

**Paul's Example
Philippians 3:1-4:1
Week 5**

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Lord, your Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. We need that light, not just in our time together today, but in our daily living and in the life of our hurting world. May your Holy Spirit soften our hearts that we might be open to the new things you have to say to us and the hard things you may want to reveal to us. Help us to be gracious with ourselves and one another, leaning on Jesus, who emptied himself and took the form of a servant to save us that we might grow into more faithful followers of you in Christ we pray. Amen.

Check-in question

Perhaps you have heard the proverbial expression, "Good is the enemy of great". What is this proverb getting at? Where have you seen this at work in your own life?

STUDY GUIDE

Some have suggested that Philippians 3:1 and on seems like a strangely abrupt transition. But there are repeated themes and words in these verses that prove to be an orderly flow of thought from Philippians 2-3. Having called the Philippians to hold fast to the "word of life" and to "rejoice" in mutual sacrifice for the gospel (Phil. 2:16-18), and having shown Timothy and Epaphroditus to be Christlike models (Phil. 2:19-30), Paul now further expounds upon that "word of life," contrasting false teaching with his own conversion and present confession (Phil. 3:1-11).

The Christian life is neither one of perfection nor of passivity, but a progressive pursuit of Christ and his likeness as we await his return and the consummation of all things.

Read Philippians 2:19-30

***This is a translation by N.T. Wright from his book, "Philippians for Everyone"**

So then, my dear family, it comes down to this: celebrate in the Lord! It's no trouble for me to write the same things to you, and it is safe for you.

Watch out for the dogs! Watch out for the 'bad works' people! Watch out for the 'mutilation' party! The 'circumcision', you see is us -- those who worship God by the spirit, and boast in King Jesus, and refused to trust in the flesh.

Mind you, I've got good reason to trust in the flesh. If anyone else thinks they have reason to trust in the flesh, I've got more. Circumcised? On the eighth day. Race? Israelite. Tribe? Benjamin. Decent? Hebrew through and through. Torah observance? A pharisee. Zealous? I persecuted the church! Official status under the law? Blameless.

Does that sound as though my account was well in credit? Well, maybe; but whatever I had written in on the profit side, I calculated it instead as a loss because of the Messiah. Yes, I know that's weird, but there's more: I calculate everything as a loss, because knowing King Jesus as my Lord is worth far more than anything else put together! In fact because of the Messiah I've suffered the loss of everything, and I now calculate it as trash, so that my profit may be the Messiah, and that I may be discovered in him, not having my own covenant status defined by Torah, but the status which comes through the Messiah's faithfulness: the covenant status from God which is given in faith. This means knowing him, knowing the power of his resurrection, and knowing the partnership of his sufferings. It means sharing the form and pattern of his death, so that somehow I may arrive at the final resurrection from the dead.

I'm not implying that I've already received resurrection, or that I've already become complete and mature! No; I'm hurrying on, eager to overtake it, because King Jesus has overtaken me. My dear family, I don't reckon that I have yet overtaken it. But this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what's ahead. I mean to chase on towards the finishing post, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God in King Jesus.

Thinking like this, in fact, is what maturity is all about! If you think differently about it, God will reveal this to you as well. Only let's be sure to keep in line with the position we have reached.

So, my dear family, I want you, all together, to watch what I do and copy me. You've got us as a pattern of behavior; pay careful attention to people who follow it.

You see, there are several people who behave as enemies of the cross of the Messiah. I told you about them often enough, and now I'm weeping as I say it again. They are on the road to destruction; they worship their stomachs, and find glory in their own shame. All they ever think about is what's on the earth.

We are citizens of heaven, you see, and we're eagerly waiting for the savior, the Lord, King Jesus, who is going to come from there. Our present body is a shabby old thing, but he's going to transform it so that it's just like his glorious body. And he's going to do this by the power which makes him able to bring everything into line under his authority.

Well then, my dear family-- I miss you so much, you're my joy and crown! -- this is how you must stand firm in the Lord, my beloved people.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to "put no confidence in the flesh"? Why do you think Paul give himself as an example of this? What does Paul put his confidence in now?
2. In biblical times, Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs (implying they were wild, impure, and outside). In [Philippians 3:2](#), Paul warns of false teachers who require circumcision ("Judaizers"), and he calls *them* "dogs." Why? What is he suggesting here?

a. *Definition: Judaizers*

Though this term is never actually used in the Bible, it refers to those in the early church who sought to compel Gentile believers to adhere to Jewish ceremonial requirements, such as circumcision, as a necessary part of salvation.

3. What does it mean to be “found in” Christ?
4. Some people argue that if you are assured eternal life there is no more motivation to persevere in a life of serving Christ. Yet here Paul indicates that his motivation to persevere is just because “Christ Jesus has made me his own”. How does this work? Why might the assurance that Paul belongs to Christ motivate him to “strain forward” toward heaven?
5. What things are you hesitant to lose or count as rubbish for the sake of Christ? Why? How might this relate to putting confidence in the flesh? How do you see yourself putting confidence in your achievements?
6. Paul says about the enemies of the cross of Christ that they have their minds “set on earthly things”. Obviously we all have to think about getting an education, earning a living, finding a spouse, taking care of our possessions. What is the difference between having a mind “set” on these things versus just thinking about them to be responsible?
7. In what areas of your life do you need to remember that you are no longer a slave to the god of your bellies, but that Christ has set you free and that you have a hope far more desirable?
8. The gospel is infinitely glorious, rich, and expansive, but here Paul condenses the gospel message to a few short lines, making clear what it is and is not. Do the same in your own words. Imagine a friend asked you what he or she must do in order to be made right with God; what would you say?
9. What “lies behind” that Paul resolves to “forget” (Phil. 3:13)? (Hint: don’t limit your consideration to negative things of the past.)
10. Remarkably, after fully acknowledging his imperfection (Phil. 3:12–13), Paul calls the Philippians to “join in imitating me” (Phil. 3:17). This is a call not infrequently issued by Paul (Phil. 4:9; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Thess. 3:8–9; 1 Tim. 4:12, 15–16), so why do many of us find it remarkable? Why are we often leery of watching and imitating imperfect Christians, let alone serving as models ourselves?

Further Reading/Resources¹

NO RIGHTEOUSNESS/ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS. If anyone had reason to be confident in himself—in religious heritage, zeal, discipline, moral scruples, etc.—it was Paul. He wasn’t perfect, but compared with others, he was “blameless” (Phil. 3:6). Humanly speaking, he had attained all of the “righteousness” one could. But by God’s intervening grace, Paul was shown that the only hope for being made right with God is to abandon any and all confidence in his own goodness and good works. His “achievements” achieved nothing. Actually, even worse, they were “loss,” even “rubbish” (Phil. 3:7–8). All self-trust must be renounced (such is repentance). Only then is one ready to see Jesus’ life and death not as a “loss” but as a “gain.” True righteousness “comes through faith in Christ;” it “depends on faith” (Phil. 3:9). Faith itself doesn’t save, nor does trust in faith. Faith is looking outside of self to trust in “Christ, the righteousness of God” for us.

REPEATING THE GOSPEL. After reiterating his call to “rejoice in the Lord,” Paul further introduces this section of Philippians with this: “To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you” (Phil. 3:1). The “same things” that Paul goes on to write about in Philippians 3:2–9 are the truths of the gospel: warning of its distortion (Phil. 3:2) and explaining its essence through his own conversion (Phil. 3:4–9). He had taught them these things before, but rehearsing them again is “safe.” In fact, regardless of the conditions or times, repeating the gospel is *essential* for the church’s fidelity and devotion. The gospel is “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3) and must be repeated, expounded, re-apprehended, and applied again and again.

KNOWING CHRIST. Philippians 3:1–11 is intensely personal, not only because Paul opens up his own life, but also because of the way that he speaks of Christ. Salvation is desirable, of course,

¹ *Philippians: A 12-Week Study* © 2014 by Ryan Kelly. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-bible-philippians/#week-1-overview>

because sinners need forgiveness and the alternative is eternal condemnation; but it is ultimately desirable “because of the surpassing worth of *knowing* Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:8). Christ is not merely the means to gain mercy, but mercy is the means by which we “gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8). Salvation is a Person.

THE LAW VERSUS FAITH. Paul’s words—as well as his life—elucidate two different, opposing religious models. One model rests its confidence in the law and the flesh and the other rests in Christ’s righteousness as a gift through faith. This raises the question of how Paul can seem to speak disparagingly about the law, since it was given by God who commanded his people to obey it. Indeed, Paul elsewhere attests that “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). But how one *uses* the law makes all the difference in the world. God intended the Mosaic law primarily as a preparation for the righteousness that would come through the Messiah (see Gal. 3:23–25). But, like many Jews in his day, Paul had grown up trusting “a righteousness of [his] own that comes from the law” (Phil. 3:9). Obedience to the law was the primary basis for a right standing with God. He later came to see that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:3). But many in his day—even some professing Christians—hadn’t rightly understood this. Some mingled Christ and this distorted view of the law. They imposed the legal demands of the law on others, especially Gentiles, who, in their reckoning, needed to be circumcised and to keep the law. But such barking “dogs” (Phil. 3:2) should be ignored, Paul insists. Those who have the *true* circumcision “worship by the Spirit, . . . and glory in Christ . . . and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).

RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. Paul’s highest hope and longing was in “the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:11). This is a culminating event in God’s plan, when the bodies of living and dead believers will rise and be made new like Christ’s post-resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:35–55). They will dwell in a new heaven and new earth without corruption, death, sin, conflict, curse, or threat (Rev. 21:1–5). They will be “glorified” in that they will be like Jesus and will “see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). God will forever dwell with his people, fulfilling all his grand promises.

JESUS HAS MADE ME HIS OWN. Quite similar to Philippians 2:12–13 (“work out your own salvation . . . for it is God who works in you”), Paul writes in Philippians 3:12–13, “I press on to make it my own, *because* Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Both passages stress the complementary truths of human responsibility and divine sovereignty. But what is unique about Philippians 3:12–13 is the personal, even intimate, tone: “Jesus has made me his own.” Whether in initial grace or in ongoing sanctification, the reality is not simply that God works (or draws, or changes, or grows, or purifies—all good and important!), but that Jesus is making us his own. He is powerfully at work in us *because* he has taken us as his own. This should daily energize us, as it did Paul, to “press on to make it my own,” even “straining forward” to Christ and Christlikeness (Phil. 3:12–14).

FROM LOWLINESS TO GLORY. Paul ends Philippians 3 by rejoicing that when Jesus returns he “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). The path from lowliness to glory is a well-trodden one by this point in Philippians. The supreme example is that of Christ in his incarnation and crucifixion, leading to his resurrection and exaltation (Phil. 2:5–11). Similarly, Paul’s life being “poured out as a drink offering” (in execution) is something to “rejoice” in since it will demonstrate, at the “day of Christ,” that he “did not run in vain” (Phil. 3:16–17). Epaphroditus, too, was “near to death” (Phil. 3:27) because of his service to Paul on the Philippians’ behalf. God rescued him from life-threatening sickness; thus, the church should “honor” him (Phil. 3:29). Paul, again in Philippians 3, recounts his great “loss” for the sake of Christ (Phil. 3:4–8)—a passage that ends with his expectation and longing to “attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:11). So, too, Philippians 3:21 treks that path between present lowliness (“our lowly body”) and future glory (“transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body”). All put together, it is clear that Paul is making an important point!

ALL THINGS SUBJECTED TO JESUS. Paul speaks of “the power that enables” Christ “to subject all things to himself” (Phil. 3:21). He has already made the point that, because of who Christ is and because of his obedient death, he was raised and is now “highly exalted” (Phil. 2:5–11). His power and authority are supreme and universal. In that sense, all things have *already* been subjected to him (1 Cor. 15:28; 1 Pet. 3:22). But experience as well as God’s Word tells us that much of the world still

does not bow before or confess Christ. Hebrews explains this: The Father has put “everything in subjection to him” and “left nothing outside his control;” but “at present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Heb. 2:8). When the King returns a second time, his rule, authority, and power will be universally and unavoidably manifest (Phil. 2:1–11). The power that will one day abolish all earthly authority, enemies, even Satan, and death itself, is *the same power* that will “transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” He will do it “by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil. 3:21).

INDWELLING SIN. When Paul acknowledges his spiritual imperfection in Philippians 3:12–14, he is assuming a theological category that is fundamental to the Christian life. The absence of perfection assumes the presence of sin. While sin’s dominion has been crushed by God’s regenerating grace (Rom. 6:1–14), and his law has been written on the heart, creating new desires (Jer. 31:33), there is a principle of remaining indwelling sin—what Paul often calls “the flesh” (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16–23; Col. 2:23). Sin has been dealt a deathblow in regeneration, but it dies a slow death. In many ways, it is still quite active. The passions of the flesh “wage war against your soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). This is a slow and lifelong war. Thus, hard work is assumed in Paul’s language of “pressing on” and “straining forward.” But progress is also assumed. The race is run in steps—often small (and at times backward!), but we pray and strive for “progress” (Phil. 1:25). Such growth isn’t gained through performance of the law (Phil. 3:2) but in knowing and seeking Christ (Phil. 3:1–14; see also 2 Cor. 3:18).

HEAVEN. Philippians 3:20 says that “our citizenship is in heaven.” What is heaven? At the consummation of all things there will be a completely reconstructed creation, a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21–22). However, heaven is not just a future reality and place. Nor is it simply the dwelling of those who die before Christ’s return. Heaven is also a present, invisible reality for the saints living on earth. Every Christian is already “blessed . . . with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3). Raised up with Christ in regeneration, we are mysteriously but really “seated . . . with him in the heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6). So when Paul writes “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20), he is not only encouraging us to think about where we *will go*, but also about where we *are now*. It is a concept as majestic as it is mysterious. We “see” this realm now only with the eyes of faith (2 Cor. 4:18). We must “set our minds” on it (Col. 3:2) and long for the day when “heaven” will not only become visible but will overtake and transform everything.



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

A UNIQUE WIN...

- HE SAW HIS
- HIS AWARENESS OF JESUS
- KNOWING JESUS

1:1-11 OPENING PRAYER



2:6-11 THE MESSIAH POEM

ALTHOUGH HE EXISTED IN THE NATURE OF GOD, HE DID NOT REGARD HIS EQUALITY WITH GOD AS A THING TO BE EXPLOITED; RATHER, HE EMPTIED HIMSELF, TAKING UP THE NATURE OF A SERVANT; HE WAS BORN AS A HUMAN & RECOGNIZED AS A HUMAN; HE HUMILED HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS.

THEREFORE, GOD HAS HIGHLY EXALTED HIM, AND GIVEN HIM THE NAME WHICH IS ABOVE EVERY NAME, SO THAT AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, IN HEAVEN, ON EARTH, OR UNDER THE EARTH, AND EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS:

QUOTING ISAIAH 45:23
PAUL'S POINTS
the One True God
= the Father & the LORD JESUS

JESUS the MESSIAH is LORD! To the GLORY of GOD the FATHER!

1:12-26 PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT



RELEASE

START MORE JESUS COMMUNITIES

PARTICIPATING IN THE STORY JESUS

EXECUTION

"FOR ME, LIFE IS THE MESSIAH, AND SO DYING WOULD BE A GAIN." (1:21)

OR

BETTER FOR OTHERS

1:27-2:18 FOLLOWING JESUS' EXAMPLE



2:19-30 TWO EXAMPLES



3:1

I PLEAD WITH UNIFIED IN THE...

"I RE...

IN KNOW...