

## Studies in Philippians (3:1-16)

Paul begins with an encouragement

1 *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.*

*To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.*

Two teachings in an insecure world:

•Rejoice in the Lord

Joy and rejoice 16 times

Rejoice in your union with Christ (peace, confidence)

Like a good marriage — each trusts the other absolutely

•Safety for you

secure (asphalt)

These are troubled times: coronavirus + China's threat to our economy

Good time to ask where our confidence is — in the economy or in Christ?

Paul was awaiting trial and possibly beheading

The trial judge was the evil and unpredictable Nero

Then a warning

2 *Look out for the dogs,*

*look out for the evildoers,*

*look out for those who mutilate the flesh.*

Threefold 'Beware'

Dogs — unclean animals

Evildoers — because they are 'enemies of the cross'

Mutilators — (*katatomē*); v3 circumcision (*peritomē*)

Reference is to Jewish-Christian 'circumcision' mission.

These say that Jews are the true people of God and that Christians are not.

Hear what Paul says:

3 *For **we** — who belong to Jesus — *are the circumcision,**

*who worship by the Spirit of God*

*and glory in Christ Jesus*

*and put no confidence in the flesh —*

By contrast, **we** are the circumcision (the true Israel)

**we** worship by the Spirit (grace, not law)

**we** glory in Christ Jesus

**we** put no confidence in the 'flesh'

double entendre — our works, achievements

— circumcised foreskin

Paul now lists his own ‘works’ and achievements

4 *though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.  
If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh,  
I have more:*

Paul claims great eminence in Judaism<sup>1</sup>

This is his CV, his resumé

5	<i>circumcised on the eighth day,<sup>2</sup></i>	Tarsus
	<i>of the people of Israel,</i>	Tarsus
	<i>of the tribe of Benjamin,</i>	Tarsus
	<i>a Hebrew of Hebrews;</i>	Tarsus
	<i>as to the law, a Pharisee;<sup>3</sup></i>	Jerusalem
6	<i>as to zeal,<sup>4</sup> a persecutor of the church<sup>5</sup>;</i>	Jerusalem
	<i>as to righteousness under the law, blameless.</i>	

Outwardly the young Pharisee was blameless

But in Romans 7 he says that **in himself** he was a ‘wretched’ lawbreaker (Rom. 7:22-23).

Using a book-keeper’s language

7 *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.  
What I had thought was a credit (the achievements) was actually a debit.*

8 *Indeed, I count everything as loss  
because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.  
Such is the worth of knowing Christ that all my achievements are a debit.*

*For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things  
and count them as rubbish,  
in order that I may gain Christ*

Commitment to Jesus has cost me everything I had in my former life

I now regard them as trash

In order to gain Christ

Paul’s Christianity probably cost him an honored name in Judaism

He would have been one of the great and revered rabbis.

<sup>1</sup>I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers’ (Galatians 1:14).

<sup>2</sup>Genesis 17:12 – ‘He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised’.

<sup>3</sup>Acts 26:5 – ‘...according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee’.

<sup>4</sup>Acts 22:3 – ‘I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia,  
but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel,  
according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being *zealous* for God...’

<sup>5</sup>Acts 22:4 – ‘I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women’.

9 *and be found in him,  
not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,  
but that which comes through faith in Christ,  
the righteousness from God that depends on faith –*

‘Found in him’ on the day of judgement  
not having his own righteousness based on law.  
but having the righteousness of God based on faith in Christ.  
That attitude needs to be mine and yours

Now his deeply heartfelt prayer:

10 *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,  
and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*  
11 *that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the  
dead.*

Paul’s passion: ‘That I may know him’ – as the resurrected One.  
Paul’s passion: to ‘share’ in his sufferings – in being faithful to God.

Astonishing that Paul highly educated and socially eminent should  
worship and serve the poor carpenter from Nazareth.  
That carpenter was the long-awaited Messiah, miracle worker, sage,  
crucified but resurrected.

12 *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect  
but I press on to make it my own,  
because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*

Paul’s goal: to become more and more Christ-like.  
He presses on to ‘seize’ resurrection.  
Because Christ had ‘seized’ him.

Before Damascus he was a persecutor  
after Damascus he was a preacher.  
Before Damascus he was ‘under sin’ and ‘under law’  
after Damascus he was justified by faith, free.  
Before Damascus he lived for himself  
after Damascus he lived for Christ and for others.  
As he said, ‘if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation’ (2 Cor 5:17).  
Paul’s conversion is a paradigm for everyone.

13 *Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have made it my own.  
But one thing I do:  
forgetting what lies behind  
and straining forward to what lies ahead,*

14 *I press on toward the goal for the prize  
of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Paul the elite athlete

Straining forward for the prize: God's upward call — to meet Jesus

15 *Let those of us who are mature think this way,  
and if in anything you think otherwise,  
God will reveal that also to you.*

16 *Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

v15a This is mature, grown up thinking.

v15b Suggests some Philippians were wavering regarding their hope.  
The Spirit will apply apostolic truth to you.

v16 Hang on to where you have reached. Don't slip back.

### Reflection

1. Being united with Christ is our joy and our safety

2. No to:

Christ *plus* ritual works, moral works, religious experience.

To 'add' to Christ is to say he is not sufficient in himself.

Rather, we say (with the hymn):

*In Christ **alone** my hope is found;  
He is my light, my strength, my song;  
This cornerstone, this solid ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.*

3. It had been 30 years since the Lord had 'seized' Paul  
He is not diminished in his passion for the Lord

4. He could point to the 'flesh' as a basis for righteousness.  
He points away absolutely from himself and looks only to Christ.