concerned with physical indulgence than with ethics or morality. Today many take the way of the Epicureans to indulge in physical enjoyments. On the weekends some are so given to sports and physical pleasures that they forget everything else. Of the Epicureans Paul also says that they “set their minds on

earthly things.” By earthly things he means physical things, material things, matters of eating and drinking.

According to the book of Colossians, Paul did not agree with asceticism, with the practice of treating the body severely. But neither would he agree with the Epicurean indulgence in physical enjoyment. We need such things as food and clothing. Without them, we cannot live. However, we should not indulge ourselves in these things.

In [Philippians 4:11](#) Paul says, “I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content.” The Greek word rendered “content” is a Stoic term, indicating a practice opposite to that of the Epicureans. The Stoics taught that a person should be content in all circumstances, caring neither for enjoyment nor for suffering. Paul used this expression in testifying that he had learned the secret to be content. In principle, we Christians agree neither with the Epicureans nor with the ascetics. In a sense, we may somewhat stand with the Stoics.

CITIZENSHIP IN THE HEAVENS

In [Philippians 3:20](#) Paul goes on to say, “For our citizenship is in the heavens, from which

also we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Greek word rendered “citizenship” may also be rendered commonwealth or associations of life. Our national life is not in any earthly country; it is in the heavens. Our real citizenship, our true commonwealth, is in the heavens.

Because our citizenship is in the heavens, we should not be occupied with earthly things, with the physical things needed for our existence. We should not place such a high value on material things. This does not mean, of course, that we should not have proper food, clothing, housing, and transportation. We definitely need these things. But anything that goes beyond need falls into the category of indulgence. Such indulgence is to be condemned. If we love the earthly things needed for human life, this is an indication that we do not treasure our heavenly citizenship.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE BODY

From the heavens we are eagerly awaiting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who “will transfigure the body of our humiliation, conforming it to the body of His glory, according to the operation of Him who is able even to subject all things

to Himself.” The transfiguration of our body will be the ultimate consummation of God’s salvation. In His salvation God first regenerated our spirit ([John 3:6](#)), now He is transforming our soul ([Rom. 12:2](#)), and, consummately, He will transfigure our body, making us the same as Christ in all three parts of our being.

In [Philippians 3:21](#) Paul refers to our body as “the body of our humiliation.” This describes our natural body, made of worthless dust ([Gen. 2:7](#)) and damaged by sin, weakness, sickness, and death ([Rom. 6:6](#); [7:24](#); [8:11](#)). But one day this body will be transfigured and conformed to the body of Christ’s glory. Christ’s body of glory is His resurrected body, saturated with God’s glory ([Luke 24:26](#)) and transcendent over corruption and death ([Rom. 6:9](#)).

No matter how we may feed and clothe our body and no matter what kind of automobile we use to transport it or dwelling place to house it, it is still a body of humiliation. You may allow your body to rest on the best and most expensive bed, but it is nonetheless a body of humiliation. However, we should not hate or despise our body. If we despise our body, we shall practice asceticism. In a very real sense, we should love our body for the Lord’s sake. We need to care for

the body without allowing it to indulge itself. One day, the Lord Jesus will come and transfigure the body of humiliation and conform it to the body of His glory.

In [Philippians 3:21](#) Paul says that the transfiguration of the body of humiliation is “according to the operation of Him who is able even to subject all things to Himself.” The transfiguration of our body is by the great power which subjects all things to the Lord ([Eph. 1:19-22](#)). This is the almighty power in the whole universe.

I believe that now we can grasp Paul’s basic thought in [Philippians 3](#). In this chapter Paul instructs us concerning both how to deal with the soul and how to deal with the body. To deal with the soul, we must count as loss all religious, philosophical, and cultural things so that Christ may occupy our entire being and that we may gain Him to the uttermost. To deal with our body, we should take care of our physical need, but not indulge in excessive physical enjoyment. Our aim should be to care for the body in a proper way that it may be healthy for the Lord’s expression. But our intention should not be to glorify the physical body through the over enjoyment of physical things. Our body is not to be glorified in this way, but is to be glorified at the

time of the Lord's coming back. At that time, He will transfigure our body of humiliation. Thus, we are waiting for Christ to come back that we may be brought into the ultimate consummation of God's salvation—the transfiguration of our body. Day by day, we are undergoing the process of transformation in our soul as we are waiting for the Lord to come to transfigure our body and thereby to bring us into the ultimate consummation of God's salvation.

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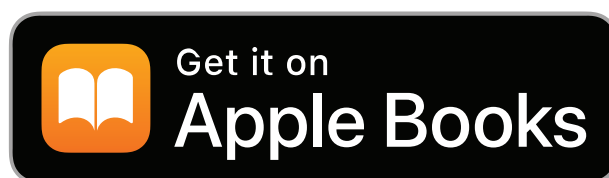
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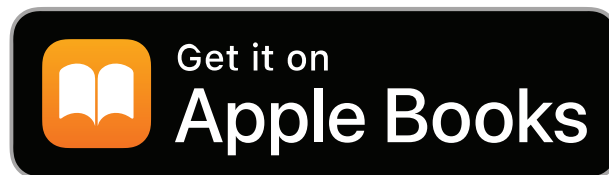
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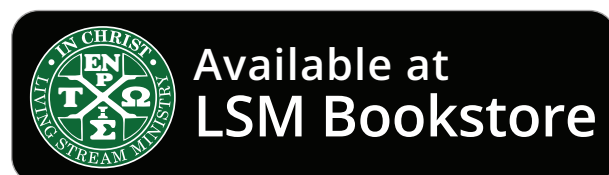
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