

## **Bear Witness: Encountering Jesus changes your Identity Philippians 3:4-14 FBC**

Canton Sunday am June 21, 2026 Camp meeting kickoff

**Introduction: What if you realized that Jesus changes your identity? Bear witness!**

### **The self-righteous hate humility. V. 1-3**

They cannot rejoice. No complainers can rejoice. troubled people are always trouble makers.

They thought they could do exterior modifications of their appearance to gain acceptance to a Holy God!

I am calling you today to bear witness to God's greatness, not your own.

No one gets saved from the self-righteous!

#### **I. Paul was not always Paul, he was once Saul. V. 4-6**

**a. The more confidence you have in yourself the more you will have to lose to bear witness=7!**

**i. My parents followed the law=8<sup>th</sup> day. V. 5**

**ii. My genealogy is full of great people=Abraham. V. 5**

**iii. My tribe is of kings=Saul. V. 5**

**iv. I was the best of the best=Hebrew of Hebrews. V. 5**

**v. I did it better than anyone else=Rule follower. V. 5**

1. Pharisees:

a. Bitter legalists breeding fear they will never be enough.

b. Better than you at controlling money.

c. Power playing rumor milling religionists without relationship.

d. Hypocritical exclusionists forming cliques and causing divisions.

e. Self-righteous pride-filled pit of vipers.

**vi. I did it with more passion and conviction than anyone else=Persecutor. V. 6**

1. Even killing those who were the opposite of me.

**vii. I did it perfectly=Blameless. V. 6**

**b. Count them as fertilizer for pride or lose your witness. V. 8**

"Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven! He was spiritually bankrupt! Paul had to lose his "religion" to find salvation..." Chuck Missler.

#### **II. Bearing witness comes from knowing our new identity. V. 7-14**

**a. Give up who you are for who He is!**

**i. Gaining Jesus, losing self. V. 7**

**ii. Knowing my Lord's heart, comes from knowing Him. V. 8**

**iii. Suffering with Jesus is the pathway to joy. V. 8**

- iv. **Being found in him means rejecting self-righteousness. V. 9**
- v. **Not from the Law, but through faith. V. 9**
- vi. **Knowing the power of the resurrection to raise me up from dying to self. V. 10-11**
- vii. **Pressing on to why Jesus took hold of me. V. 12**

“This is the declaration of a Christian who never permitted himself to be satisfied with his spiritual attainments. A sanctified dissatisfaction is the first essential to progress in any race or serious undertaking....We are continually warned against a false estimate of our spiritual condition.

Verse 12 is not only a statement of the demands of discipleship, it also is an announcement of the principles by which this calling should be realized:

- 1) He acknowledges that he was *called by* Christ Jesus;
- 2) God had a *purpose* in calling him;
- 3) He acknowledges that this puts an *obligation* on himself—an obligation to follow after Jesus.

We are called—by the God the Universe—we didn’t choose Him: He chose us: [And there’s more:]

Paul was certainly not complacent: he was intensely committed to winning the race of life; of maximizing his opportunities. [Cf. Benjamin Franklin’s pursuit of virtues: *Ben Franklin’s Almanac...*]” Chuck Missler

**b. Your past doesn’t define you the upward call of God does. V. 13-14**

“It is important for us to realize that Paul is *not* telling us how to be saved. That would be by works and self-effort, and would contradict what he wrote in the first 11 verses—as well as most of the rest of his epistles!

In order to participate in the Greek games, the athlete *had to be a citizen!* He did not run the race to gain his citizenship. (In v.20, he will emphasize that “our citizenship is in heaven” [already].) But since we are already the children of God through faith in Christ, we have the responsibility of “running the race” and achieving the goals that God has set for us.” Chuck Missler

**Conclusion: Possess these attitudes or you will never bear witness to your identity change. V. 15-16**

# David Guzik

## Study Guide for Philippians 3

### LEAVING LAW AND PRESSING ON TO JESUS

#### A. The futility of a relationship with God based on the principle of law.

##### 1. ([Philippians 3:1-2](#)) Warning against the influence of legalistic Jews.

**Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you *is* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!**

a. **Finally**: This didn't mean that Paul was almost finished; Paul wrote here as many preachers speak. Yet we should expect some sort of transition in the letter with the word **finally**.

i. "Paul's 'finally' here is not the 'finally' of the present day preacher. He has another 'finally' in [4:8](#). He does not mean by this that he is about to close the letter. The words translated by the word 'finally' are literally 'as for the rest.'" (Wuest)

b. **Rejoice in the Lord**: This is a fitting theme for the whole letter. Paul shared with the Philippians the principle of being able to rejoice **in the Lord** — not in circumstances or in situations, but **in the Lord** who works all things together for good.

i. This abiding joy is fitting for the believer because it shows that we really do trust in a God whom we really believe is in control. When we believe this, it isn't any surprise that we are then filled with joy.

ii. **Rejoice in the Lord**: "The entire phrase may be the Christian equivalent of the Old Testament exclamation, *Hallelujah*." (Martin)

iii. "*It is a duty for us to cultivate this joy*. We must steadfastly arrest any tendency to murmur and complain; to find fault with God's dealings; or to seek to elicit sympathy. We must as much resist the temptation to depression and melancholy as we would to any form of sin." (Meyer)

c. **For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe**: Paul assured the Philippians that he didn't mind reminding them of the same things because it was for their safety.

i. Paul did not mind reminding them because he was passionately concerned about certain dangers, and he would speak out strongly against them. "This outburst is very remarkable, for its vehemence is so unlike the tone of the rest of the letter. That is calm, joyous, bright, but this is stormy and impassioned, full of flashing and scathing words." (Maclaren)

d. **Beware of dogs**: This was a harsh reference to the troublemaking legalists who attempted to deceive the Philippians. “**Dogs**” is exactly the term of contempt Jews would use against Gentiles. Paul said a lot by using this word against these Jewish-influenced legalists.

i. Muller quoting Lightfoot: “The herds of dogs which prowl about Eastern cities, without a home and without an owner, feeding on the refuse and filth of the streets, quarreling among themselves, and attacking the passer-by, explain the applications of the image.”

ii. “We are bidden, therefore, to beware of men of a quarrelsome and contentious spirit, who under the guise of religion hide impure and unclean things; and who are not only defiled, but defiling in their influence.” (Meyer)

e. **Beware of evil workers**: This describes both what these legalists **do** (working **evil**), but was also a word against their emphasis on righteousness with God by **works**. Paul would admit that they have a concern for works, but they were **evil workers**.

i. **Evil workers**: “These people are the ‘Cranks’ of our Churches; they introduce fads and hobbies; they exaggerate the importance of trifles; they catch up every new theory and vagary, and follow it to the detriment of truth and love.” (Meyer)

f. **Beware of the mutilation**: Here is another harsh reference to the insistence of these Jewish legalists on requiring circumcision for Gentiles who wanted to become Christians. This was all done with the idea that someone must become a Jew **first** before they could become a Christian.

i. “They did not deny that Jesus was the Messiah, or that His Gospel was the power of God unto salvation, but they insisted that the Gentile converts could only come to the fullness of Gospel privilege through the Law of Moses.” (Meyer)

ii. However, Paul did not see their insistence on circumcision as something beautiful or noble; he regarded it as an ugly example of **mutilation**. Maclaren imagines Paul saying it like this: “I will not call them the circumcision, they have not been circumcised, they have only been gashed and mutilated, it has been a mere fleshly maiming.”

iii. Martin on **the mutilation**: “By a pun, he mockingly calls it a mere cutting, *katatome*, *i.e.* mutilation of the body on a par with pagan practices forbidden in **Leviticus 21:5**.”

2. **(Philippians 3:3-4) Paul defines the true circumcision.**

**For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:**

a. **For we are the circumcision**: These Jewish legalists considered themselves the ones truly circumcised and right with God. But Paul declared that he and his followers were the **true circumcision**.

b. **Who worship God in the Spirit**: This defines the true circumcision. They **worship God in the Spirit**, as opposed to the fleshly and external worship emphasized by these legalists.

i. "The word 'worship' is the translation of the Greek word referring to the service of Jehovah by His peculiar people, the Jews. A Jew would be scandalized by the application of this word to a Gentile." (Wuest)

c. **Rejoice in Christ Jesus**: This also characterizes those of the true circumcision. Their joy is not found in their own ability to be justified by the law or by their law-keeping. Jesus and Jesus alone is their joy.

d. **Have no confidence in the flesh**: This is a third characteristic of the true circumcision. They do not trust in their own ability to be righteous before God through external works (**the flesh**), but their only confidence is in Jesus.

e. **I also might have confidence in the flesh... I more so**: Paul knew that he was more qualified to be justified by the keeping of the law than any of his present legalistic opponents were.

i. Curiously, often those who promote the idea of having confidence in the flesh are the same ones who are the least qualified to have such confidence. This is because of the principle Paul explains in **Colossians 2:23** — *These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

### 3. (**Philippians 3:5-6**) Paul's reasons why he might have confidence in the flesh.

**Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.**

a. **Circumcised the eighth day...**: Paul first listed four things that were his possessions by birth, all reasons why he might have confidence in the flesh.

- Paul was **circumcised the eighth day** in accordance with **Leviticus 12:3**.
- Paul was **of the stock of Israel**, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and therefore an heir to God's covenant with them.
- Paul was of **the tribe of Benjamin**, a distinguished tribe. Benjamin was distinguished by the fact that it gave Israel her first king, Saul (**1 Samuel 9:1-2**). It was the tribe that aligned itself with faithful Judah when Israel divided into two nations at the time of Rehoboam (**1 Kings 12:21**). It was also the tribe that had the city of Jerusalem within its boundaries (**Judges 1:21**).

- Paul was **a Hebrew of the Hebrews**. This contrasted him with the Jews who embraced Greek culture as it spread through the Mediterranean. In that time, many Jews became ashamed of their Jewishness and tried to live and act as much like Greeks as they could, sometimes even to the point of having their circumcision cosmetically restored or hidden so they could enjoy the Roman public baths without being noticed as Jews. In contrast, Paul was raised by his parents as **a Hebrew of the Hebrews**.

b. **Concerning the law**: Paul then listed three things that were his by personal choice and conviction, all reasons why he might have confidence in the flesh.

- Paul was **concerning the law, a Pharisee**. This tells us that among an elite people (the Jews), Paul was of an elite sect (the Pharisees), who were noted for their scrupulous devotion to the law of God. “There were not very many Pharisees, never more than six thousand, but they were the spiritual athletes of Judaism. Their very name means *The Separated Ones*. They had separated themselves off from all common life and from all common tasks in order to make it the one aim of their lives to keep every smallest detail of the Law.” (Barclay) The concern that Pharisees had for keeping the law is reflected in passages like [Matthew 23:23](#).
- **Concerning zeal, persecuting the church**. Paul was not merely an *intellectual* opponent of perceived heresies against Judaism; he was also an active fighter against them — even in his blindness to God. Paul’s observation that the Jews of his day *have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge* ([Romans 10:2](#)) was true of his own life before God confronted him on the road to Damascus.
- **Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless**. This shows that Paul achieved the standard of righteousness which was accepted among the men of his day — though this standard fell short of God’s holy standard. Because of how the law was interpreted and taught, there were those of that day who were deceived into thinking that they really were **blameless**, like the rich young ruler ([Luke 18:18-23](#)).

i. In summary, if *anyone* could lay claim to pleasing God by law-keeping and the works of the flesh, it was Paul. He was far more qualified than his legalizing opponents were to make such a claim.

#### 4. ([Philippians 3:7](#)) Paul rejects all confidence in the flesh.

**But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.**

a. **These I have counted loss for Christ**: Any of the corrupting teachers Paul warned against would be proud to claim Paul’s pedigree. Yet Paul made it plain: **these things I have counted loss for Christ**.

i. “The word ‘gain’ is plural in the Greek, namely, ‘gains.’... ‘Loss’ is singular. The various gains are all counted as one loss.” (Wuest)

ii. “He was skilled in spiritual arithmetic, and very careful in his reckoning. He cast up his accounts with caution, and observed with a diligent eye his losses and his gains.” (Spurgeon)

b. **I have counted loss**: Paul **counted** these things loss. It wasn't so much that they were a loss by their very character, as much as he chose to **regard** them as **loss**.

i. They were **counted loss** not so much because they were harmful to Paul, but because these things were ways in which Paul sought to please God in the energies of the flesh. Before Paul became a Christian, he thought all these things made him a success in the effort to please God by works.

ii. We can say that Paul's attitude was the same that Jesus described in the parable of the pearl of great price ([Matthew 13:45-46](#)).

## B. Paul's utter confidence in a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

### 1. ([Philippians 3:8](#)) Paul's gain in Jesus Christ.

**Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ**

a. **Yet indeed I also count all things loss**: Paul did not only count his religious pedigree as a loss; he counted **all things loss** — but he counted them as a loss in view of **the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus**.

i. **Yet indeed**: “The translation of five particles, which latter are literally translated, ‘yea, indeed, therefore, at least, even,’ and show the force and passion of Paul's conviction.” (Wuest)

ii. It wasn't so much that those things were worthless in themselves, but compared to the greatness of **the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus**, they really were nothing.

iii. Paul here put a *personal relationship with Jesus Christ* at the very center of the Christian's life. He joyfully accepted the loss of all other things for the greatness of this personal relationship.

iv. In [Philippians 3:7](#) Paul said that he **counted**; in this verse he said **I also count**. This first counting was at his conversion; the second — some 30 years later — was in his Roman prison. After all he had experienced, he still counted it worthy to give everything up for the sake of following Jesus.

v. “After twenty years or more of experience Paul had an opportunity of revising his balance-sheet, and looking again at his estimates, and seeing whether or not his counting was correct. What was the issue of his latest search? How do matters stand at his last stocktaking? He exclaims with very special emphasis, ‘Yea doubtless; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.’” (Spurgeon)

b. **For whom I have suffered the loss of all things**: This counting loss was not merely an internal spiritual exercise. Paul had indeed **suffered the loss of all things** that he might gain Christ.

i. This is demonstrated by the place and circumstances under which Paul wrote this letter — a Roman prison, where he truly could say that he had **suffered the loss of all things**.

c. **Count them as rubbish**: Paul here used strong language. Literally, Paul considered them as excrement — as dung; not only as worthless, but as offensive.

i. The ancient Greek word for **rubbish** had one of two uses. It could describe excrement from the body or table scraps that were fit only to be thrown to the dogs. We may suppose that Paul would be comfortable with either meaning in this context.

ii. “The word **[rubbish]** means the vilest dross or **[refuse]** of any thing; the worst excrement. The word shows how utterly insignificant and unavailing, in point of salvation, the apostle esteemed every thing but the Gospel of Jesus.” (Clarke)

## 2. **(Philippians 3:9)** The spiritual benefits of his gain in Jesus Christ.

**And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;**

a. **And be found in Him**: Because Paul was **in Him**, he could renounce his **own righteousness** and live by the **righteousness which is from God by faith**. The foundation for his spiritual life was in what Jesus had done for him and not in what he had done, was doing, or would do for Jesus in the future.

b. **The righteousness which is from God by faith**: Paul here exposed the great difference between the legal relationship stressed by his opponents and his personal connection with Jesus Christ. The difference is between living and trusting in your own righteousness and living and trusting in God’s righteousness given **through faith in Christ**.

i. “He disowns his own righteousness as eagerly as other men disown their sins, and he highly esteems the righteousness which Christ has wrought out for us, which becomes ours by faith.” (Spurgeon)

## 3. **(Philippians 3:10-11)** Paul’s experience of a personal relationship with Jesus.

**That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**

a. **That I may know Him**: This was the simple plea of Paul’s heart. It was a plea unknown to the legalist, who must necessarily focus on his own performance and status to find some kind of peace with God. But Paul wanted Jesus, not self.

i. To know Jesus is not the same as knowing His historical life; it is not the same as knowing correct doctrines regarding Jesus; it is not the same as knowing His moral example, and it is not the same as knowing His great work on our behalf.

- We can say that we know someone because we recognize him: because we can distinguish what is different about him compared to other people.
- We can say that we know someone because we are acquainted with what he does; we know the baker because we get our bread from him.
- We can say that we know someone because we actually converse with him; we are on speaking terms with that person.
- We can say that we know someone because we spend time in his house and with his family.
- We can say that we know someone because we have committed our life to him and live with him every day, sharing every circumstance as in a marriage.
- Yet beyond all this, there is a way of knowing Jesus Christ that includes all of these yet goes beyond them.

ii. "They tell me he is a refiner, that he cleanses from spots; he has washed me in his precious blood, and to that extent I know him. They tell me that he clothes the naked; he hath covered me with a garment of righteousness, and to that extent I know him. They tell me that he is a breaker, and that he breaks fetters, he has set my soul at liberty, and therefore I know him. They tell me that he is a king and that he reigns over sin; he hath subdued my enemies beneath his feet, and I know him in that character. They tell me he is a shepherd: I know him for I am his sheep. They say he is a door: I have entered in through him, and I know him as a door. They say he is food: my spirit feeds on him as on the bread of heaven, and, therefore, I know him as such." (Spurgeon)

b. **And the power of His resurrection**: Knowing Jesus means knowing this **power**, the new life that is imparted to us now, not when we die.

i. "He wants to know in an experiential way the power of Christ's resurrection. That is, he wants to experience the same power that raised Christ from the dead surging through his own being, overcoming sin in his life and producing the Christian graces." (Wuest)

ii. "I do not think, however, that Paul is here thinking so much of the power displayed in the resurrection, as of the power which comes out of it, which may most properly be called, 'the power of his resurrection.' This the apostle desired to apprehend and to know." (Spurgeon)

- The power of His resurrection is an **evidencing power**. It is the evidence and seal that everything Jesus did and said was true.
- The power of His resurrection is a **justifying power**. It is the receipt and proof that the sacrifice of the cross was accepted as payment in full.
- The power of His resurrection is a **life-giving power**. It means that those who are connected with Jesus Christ receive the same resurrection life.
- The power of His resurrection is a **consoling and comforting power**. It promises that our friends and loved ones who are dead in Christ live with Him.

c. **And the fellowship of His sufferings**: Knowing Jesus also means knowing this **fellowship of His sufferings**. It is all part of following Jesus and being **in** Christ. We can say that suffering is part of our heritage as the children of God; we get to be part of the family of suffering: *If children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together* ([Romans 8:17](#)).

d. **Being conformed to His death**: This reminds us that being **in Christ** also means being “in” His death. These words had particular relevance to Paul who faced possible martyrdom.

e. **If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead**: Paul was not morbidly focused on suffering and death in the Christian life. He saw that they were a necessary way to the goal of resurrection life right now and the ultimate resurrection from the dead.

i. This was a goal that was worth **any means** to Paul. The suffering was worth it, considering the greatness of the goal of **resurrection from the dead**.

ii. **I may attain**: Paul didn’t doubt that he was saved, but he did long mightily for the completion of his salvation through the resurrection of his body. It was something that he had not yet attained and longed for.

iii. Remember that Paul wrote this having experienced more suffering than we will ever experience, and he wrote it from the custody of Roman soldiers. This wasn’t merely theological theory and ideas, but a lived-out connection with God.

#### 4. ([Philippians 3:12-14](#)) The future of Paul’s relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

a. **Not that I have already attained**: Paul wrote from such spiritual maturity and purity that we might expect he believed that he had conquered all spiritual difficulties and saw himself as having arrived at near perfection. Yet he assured us this was not so. There was no perfectionism in Paul.

- i. Sadly, it is common for many Christian leaders to cultivate the attitude that they **have already attained**. Without saying the words, they put forth the image of constant triumph that gives the idea that they **have already attained** and are **already perfected**.
- ii. “Brethren, it is a very healthy thing for us who are ministers to read a biography like that of M’Cheyne. Read that through, if you are a minister, and it will burst many of your windbags. You will find yourselves collapse most terribly. Take the life of Brainerd amongst the Indians, or of Baxter in our own land. Think of the holiness of George Herbert, the devoutness of Fletcher, or the zeal of Whitfield. Where do you find yourself after reading their lives? Might you not peep about to find a hiding-place for your insignificance?” (Spurgeon)
- iii. “Just as a little child is a perfect human being, but still is far from perfect in all his development as man, so the true child of God is also perfect in all parts, although not yet perfect in all the stages of his development in faith.” (Muller)
- iv. “But while the work of Christ for us is perfect, and it were presumption to think of adding to it, the work of the Holy Spirit in us is not perfect, it is continually carried on from day to day, and will need to be continued throughout the whole of our lives.” (Spurgeon)

b. **But I press on**: Because Paul realized that he had not arrived, there was only one option open for him. He had to **press on**. There was no turning back for Him.

- i. When Spain led the world (in the 15th century), her coins reflected her national arrogance and were inscribed **Ne Plus Ultra** which meant “Nothing Further” — meaning that Spain was the ultimate in all the world. After the discovery of the New World, she realized that she was not the end of the world, so Spain changed the inscription on her coinage to **Plus Ultra** meaning “More Beyond.” In the same pattern, some Christian lives say, “Nothing Further” and others say “More Beyond.”
- ii. This is where child-like faith meets real maturity. A child can’t wait to be bigger and always wants to be more mature.
- iii. **But I press on** meant that Paul had put his hand to the plow and refused to look back (**Luke 9:62**).

c. **That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me**: Paul pressed on for what Jesus wanted. His effort was put forth to do God’s will, not his own.

- i. When Paul said, **That I may lay hold**, he used strong language. “The word ‘apprehend’ is from the same Greek word translated ‘attained,’ but with a preposition prefixed which means in its local force ‘down.’ He wants to catch hold of it and pull it down, like a football player who not only wants to catch his man, but wants to pull him down and make him his own.” (Wuest)

ii. Paul began this verse with the idea that Jesus Christ had laid hold of him. This is an important idea; yet sometimes Christians react to that idea by being passive. They suppose, “Jesus got a hold of me; so that is it now. I am a Christian and I am going to heaven.” Paul showed a different attitude; he was determined to **lay hold** for that for which Jesus had **laid hold** of him. So one should ask, “Why did Jesus lay hold of Paul?”

- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to make him a new man ([Romans 6:4](#)) — so Paul would **lay hold** of that and wanted to see the converting work of Jesus completely carried out in himself.
- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to conform him into the image of Jesus Christ ([Romans 8:29](#)) — so Paul would **lay hold** of that and wanted to see the nature of Jesus within himself.
- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to make him a witness ([Acts 9:15](#)) — so Paul would **lay hold** of both the experience of Jesus and to testify of that experience.
- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to make him an instrument in the conversion of others ([Acts 9:15](#)) — so Paul would **lay hold** of the work of bringing others to Jesus.
- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul to bring him into suffering ([Acts 9:16](#)) — so Paul would **lay hold** of even that work of God in his life, wanting to know Jesus in the fellowship of His sufferings.
- Jesus **laid hold** of Paul that so that the Apostle might attain to the resurrection from the dead ([Philippians 3:11](#)) — so Paul would **lay hold** of that heavenly hope.

d. **The prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus:** Paul was focused on one thing and would not let **those things which are behind** distract him from it. He pressed on for the **prize**.

i. We often let **those things which are behind** distract us, whether they be good things or bad things. Looking at what is in the past often keeps us from what God has for us in the future.

ii. It is a deception to live either in the past or in the future; God wants us to press on in the present, because the present is where eternity touches us now. Paul knew that a race is won only in the present moment, not in the past or in the future.

e. **I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus:** The prize is the **upward call of God**. The **prize** is the **call** itself, not the benefits that come from the call or any other thing. The prize is being able to run the race at all, working with God as a partner to do the work of His kingdom.

i. “It is a **high calling** because it comes from above, from God; the conception of it has emanated from His heart. It is a **high calling** because it is worthy of God. It is a **high calling** because it is so much above the ideals of men... And then this is a **high calling** because it summons us to where Christ sits at the right hand of God.” (Meyer)

ii. Because it is such a glorious call, it is worth **reaching forward** for it. “The Greek word points out the strong exertions made in the **race**; every muscle and nerve is exerted, and he

puts forth every particle of his strength in running. He was running for life, and running for his life." (Clarke)

f. **The upward call of God in Christ Jesus**: As everything else, this **upward call of God** is only **in Christ Jesus**. The legalists might say they followed the **upward call of God**, but they certainly didn't do it **in Christ Jesus**; instead they did it in the efforts of their own flesh.

## The Bible Says Philippians 3:2-7 Meaning

Now Paul begins to admonish his beloved Philippian disciples to Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision. Paul might be speaking of Jews who teach that Gentiles must be circumcised and obey Jewish religious rules in order to be saved. In this case, they could be referring to justification salvation (to be born into the family of God, being delivered from eternal separation from God).

Paul's letters to the Romans and to the Galatians address directly the topic of seeking to be justified through religious deeds. After he left them, Paul's disciples in Galatia accepted and believed the false teaching of the kind of dogs and evil workers he warns the Philippians to avoid. In following the false teaching of the dogs and evil workers, the Galatians were "seeking to be justified in Christ" (Galatians 2:17). In "seeking to be justified" in the sight of God through their own religious observance, the Galatians were saying, in essence, "Jesus's death on the cross is not sufficient, I have to add something."

This is why Paul said to the Galatians "...if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you" (Galatians 5:2). Paul's point was that they would be relying on themselves rather than Christ, so would have no reason to walk in faith in obedience to Christ. If they relied on their own actions to be justified, then the mindset of chapter 2 would apply — they would be focusing on the wrong thing. Paul adamantly asserts throughout his writings that no human can add a single thing to Jesus's finished work on the cross. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul asserts that every sin was "nailed to the cross":

"When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a

public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

[\(Colossians 2:13-15\)](#)

In his letter to the Romans, where Paul defends this gospel of grace against those who would require circumcision and adherence to religious ritual as a necessity for salvation, Paul asserts that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" ([Romans 5:20](#)). This means that Jesus' death on the cross covered every sin, for all time, and His grace abounds to cover every sin. This of course means that nothing can be added to Jesus' work on the cross. In order to adopt the mindset of radical obedience that Jesus adopted, we have to believe that we are already fully accepted into God's family through the work of Christ on the cross. That is the foundation from which we can then make a choice to adopt the mindset that it is in our best interest to lay aside everything and endure anything in order to gain the greatest rewards from Christ.

The [dogs](#) and [evil workers](#) could also be falsely teaching that religious observance brings sanctification. Our sanctification is the deliverance from the power of sin in our daily lives. Through sanctification, we escape the negative consequences of sin, both now as well as at the judgement seat of Christ. In this case, obsessing over religious observance directs our focus on how we appear before other people, rather than focusing on the great day when we will stand before Christ. When we focus on pleasing Christ, it leads us to prioritize serving others in love. When we focus on religious ritual, it leads us to prioritize comparing ourselves to others.

Paul considered the teaching that circumcision and religious ritual delivered anyone from sin in any context as [evil](#).

In light of this reality, Paul now asserts [for we are the true circumcision. Circumcision](#) was a ritual God provided to Abraham as a sign of the covenant, or contract, that God had made with him and his descendants, the Hebrews. Circumcision was like an ordinance, it was a physical sign that represented a spiritual reality. God chose Abraham and accounted, or reckoned, Abraham as being righteous in His sight because Abraham believed God ([Genesis 15:6](#)). Abraham was justified in the sight of God solely because of faith, and this took place many years prior to the time when God asked Abraham to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant.

Circumcision then is not required to be justified in God's sight. Rather it is a part of walking in fellowship with God. It is an action that provides a reminder of a covenant relationship with God, and what God has promised to His people. God promised great blessings to Abraham if he would walk in obedience. Part of that obedience was to practice circumcision ([Genesis 17:1-12](#)).

Paul claims that now [the true circumcision](#) is no longer those who have mere physical circumcision. Now the [true circumcision](#) is those [who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus](#). In our

current age, Christ has freely given to all people the opportunity to join His family through simple belief in Him ([John 3:14-16](#)). This is the same way Abraham was declared righteous; Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness ([Genesis 15:6](#)).

The Philippian believers had believed; we know this because Paul referred to them as "saints" ([Philippians 1:1](#)). This means they were already justified in the presence of God. Paul then admonished these believers to choose the same mindset Jesus chose, and walk in radical obedience to God. This was not necessary in order to be justified in God's sight, because that only comes through faith. Rather, choosing the same mindset as Christ was needed in order to gain the greatest benefit from our covenant relationship with God. That is why Paul admonishes believers to adopt a mindset that God's rewards for obedience will be worth the difficulties to be endured.

Paul infers that the equivalent of physical circumcision, from the age of the Old Covenant, is in this Age of Grace worshipping [in the Spirit of God and glory in Jesus Christ](#). Just as physical circumcision was a reminder of God's covenant relationship with Israel, worshipping [in the Spirit](#) is a reminder for New Testament believers of our relationship with Christ through the new covenant in His blood ([Luke 22:20](#)). We gain intimate fellowship with Christ through a daily walk of faithfulness, walking in the Spirit. Rather than following religious ritual, we are to serve others as Jesus served. Rather than seeking glory from the world, we are to walk in the [glory of Jesus Christ](#).

The [dogs](#) and [evil workers](#) who would mislead them are actually the [false circumcision](#), which is why Paul warns the Philippians to [beware](#) of them. If the Philippians seek self-justifying religious observance, they will not be adopting the mindset that Jesus adopted. Jesus confronted and opposed those who focused on religious ritual at the expense of walking in the true spirit of the Law ([Matthew 23](#)). To follow the [false circumcision](#) will be to follow in the path of those whom Jesus chastised. It will be the opposite of adopting the mindset that Jesus chose, as described in Chapter 2.

In Acts, we learn that Paul gained the agreement of the leading Jewish church authorities in Jerusalem that Gentiles were not to be burdened with circumcision and religious rituals ([Acts 15](#)). Notwithstanding that, there were still Jews following behind Paul and overturning Paul's teaching of grace, teaching legalism in place of grace. This is likely what Paul is warning his Philippian disciples against. Paul is using a twist of irony, noting that the physically circumcised Jews who advocate the necessity of physical circumcision are the [false circumcision](#), while the physically uncircumcised Gentile believers are the [true circumcision](#).

There are two actions that express the [true circumcision](#). One action is to [worship in the Spirit of God](#). When believers [worship in the Spirit of God](#), it is an out-working of the new covenant we have with God. The new covenant, or contract, is one that is written on our hearts, as God had promised

He would do, through the prophets ([Jeremiah 31:27](#)). The indwelling Holy Spirit seals believers into the new covenant ([Ephesians 1:13](#)). This is similar to physical circumcision, which was a seal of the covenant Abraham had with God ([Romans 4:11](#)). It is a sign that "we are His people."

Paul adds a second sign to [worship in the Spirit of God](#), which is the phrase [glory in Christ Jesus](#). Paul's idea of how to [glory in Christ Jesus](#) likely includes adopting the attitude Paul admonished believers to adopt in Chapter 2. It is to live a life wholly dedicated to please the Lord, trusting that His ways are for our best. It is a complete trust in the benevolent intent of God toward us. This attitude leads us to rejoice in all circumstances. Choosing to [glory in Christ Jesus](#) is to choose a perspective that says, "If I follow the Lord's direction, that will work out best for me, no matter what my senses might be telling me."

As Paul will say shortly, "I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ" ([Philippians 3:8](#)). [To glory in Christ](#) is to consider any distraction from radical obedience as rubbish. Paul's point is that these are the true signs of obedience to the new covenant in Christ. It is not religious observance to rituals like circumcision. It is the spiritual worship of complete obedience, and commitment to follow the example of Jesus.

A part of adopting this perspective is to also [put no confidence in the flesh](#). In this case Paul says [we put no confidence in the flesh](#). By the use of [we](#), Paul includes the Gentile Philippian believers together with himself, a believing Jew, as well as his mission partners. Paul asserts that the [true circumcision](#) consists of those who trust Jesus' work on the cross and also live in the obedience of faith. In living by faith, they [put no confidence in the flesh](#). By [confidence in the flesh](#), Paul is likely thinking of religious rules, such as [circumcision](#).

It is important to note that Paul was physically circumcised. He will mention this shortly. He had Timothy circumcised after he joined Paul's ministry. He did this because Timothy's mother was Jewish, and Paul did not want Timothy's lack of physical circumcision to be a stumbling block in witnessing the gospel of Christ to the Jews ([Acts 16:1-3](#)). Further, Paul continued to observe Jewish religious customs during his entire ministry ([Acts 28:17](#)).

But Paul did not have [confidence](#) that this action [in the flesh](#) had anything to do with either his or Timothy's relationship with God. Paul was not keeping religious rituals in order to in any way be justified in the sight of God; that comes solely through faith in Jesus' finished work on the cross. Neither was Paul trusting religious ritual to be sanctified; that comes through the obedience of faith, adopting the same mentality of obedience that Jesus chose ([Philippians 2:5-10](#)). Paul was, however, attempting to be a faithful steward, that he might please Christ with his service, and receive great rewards.

As Paul states in 1 Corinthians:

"To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

[\(1 Corinthians 9:22-23\)](#)

Later in Chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, Paul makes clear that he is buffeting his body, his flesh, like an Olympic athlete. Paul desires to win the greatest prize of life, to please God through the obedience of faith. It is in this way he will "overcome" and gain the greatest victory of life, as Jesus overcame

[\(Revelation 3:21\)](#).

In stating all this, Paul makes clear the distinction between being justified in the sight of God (being accepted into God's family) versus gaining rewards for faithful service. Being justified in the sight of God is a gift, freely given. It only requires enough faith to look upon Jesus on the cross, hoping to be healed of the venomous poison of sin ([John 3:14-16](#)). Jesus does all that work. We do none.

On the other hand, gaining the greatest rewards of living a faithful life requires the radical obedience of Christ. That is why Paul gladly endures persecution, even to death at the hand of Emperor Nero. He is copying the example of Jesus, who learned obedience, even to death on the cross, and as a result was exalted by His Father ([Philippians 2:5-11](#)).

That Paul calls these [evil workers](#) "dogs" is quite an insult. [Dogs](#) were second only to pigs as unclean animals in Jewish culture. By calling them [dogs](#), Paul is stating that their religious works are actually the opposite of what they claim. Rather than making them righteous, their works are making them unclean. This makes sense, given that the [evil workers](#) are teaching falsely.

Paul will now make the case that if anyone could trust their own religious actions to justify themselves in the sight of God, it would be Paul. Paul says [I myself might have confidence even in the flesh.](#) The phrase [confidence in the flesh](#) refers to having faith in religious practices and credentials. Paul asserts that [If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more.](#) In stating this, Paul is making the point that he is more religiously qualified than any other Jew.

Paul actually kept Jewish customs throughout his ministry ([Acts 28:17](#)). But he will also make the point that this means absolutely nothing in terms of gaining righteousness in the sight of God. Paul relies wholly on the finished work of Jesus to be justified in the sight of God.

These statements of Paul about having [confidence in the flesh](#) could also apply to sanctification, and gaining God's rewards. We do not please God through acts of religious ritual. We please God through

-serving others, and obeying Jesus' commands. Religious ritual can be of benefit to prepare us to serve and minister. But they are a means, rather than an end. Paul relies wholly on pleasing God with the obedience of faith, adopting the same mindset of radical obedience in order to be sanctified, or set apart for great rewards by pleasing God. He relies not at all on his religious credentials.

Paul now lists his religious qualifications. This is what he would rely upon were he to trust his own efforts, either to be justified or be sanctified. He is asserting that if anyone is qualified to be deemed righteous by virtue of religious practice, then it would be him:

- Paul was *circumcised the eighth day*. This means he was born a Jew and was circumcised on the *eighth day* of his life, according to Jewish Law ([Genesis 17:12](#)). This means he had religiously observant parents.
- Paul was born *of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin*. Paul could trace his lineage and had a pedigree of being Jewish. In this period where many Jews were scattered around the world, it might have been that not all would have such a pedigree.
- Paul was *a Hebrew of Hebrews*. The term *Hebrew* is another term for someone of the nation of Israel. He was the most Israelite of the Israelites. The following list of qualifications demonstrates that Paul was the best of the best, in terms of following Jewish religious rituals:
  - *as to the Law, a Pharisee*. The Pharisees were defenders of the Jewish faith. They were strict adherents to the Mosaic Law. They had been God's instrument to save Judaism from being wiped out, and had led a revolt that resulted in Israel being freed from Greek rule. The Pharisees believed the Bible and were generally well thought of by working-class Jews. Jesus recognized the validity of their authority and teaching ([Matthew 23:1-3](#)). Jesus castigated them for abusing their favor with the working-class Jews, and exercising their interpretations and traditions (such as their oral law) which violated the spirit of the Law of God ([Matthew 23](#)). But in doing so, Jesus acknowledged their great influence with Jews.
  - *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church*. Prior to meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul himself had exercised what he then thought was the mantle of defending the faith, and persecuted those who did not adhere to the rules perpetuated by the Pharisees ([Acts 8:1](#); [9:1-2](#)). This means he was a serious keeper of religious rules.
  - *as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found* Paul kept all the religious rules. No one did it better.

So, what does Paul say all these religious credentials gained him? Nothing he values any longer.

Paul asserts, *But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

The sake of Christ is the obedience of Christ, following the attitude, mindset or perspective that Paul admonished believers choose in Chapter 2 (verses 5-10). Jesus left His abode in heaven in order to obey His Father. He did not consider Himself to be entitled to remain in His high station in heaven. He did not complain, or insist someone else give up their place in heaven and come to earth. Jesus considered that His best was always served through obeying His Father. He gave up the most comfortable and prosperous circumstances imaginable, and took on the role of a servant, in order to do His Father's will. In a similar way, Paul states that whatever things were gain to him, whatever things made him comfortable or gave him status among men in his prior role, he has counted as loss.

Just as Jesus set aside the comforts of heaven in order to take on the form of human flesh, Paul has set aside the privileges of his religious credentials in order to serve as a minister of the gospel of Christ. And, just as Jesus did, Paul trusts the benevolence of God, that God's rewards will make anything he gives up in this life more than worth the cost.

## Chuck Smith

### Verse by Verse Study on Philippians 3-4 (C2000)

Shall we turn now in our Bibles to Philippians 3.

Again, remember that the background of this epistle, Paul is chained to a Roman soldier in Rome, in prison, writing to the Philippians. The keynote of the epistle is rejoice, and he said,

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord (Phl 3:1).

You know, oftentimes it is extremely difficult to rejoice in circumstances. In fact, I think sometimes it is impossible to rejoice in circumstances. I just did a dumb thing, I ran through a red light and hit somebody and I am being sued for a million dollars. It is hard to rejoice in circumstances. But you can always rejoice in the Lord, because He is above circumstances. So, the exhortation in the scripture is always that of rejoicing in the Lord. And Paul writes,

To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous (Phl 3:1),

In other words, "Here I am, I am chained in prison, but I don't find it hard to write this to you. I am rejoicing here, in the Lord." I am sure he wasn't rejoicing in the circumstances themselves. They were rather miserable, but that does not stop you from rejoicing in the Lord. There is always cause to rejoice in the Lord.

but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs (Phl 3:1-2),

Now, immediately after telling them to rejoice in the Lord, he is warning them about the false teachers. Paul had certain people that seemed to follow him wherever he went, trying to pervert that

which he taught of the grace of God, especially the Jewish legalizers who sought to bring the people back to a legal relationship with God, putting them under the law. They demanded that they be circumcised and they keep the law of Moses in order to be saved, which Paul called the perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that these people usually referred to the Gentiles as dogs. That was a common name by which the Jews referred to the Gentiles: the gentile dogs. It was not a reference to a kindly family pet, but it was a reference to those mean wild dogs that roamed Israel. Barking and snapping at everybody, and belonging to nobody. And they were a sort of a hated animal. And thus the name dog the Jews began to apply to the Gentiles. It is interesting that Paul turns it around and uses it of those teachers that would seek to put the believers back under the law.

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision ([Phl 3:2](#)).

The word concision comes from a Greek word, which means mutilators. Paul is talking about their demands that the Gentiles be circumcised to be saved. And then he uses a contrasting Greek word, and it is a play on Greek words. If you read any Greek, you can pick up on the play on words.

"Beware of the concision."

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit ([Phl 3:3](#)),

Paul was constantly emphasizing that the physical rites had no value except there be a corresponding spiritual experience, that the circumcision of the flesh accounted for nothing. What God was interested in is that my heart was circumcised, that I had the heart after the Spirit, and not after the flesh. And though I may have a fleshly rite, if my heart was after the things of the flesh, then what happened to me physically has no bearing upon my relationship with God at all.

The same can be said of any of the other rites that we have within the church. The rite of water baptism is really not a physical rite, but a spiritual experience. It is not the physical experience that saves, it is the spiritual: the death to the old nature and the old man in my heart, the reckoning of myself to be dead, and living that new life in the resurrected Lord. And so Paul says, "Beware of those who would mutilate your body, for we are of those who are circumcised in the spirit." We worship God in the spirit.

Jesus said, "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus ([Phl 3:3](#)),

And that is in the glorious liberty that we have in Christ Jesus, that relationship that we can now have with God apart from the law.

and have no confidence in the flesh ([Phl 3:3](#)).

Now, Paul said in his Roman epistle, "I know in me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing." I have no confidence in the flesh. Paul said,

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more [If anyone might have something to boast in the flesh. I am the one who would]: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless ([Phl 3:4-6](#)).

Hey, this is a pretty good pedigree. I mean, if you can be saved by works, if you can be saved by your own efforts, if you can be saved by keeping the law, then Paul said, "Hey, I am ahead of the pack. I more than anybody else. I had everything going for me as far as righteousness from the law."

You remember Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, chapter 5 of Matthew, said, "Except your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." Now, Paul was a classic example of what Jesus was referring to. As far as the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, Paul had it. He had done everything that he was supposed to do according to the law to be righteous. In fact, he had gone beyond. He was a Pharisee. He persecuted the church. As far as his zeal and according to the righteousness that is in the law, he was blameless. But still, that is not enough to bring a man an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Now, here they were going around and trying to tell the Gentile believers that you had to keep the law to be righteous. Paul said, "No, I came out of that. I had it made as far as the law was concerned." But then this monumental statement,

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ ([Phl 3:7](#)).

All of this background that put me in a high standing as far as the law is concerned I counted loss for Christ.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ([Phl 3:8](#)):

Paul the apostle is on his way to Damascus to persecute the church. He had papers from the high priest that empowered him to throw in prison those who believed in Jesus Christ. And as he headed out towards Damascus, he was going out with threatenings of murder against the believers. But while he was on his way, just before arriving in Damascus about noontime, there came a light from heaven brighter than the noonday sun. Paul fell on the ground, and there the Lord spoke to him and said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And he answered, "Who art thou, Lord that I may serve thee?" And He said, "I am Jesus. It has been hard for you to kick against the pricks." And there Paul

was converted. He met Christ on the Damascus road. Suddenly upon meeting Christ, all that he counted as important to him up to that point in his life, all of his religious credits, all of the religious background, he said lost for Christ. Because this is going to bring him an estrangement from his cronies back in Jerusalem that he has been going around with.

Paul is writing this epistle to the Philippians some thirty years after the Damascus road experience. He is referring to it, "The things which were gain to me, I counted loss for Christ, thirty years ago, on the road to Damascus." But then Paul updates his experience. And he said, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." In other words, "I experienced it thirty years ago, and I had a turn-around in my life, and all of the past legalism and legal relationship with God, and all of those endeavors in my own flesh, the works of my flesh, I counted loss. Now I do count them, thirty years later, I still count them loss."

A lot of people testify of an experience that they had in Christ years ago. "Oh, I had such a glorious experience, the Lord met me in such a powerful way. And I just dedicated my life completely to the Lord. I was so moved, I was so touched by the Spirit of God upon my life." But unfortunately, since then, a lot of those things that they counted loss at that point, they picked back up, so that they are encumbered again. You see, past experience is only valid if it is translated into the present. If the past experience has not been translated into the present, then it really has no value at all. There is really no value to say I counted those things loss for Christ thirty years ago, if in the meantime I have picked them back up and I am encumbered with them again. Always, we must be able to translate the past experience into the present relationship if it is to be a valid experience at all. Otherwise, the experience is invalidated.

I really am not so much interested in what happened to you thirty years ago, twenty years ago, or ten years ago. I am interested in what is your relationship tonight with the Lord. That is what is important. Experiences are good. Thank God for the experiences, but they are not valid unless they are translated into the immediate, present relationship, and I do count them but loss. It is still going on. The past is translated into the present. "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." I love that phrase. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

I think that we have to be the most blessed and privileged people in the world. You know, there are many people in the world tonight who have never had the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. People lived and died without ever having heard of Jesus Christ our Lord. Not only do we have the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but we have the privilege of gathering together and studying the word of God together. What some people wouldn't give for the opportunity of gathering with us.

He said,

For whom I have suffered the loss of all things ([Phl 3:8](#)),

Indeed Paul did. He was totally, completely ostracized by those who were once his compatriots, those whom he once shared with. When he received Jesus Christ, as far as they were concerned, he was dead. He no longer existed. But he said those things which were so important to me, those things for which I lived,

And do count them but dung [as refuse], that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith ([Phl 3:8-9](#)):

Now, Paul had excelled in the righteousness in the law. He said he was blameless. But he said he cast that over for the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He counts all of the works of the past just wasted effort, refuse. "My desire is to know Him, and to be found in Him." Not having my own righteousness, my works through the law, but now the righteousness which is of God by faith, that righteousness which is imputed to those who believe, that righteousness that Abraham had when God imputed his faith for righteousness.

Now, I can endeavor to be righteous before God by my own works and efforts. I must, first of all, set the standard: what constitutes righteousness? What is right and what is wrong? And having determined then what is right and what is wrong, I may then seek to always do that which is right. Work hard at doing that which is right. And, at best, I can develop a self-righteousness. The effect of it usually on the individual who has obtained such a thing: I keep the rules; I never do anything wrong; I always do what is good; I am a doo bee; I am just living by these righteous standards. The effect upon the individual is usually pride and the developing of a judgmental attitude.

As the Pharisee who went in before the Lord and said, "Father, I thank you that I am not as other men. I am not an extortioner, and the other things. God, I thank you that I am so good," that pride and self-righteousness. But then, worse than that, this judgmental spirit. Because suddenly, you see, I am on a little spiritual pinnacle, and I can begin now to judge everybody else who doesn't live by the same standards of holiness by which I live. "How can they say they are a child of God? How can they say... " and here I am in my little pompous righteous throne, judging everybody else who isn't living by my standards. It can be a very dangerous thing.

On the other hand, I can recognize that I have a problem with sin, with myself, with my flesh. I can be honest with myself. When I have been upset (because that is against my rules, never be upset) and so I am upset, I have to lie to myself and say, "I really wasn't upset, I was just indignant." And you can become a phony, because, you know, you set your own standards; you live by your own rules. But when I take the righteousness which is by Christ, it is an honest life, I can say, "Hey, I am not perfect,

but I believe in Jesus Christ with all my heart. He is my Savior. He is my Lord." And God then imputes to me, or accounts to me, righteousness. On my account, God writes righteous.

Now, the problem of being righteous by my efforts, by my works, I may be doing right, I may have lived all of my life up to this point by the rules, having never violated, sailing along in good shape, and there is written across my name, righteous. But tomorrow, some nut pulls in front of me on the freeway and then blocks and traps me, and I may shake my fist and honk my horn, and say, "Get off the road, you fool." And all of my good record down the tube and the righteousness is erased. I blew it. Oh, what a shame. Here, my entire life I have never done anything wrong, have been going by the rules, up till now. You see, there would be no security in that kind of righteousness at all. And any moment I could lose it. But not the righteousness which God has accounted to me through my faith in Jesus Christ. Because I may blow my horn and shake my fist, but the Spirit will say, "Hey, don't you remember you have got a fish emblem on the back of your car? What are you going to do when you pass the guy?" And I may pull over to the side of the freeway and decide not to pass him so that I won't be a bad witness, and bow my head and say, "God, I am sorry. That isn't a real representative of You. Forgive me, Lord."

You see, the angel doesn't have to erase the righteousness and then rewrite it, or whatever. It stays there. The righteousness through faith in Christ, my faith in Jesus doesn't waver. My actions they may, but not my faith in Him. And the righteousness is accounted to me by my faith in Him. And so, it is an established righteousness. No wonder Paul opted for the new righteousness, though he had done pretty good up until this point. "Don't know what is going to happen tomorrow, so hey, I will jump this ship and get on this one and I will gladly throw overboard the old life, with the struggle and the effort in my flesh, in order to live this new life after the Spirit, believing and trusting in Jesus Christ, to do for me what I really can't do for myself. And to be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God, through faith."

Probably the best illustration I have heard of this particular passage is the story of the young girl who came from very poor circumstances, but was diligent and worked hard to work her way through college. And now she was in her senior year. They were going to have the senior prom. And she was so excited over the fact that she had been able to labor and work and make her way through college and was going to be graduating. So, she decided that she would make for herself a new dress for the senior prom. Now, because she had spent all of her money on tuition, and just getting by, on her books, and everything else, she really didn't have much money. She couldn't buy a dress, but she really didn't have much money to buy very good material. But she went down to the dime store and picked out the best that she could afford, bought a simplicity pattern. She laid the thing out, carefully cut it out, but she really had never sewn anything before. So, by the trial and error method, the redoing a lot of the seams and all, and the hem wasn't really straight, but it was a good effort. She gave it her best. It was surely the best that she could do. And so, she put it on and she walked out in

the dorm where the other girls were and she said, "Look girls, this is my new dress for the prom. I made it myself." And they were kind to her, they said, "Oh, that is nice," but they did notice the imperfections in it. And did feel rather sorry for her. But they recognized that it was the best that she could do.

About that time, Lady Bountiful walked in the door. And she saw this young girl, modeling her dress and she said, "Would you mind going with me?" And the young girl went outside, and there was a limousine chauffeur, and they went down to I. Magnum's, and the chauffeur took the car up. They went in. And so the models started coming in with all these beautiful dresses showing them off and doing their little stances and all, and a model came in that had a dress that was absolutely gorgeous. She just sort of caught her breath when she saw it, it was just such a glorious gown.

Lady Bountiful, being very astute, noticed that she gasped at that one. She called the model over that they might look at it more closely and feel the texture of the material, and obviously she was very impressed with it. But as the model was turning around, her eye caught the ticket with the price tag \$4,295.00. And she thought, "Oh my, I didn't dream anything could cost that much." But, Lady Bountiful, seeing her interest in it, said to the clerk, wrap it up and have it sent to the car.

When she got back to the dorm, she went into her room and she carefully unwrapped this dress, put it on; it fit perfectly. Now she walks back out where all of the girls are waiting, and she said, "Look girls," and as they gasp in amazement at the glory and the beauty of the dress, she said, "This is something that I could have never purchased for myself. It is something that I could have never made for myself, but it was given to me by Lady Bountiful."

So Paul, he had done his best to clothe himself in righteousness by works, but then he came in to that glorious knowledge of Jesus Christ, and, "No longer," he said, "to be found in my own righteousness, which is of the law, my own making, my own work, but I will gladly exchange that for the glorious righteousness which God has accounted to me through my faith in Jesus Christ." The righteousness which is of Christ through faith. Something that I could never purchase for myself, something that I could never do for myself. With all of my efforts I could never come up to that. And yet, that is what God has imparted to me through faith, my faith that He has given to me, in Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on,

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection ([Phl 3:10](#)),

And at this point we also say, "Ya, ya, power, I want power. I would like to know Him in the power of His resurrection. Give me the power," and we are so power-hungry. But Paul didn't stop there did he?

and the fellowship of his sufferings ([Phl 3:10](#)),

Hey, wait a minute, Paul; I want to get off at the last stop. I don't know about this suffering bit. I like the power, but I don't like the suffering. Don't you know that Christians don't have to suffer? The fellowship of His sufferings.

Our flesh always rebels against suffering. The disciples found it difficult to handle when Jesus started talking about the suffering that he was to experience, and Peter cried out, "Lord, be that far from thee." And Jesus said, "Get thee behind me, Satan, you offend me." It was the natural cry of man, "Spare yourself from suffering." But Paul is willing to follow Jesus to the cross. "I want to know him; I want to know him completely." Yes, the power of the resurrection, but you know, you can never know the power of the resurrection until you have, first of all, know the cross. Jesus wasn't resurrected until he first went to the cross. The resurrected life always follows the crucified life. The power of the resurrection follows the fellowship of the suffering and the cross. And so yes, I want to know the power of the resurrection, but if I am to experience that, I have got to, first of all, experience the fellowship of the suffering, the death on the cross, the death to my old self, my old nature.

being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead ([Phl 3:10-11](#)).

But how can you attain the resurrection of the dead unless you, first of all, have died? You see, Jesus could not experience the power of the resurrection until the cross. The cross was essential and necessary for Him to experience the power of the resurrection. So it is true with us. I am crucified with Christ, now I can experience the power of the resurrected life. And many people have never experienced the power of the resurrected life, because they have shied away from the fellowship of the suffering and of the crucified with Christ life. "I want to hang on to the flesh. I don't want to see it nailed to the cross. I want to hold on to the things of the flesh." But you will never know the life of the resurrected Christ until you have experienced the fellowship of the sufferings.

If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect ([Phl 3:11-12](#)):

It is sort of sad that so many people seem to feel that they have attained, or they have achieved their spiritual walk, and they sort of sit on little pedestals, little ivory towers. "I have attained, I have achieved. Here I am, you know, come and I will teach you. Sit at my feet and learn." But Paul the apostle said, "Look, I don't consider that I have attained; I don't look at myself as being perfect, the work of the Lord is not yet complete in me."

but I follow after [I am pursuing], if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus ([Phl 3:12](#)).

Now, Paul recognized something that is very important for all of us to recognize who have been apprehended by Jesus Christ. When the Lord apprehended us, and you can all look back in your own life to that point where the Lord apprehended you, where He said, "I have chosen you and ordained you that you should be my disciple," and we turn to follow Jesus Christ. Now, when the Lord apprehended us, He had in His mind a plan and a purpose for each of our lives. The Lord knew exactly what He intended for you to do. He had a work for you to fulfill. Paul said, "I have not yet apprehended that for which I was apprehended. The Lord apprehended me, but when He did, He had a purpose in mind. I have not yet accomplished that purpose."

Now, the fact that we are sitting here tonight, we can all say the same thing, "I am not yet apprehended that for which I was apprehended." The reason why we can all say it tonight is because we are all here. Why did the Lord apprehend you? So that you could share with Him the eternal glories of His kingdom. And so, when He is finished with me here, this robe of flesh I will drop and rise to seize the everlasting prize and shout while passing through the air. Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer. And one day when I am sitting, looking up in Jesus' face, just overwhelmed by His glory and love, I will turn to the fellow next to me, and I will say, "I finally have apprehended that for which I was apprehended. This is what the Lord intended for me, to be with Him in His kingdom, to share with Him His glory. Father, I would that those who You have given to me, to be with me here, would also share with me in the Kingdom."

That is why God apprehended you; He has a glorious plan and a purpose for your future. He has a plan for your life now, and we should be as Jesus, who said, "I must be about my Father's business." Anything I do for myself is a waste of time and effort. I am forestalling the plan of God. So what do I do? I forget those things which are behind.

A lot of people make the mistake of trying to live in the past. And with a lot of people, there is just a lot of bad experiences in the past. And the problem is that they are constantly going back and going over those bad experiences. And they are not really going ahead in life at all, because they are so involved in the past. "They really did me wrong. I can't get over that. I can't believe what they did to me. I just can't rise above it. I just..." And living in the past, and being destroyed in the past, and can't go ahead because they are looking backward. Living in the past, there is always that danger of discouragement, which shuts off initiative for the future. The Lord may inspire you to some good work that He wants you to do. Many times the worst thing you can do is share with your friends what the Lord has laid upon your heart to do. Because so many times, they say, "Well, you really can't do that. You see, someone else already tried that and it just doesn't work." And so they go back to the past, and they pick up the failures of the past, and they are discouraged to try anything in the future. And so looking back to the past, oftentimes, we look at our failures and we are discouraged from trying to

go on. "Hey, I tried it before. I tried it for so long. It just doesn't work. I just can't do it. If I could, I would have done it a long time ago," and looking back I am discouraged of trying to go ahead.

Or, on the other hand, a person looks back and glories in their victories of the past, and they are resting on their accolades. "You know, it is what I used to be, what I used to do. I hold the record and my name is on the record books, and all." They are always looking at their past and doing nothing now. They are stagnating now. They go to the bars and drink lite beer and talk about the touchdowns they use to make. They are living in the past, the past glories. Television would cause you to think that that is all retired baseball and football players do is just hang around the bars drinking lite beer, talking about the past. And it is sad when a person is resting in the past, not pressing ahead. The past has been glorious, it has been exciting to see what God has done, but you know, I am more excited about what God is going to do.

So,

forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before  
([Phl 3:13](#)),

We haven't seen anything yet. Like the song said, "Mercy drops round us are falling, but for the showers we plead." And rather than resting in the past, what God has done, let's look forward to what God wants to do. We haven't yet scratched the surface of the work that needs to be done in the hearts and lives of the people of Orange County, in Southern California, across the United States. We have only begun to see the work of God; we have only begun to see the glory of God poured out. Let's not just sit back and rest, let's press forward to what God has for us in the future. "Reaching forth to those things which are before, I press," and the word in the Greek is [agonizo](#). They say, that in training for the Olympics, you have got to go till it hurts, and you have to work yourself through the pain. I mean, you have got to give it every effort, working through pain, beyond the pain threshold. You run until you ache and you think you can't go anymore, but you keep going. You think you are going to drop, but you keep going. And there comes that second wind, then it seems like you can go forever. But it is working through it, but it is agonizing. When you are pressing towards the mark. I agonizo towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God.

Paul said, "Don't you realize that they that run in a race run all, only one receives the prize, so run that you may obtain." There are a lot of people running the race just to say, "Well, I ran in the race." "Well, where did you place?" "Well, I didn't finish it, but I ran in it." Paul said, "One receives the prize, and you run to obtain." In other words, "Give it all you have got."

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [would be complete], be thus minded [let this be in your mind]  
([Phl 3:14-15](#)):

Let this be the same rule for your life. Forgetting the things which are behind, reaching forth for those things which are before, pressing towards that mark, be thus minded.

and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, [and] let us mind the same thing ([Phi 3:15-16](#)).

Let this be your mind, let's walk by these rules. And so the rule of the Christian life is: forgetting those things which are behind, and pressing for those things which are before, or reaching for those things which are before, pressing towards the mark.

## Matthew Henry Commentary on Philippians 3

### Chapter 3

He cautions them against judaizing seducers ([v. 1-3](#)) and proposes his own example: and here he enumerates the privileges of his Jewish state which he rejected ([v. 4-8](#)), describes the matter of his own choice ([v. 9-16](#)), and closes with an exhortation to beware of wicked men, and to follow his example ([v. 17-21](#)).

#### [Phi 3:1-3](#)

It seems the church of the Philippians, though a faithful and flourishing church, was disturbed by the judaizing teachers, who endeavoured to keep up the law of Moses, and mix the observances of it with the doctrine of Christ and his institutions. He begins the chapter with warnings against these seducers.

- I. He exhorts them to *rejoice in the Lord* ([v. 1](#)), to rest satisfied in the interest they had in him and the benefit they hoped for by him. It is the character and temper of sincere Christians to rejoice in Christ Jesus. The more we take of the comfort of our religion the more closely we shall cleave to it: the more we rejoice in Christ the more willing we shall be to do and suffer for him, and the less danger we shall be in of being drawn away from him. The *joy of the Lord is our strength*, [Neh. 8:10](#).
- II. He cautions them to take heed of those false teachers: *To write the same thing to you to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe*; that is, the same things which I have already preached to you; as if he had said, "What has been presented to your ears shall be presented to your eyes: what I have spoken formerly shall now be written; to show that I am still of the same mind." *To me indeed is not grievous*. Observe,
  - 1. Ministers must not think any thing grievous to themselves which they have reason to believe is safe and edifying to the people.

- 2. It is good for us often to hear the same truths, to revive the remembrance and strengthen the impression of things of importance. It is a wanton curiosity to desire always to hear some new thing. It is a needful caution he here gives: *Beware of dogs*, [v. 2](#). The prophet calls the false prophets dumb dogs ([Isa. 56:10](#)), to which the apostle here seems to refer. *Dogs*, for their malice against the faithful professors of the gospel of Christ, barking at them and biting them. They cried up good works in opposition to the faith of Christ; but Paul calls them evil workers: they boasted themselves to be of the circumcision; but he calls them the concision: they rent and tore the church of Christ, and cut it to pieces; or contended for an abolished rite, a mere insignificant cutting of the flesh.
- III. He describes true Christians, who are indeed the circumcision, the spiritual circumcision, the peculiar of people of God, who are in covenant with him, as the Old-Testament Israelites were: *We are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*. Here are three characters:-
  - 1. They worshipped in the spirit, in opposition to the carnal ordinances of the Old-Testament, which consist in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, etc. Christianity takes us off from these things, and teaches us to be inward with God in all the duties of religious worship. We must *worship God in spirit*, [Jn. 4:24](#). The work of religion is to no purpose any further than the heart is employed in it. *Whatsoever we do, we must do it heartily as unto the Lord*, and we must worship God in the strength and grace of the Divine Spirit, which is so peculiar to the gospel state, which is the *ministration of the spirit*, [2 Co. 3:8](#).
  - 2. They *rejoice in Christ Jesus*, and not in the peculiar privileges of the Jewish church, or what answers to them in the Christian church-mere outward enjoyments and performances. They rejoice in their relation to Christ and interest in him. God made it the duty of the Israelites to rejoice before him in the courts of his house; but now that the substance has come the shadows are done away, and we are to rejoice in Christ Jesus only.
  - 3. They have no *confidence in the flesh*, in those carnal ordinances and outward performances. We must be taken off from trusting in our own bottom, that we may build only on Jesus Christ, the everlasting foundation. Our confidence, as well as our joy, is proper to him.

### Philippians 3 Chuck Missler

These first three verses emphasize that joy is founded to a large degree on sound doctrine.

1] Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed *is* not grievous, but for you *it is* safe.

“Finally...” = yet two more chapters! What Paul really means is, “For the rest...”; in contrast to his “finally” in 4:18.

“...rejoice in the Lord”: Jesus promised joy for those who followed Him.

This was announced from the very beginning:

*And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

Luke 2:10-11

Joy is the birthright of all true believers. Jesus declared:

*These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

John 15:11

Jesus prayed to the Father:

*And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.*

John 17:13

2] Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

“Beware of dogs”: The orthodox Jew would call the Gentile a “dog,” an unclean animal; but here Paul calls the orthodox Jews “dogs”! He

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isn't just calling names: he is comparing these false teachers to the contemptible scavengers.

### **The Advent of the Judaizers**

From the very beginning, the Gospel was sent “to the Jew first” (Acts 3:26; Rom 1:16). The first seven chapters of Acts deals only with Jewish believer, or Gentile proselytes to Judaism (Acts 2:10). In Chapter 8 the message went to the Samaritans—the “part-Jew.”

When Peter was called to open the Gospel to the Gentiles—*without first becoming Jews*—it created an uproar that was ultimately confronted at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Paul was specifically sent out by the Holy Spirit to minister to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3; 22:21).

But the dissenters did not desist: they followed Paul everywhere, stirring up trouble as they went. (Luke Volume 2, the Book of Acts, makes the responsibilities for the uprisings quite clear.)

The Book of Galatians specifically addresses these issues, and it is these very “Judaizers” that Paul is addressing in these first two verses here.

“Evil workers” were teaching that salvation was by faith + works, especially the works of the law. Paul is indicating that their “good works” were really evil works because they were of the flesh and not the spirit, and were an *incumbrance* to salvation.

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

Ephesians 2:8, 9

*For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our*

*Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

Titus 3:3-7

“...beware of the concision”: *katatomh*, *katatome*, to cut up; mutilation.

A pun on “circumcision.” The Judaizers taught that circumcision was essential to salvation (Acts 15:1; Gal 6:12-18). Paul sees it, in itself,

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### **Session 05: Chapter 3 © 2010**

as only a mutilation. Even in the OT, true circumcision is always of the heart (Deut 30:6).

The true Christian has experienced a spiritual circumcision in Christ:

*In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:*

Colossians 2:11

3] For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

“...no confidence in the flesh”: Cf. Rom 2:25-29. We are His workmanship (*poi,hma poema*, from which we get “poem”; Eph 2:10). Dismiss the common claim, “The Lord helps those who help themselves.” Not so. This is just as wrong today as it was in Paul’s day. *The Lord helps those who come to the end of themselves!*

### **Happiness vs. Joy?**

Every Christian virtue has its worldly counterpart:

#### **World Christian**

Sex Love

Security Trust

Self-gratification Peace

Happiness Joy

Happiness is our translation of the Latin word *fortuna*, which is closely related to chance. Happiness is circumstantial; joy is not. Joy is a supernatural inner quality of delight in God. How does one get *this* joy?

1) Becoming a Christian. Understand who you really are, and the program God has provided for you, and lay aside any self-effort, trusting Christ for it all.

2) Obtain a mature knowledge of God’s Word.

*The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.*

Psalms 19:8

*I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.*

Psalms 119:14

*If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

John 15:10-11

Cf. Exodus 13:9; Deut 6:4-8; 11:18.

*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*

Joshua 1:8

3) Pursue a life of righteousness and peace.

*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

Romans 14:17

*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:6, 7

### **Paul's Balance Sheet**

Human ruin (Sermon on the Mount):

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Matthew 5:48

A chain is ineffective if just one link breaks. One sin shatters any claim to the righteousness of God's standard. Human righteousness—at its best—is still inadequate to qualify for the destiny God has in mind for us. Paul illustrates this from his own experience:

4] Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

Paul fills out his "balance sheet":

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5] Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

"...the stock of Israel": An Israelite—Israel was the *covenant* name of God's people, just as the word "Jew" emphasizes their racial origins.

"...tribe of Benjamin": Benjaminite origin was source of pride: Benjamin and Joseph were Jacob's favorite sons. They were born to Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. Israel's first king came from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the one tribe that remained loyal to Judah when the civil war divided Judah from Israel after the death of Solomon.

"...a Pharisee": The Pharisees were the most faithful of all the Jewish sects in their adherence to the Law, and regarded as the summit of

religious experience.

Paul was personally taught by the great rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and his career was a promising one (Gal 1:13-14); yet he gave it all up to become a member of the hated “Christian sect.”

6] Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Paul’s zeal in defending orthodoxy included zealous attacks on the followers of “that deceiver” (Mt 27:62-66), and participation in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60). Cf. Acts 22:1-5; 26:1-11; 1 Tim 1:12-16.

Seven achievements: some inherited; some earned. These “assets” were actually liabilities: they kept him *from* God:

### **Losses Result in Gains**

It would seem, on the surface, that Paul is boasting in the flesh. But actually, he is demonstrating precisely what *needs to be avoided!* He is, autobiographically, an ideal example:

7] But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

“But”: perhaps the most important word in this chapter! What is impressive from a human point of view is quite different from God’s point of view.

Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven! He was spiritually bankrupt! Paul had to lose his “religion” to find salvation...

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### **The Book of Philippians**

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Like the rich young ruler (Mark? re: Mark 10:17-22) or the Pharisee in Christ’s parable (Luke 18:10-14), Saul had been looking at the *outside* rather than the *inside*.

[Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, emphasized *attitudes* and *appetites* as well as actions.]

8] Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,

It would be difficult to find a more forceful refutation of human effort to please God that what Paul has presented here. (Four Greek participles, *avlla. menou/nge kai., alla menoun ge kai,* introduce the strong statements of v.8.)

Paul’s confrontation on the road to Damascus cause him to see everything in his life quite differently! (Cf. Acts 9:1-21).

This did not make him repudiate his heritage: He did not become *less* a Jew; it made him a *completed* Jew—one who had found his Messiah!

It is this *personal relationship* that is paramount; That is what Jesus prayed for with His Father:

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God,*

*and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

John 17:3

## **Two Kinds of Righteousness**

Works righteousness (vv.1-6) and faith righteousness (vv.7-11)

9] And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

This verse is a summary of the Book of Romans: the heart of salvation in one verse. All are classified within three spiritual types:

- Romans 1:18-22, Self-justified; Paul indicts in vv.21-28.
- Romans 2:1-16, the Moral Person, who still falls short of God's requirements.
- Romans 2:17-29, the Religious Person, but God looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7).

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tragic but unfortunately prevalent. Paul does not allow this kind of thinking to continue. In verse 10, Paul had expressed his lifelong goal:

*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*

Philippians 3:10

But Paul also recognized that many of his readers would dismiss this as an idealistic impracticality and unattainable. So Paul continues:

## **Winning the Race!**

12] Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

This is the declaration of a Christian who never permitted himself to be satisfied with his spiritual attainments. A sanctified dissatisfaction is the first essential to progress in any race or serious undertaking.

"...perfect": Here it really means completed, mature. We are continually warned against a false estimate of our spiritual condition.

The church at Sardis had "a name that thou livest and art dead" (Rev 3:1). They had a reputation without reality. The church at Laodicea boasted that it was rich but was actually "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17).

[It is sobering to realize that *each* of the representative seven churches in Revelation 2 & 3 were *surprised* at their report card! That should give us all pause for reflection...]

We are also reminded of Samson who thought he still had his old power, but in reality it had departed from him (Judg 16:20).

Verse 12 is not only a statement of the demands of discipleship, it also is an announcement of the principles by which this calling should be realized:

- 1) He acknowledges that he was *called* by Christ Jesus;

- 2) God had a *purpose* in calling him;  
3) He acknowledges that this puts an *obligation* on himself—an obligation to follow after Jesus.

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## The Book of Philippians

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We are called—by the God the Universe—we didn't choose Him: He chose us:

*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

John 6:44

*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

John 15:16

Did Abraham chose God? Hardly. He was perfectly satisfied where he was in the Mesopotamian river valley in a pagan, idol-worshiping culture—but God called Him to be the vehicle for His plan of redemption for mankind.

Moses likewise. David, the youngest of seven sons of Jesse. John the Baptist—*before he was born!*

Paul was in the process of persecuting Christians... In each case, it was God's initiative. And so it is with you and me. And, in each case, it was for a specific *purpose*.

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

Romans 8:28

[And there's more:]

*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

Romans 8:28-30

13] Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

Paul was certainly not complacent: he was intensely committed to winning the race of life; of maximizing his opportunities. [Cf. Benjamin Franklin's pursuit of virtues: *Ben Franklin's Almanac...*]

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“One thing”: an important flag phrase for each of us:

- “One thing thou lackest,” Jesus said to the self-righteous rich young ruler (Mark 10:21);

- “One thing is needful,” Jesus explained to busy Martha when she criticized her sister (Luke 10:42);
- “One thing I know!” exclaimed the man who had received his sight by the power of Christ (John 9:25);
- “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after,” testified the Psalmist (Ps 27:4).
- One of the secrets of discipline is to concentrate on “one thing.” No athlete succeeds by doing everything; he succeeds by *specializing*. Ben Franklin’s famous admonition is usually *misquoted*: “Jack of all trades and master of one.” [*not* “none”!] For the Christian, the “one” *must* be the Bible. And he let’s nothing distract him:  
*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

James 1:8

### **Forgetting the Past**

When the children of Israel were delivered from the bondage of the world [Egypt] they repeatedly yearned for the earlier, more familiar, life.  
*We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.*

Numbers 11:5, 6

“Forgetting those things...” Paul simply means that we need to break the power of the past by living for the future:  
*And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

Luke 9:62

[As the race driver said, as he ripped out his rear view mirror: “What’s behind us doesn’t matter!”] We don’t want to be a leeks-and-garlic Christian!

“...reaching forth”: literally, “stretching as in a race.”

14] I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. “I press!” This is the same verb translated “I follow after” in v.12. It conveys the idea of intense endeavor.

It is important for us to realize that Paul is *not* telling us how to be saved. That would be by works and self-effort, and would contradict what he wrote in the first 11 verses—as well as most of the rest of his epistles!

In order to participate in the Greek games, the athlete *had to be a citizen!* He did not run the race to gain his citizenship. (In v.20, he will emphasize that “our citizenship is in heaven” [already].) But since we are already the children of God through faith in Christ, we have the responsibility of “running the race” and achieving the goals that God has set for us.

[Rewards; Cf. 1 Cor 3:11-15, using an architectural illustration, etc. For

an excellent discussion, see our *The Kingdom, Power & Glory* book.]

## **Finishing Well**

15] Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

“...perfect”: Here again, “perfect” really means completed, mature. We are continually warned against a false estimate of our spiritual condition.

How can you know God’s will? How is it possible for someone to know the mind of God? If God has a plan for your life, how does he reveal it to you?

Paul, here, focuses his readers on this issue: “And if you think differently about anything, God will show you how to think.” (1sv)

God is committed to guiding us. Not necessarily more than a step at a time. Just like an aircraft flying on instruments. It works because it is trusted. God is committed to revealing His will to us. There are a number of principles to apply to this crucial area:

1) We can have this assurance because of the nature of God. God made the world to reveal Himself to those who would ultimately live in it.

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*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

Romans 1:20

2) We must be walking by God’s Word.

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

John 7:17

Nothing can be the will of God for you that is not in accordance with His Word. His will for nonbelievers is also clear:

*And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

John 6:40

If you are not a Christian, God is not interested in telling you whether or not you should accept that job at (company X); or whether you should marry Sally or Mary (or Henry or John); or whether or not to enlist in the military, etc. He is interested in whether or not you will believe in Jesus Christ and receive Him as your personal Savior. God’s will for you starts at this point.

If you *are* a Christian, there is clear insight:

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is*

*that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

Romans 12:1, 2

Thus, anything that contributes to your growth in holiness is an aspect of God's will for you.

God's will for your work:

*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.*

Colossians 3:23, 24

Further,

*Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;*

Ephesians 6:5, 6

“With singleness [sincerity] of heart”: as in a *fiduciary* relationship...

What about the detailed events in one's life: how does one know whether to go to certain movies, making friends with people at work, social drinking, et al? Another predictable factor:

*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*

Philippians 4:8, 9

3) Another principle is daily fellowship with the Lord. He has assured us that,

*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.*

Psalms 32:8

To “guide you with His eye” He must first catch our eye! And you must remain “eye-to-eye” with Him. We can't know His will for us without a knowledge of God's Word.

*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

Psalms 1:1, 2

Peter said that we are:

*...born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

1 Peter 1:23

Has the Word of God penetrated *your* heart? Nothing else will do it: not

the word(s) of a person, not philosophy, not history, not science.

*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

John 3:6

This is the first great blessing of Bible study. The second is our sanctification.

*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*

John 17:17

It is through study of the Bible and fellowship with God that we are increasingly as He would have us to be. Unfortunately, Christians often seek holiness anywhere but by God's Word. They seek it through reading other literature, by attending religious conferences, by emotional experiences, even mysticism.

Do you want to know how relevant the Bible can be to *your* life and how God can use it to reveal His will to you? *Then you must spend time reading it daily.* If you are a Christian, God has a specific path marked out for you.

You will find it only as you discover His will for you *through Scripture.*

16] Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

This typically requires us to reverse our standards to His. In the Navy, they call that a "Turn 18." We call that "conversion."

There were many in the Bible who began showing great promise, but failed at the end because they disregarded God's rules. They did not lose their salvation but they did lose their rewards (1 Cor 3:15).

Lot (Gen 19);

Samson (Judg 16);

Saul (1 Sam 28:31);

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

...and it can happen to us.

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**The Book of Philippians**

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