

# Philippians 3:4-6 Commentary

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**Philippians 3:4** although I myself might have (PAPMSN) confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind (3SPAI) to put confidence (RAN) in the flesh, I far more ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [kaiper ego echon \(PAPMSN\) pepoithesin kai en sarki. ei tis dokei \(3SPAI\) allos pepoithenai \(RAN\) en sarki, ego mallon](#)

**Amplified:** Though for myself I have [at least grounds] to rely on the flesh. If any other man considers that he has or seems to have reason to rely on the flesh and his physical and outward advantages, I have still more! ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**ESV** 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

**Lightfoot:** And yet, whatever be the value of this confidence in the flesh, I assert it as well. If any other man claims to put trust in the flesh, my claim is greater.

**NET** though mine too are significant. If someone thinks he has good reasons to put confidence in human credentials, I have more:

**NLT** though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

**Phillips:** If it were right to have such confidence, I could certainly have it, and if any of these men thinks he has grounds for such confidence I can assure him I have more. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Although as for myself, I [as a Jew] could be having confidence also in the flesh. If, as is the case, anyone else presumes to have come to a settled persuasion, trusting in the flesh, I could occupy that place, and with more reason;

**Young's Literal:** though I also have cause of trust in flesh. If any other one doth think to have trust in flesh, I

more;

**ALTHOUGH I MYSELF MIGHT HAVE CONFIDENCE EVEN IN THE FLESH: kaiper ego echon (PAPMSN) pepoithesin kai en sarki:**

- 2Cor 11:18, 19, 20, 21, 22
- [Philippians 3 Resources - multiple sermons and commentaries](#)

## PROFITS THAT PROVED LOSS

**Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh** -Paul's point is simple and clear -- if the "false circumcision" could brag, how much more could he! He is not saying he has confidence in his flesh, but that if anyone could have done so, he certainly could have. Paul was as righteous as a human could attain in their own strength, but still fell short of God's requirement of perfect righteousness.

**Guy King** - What a list of investments he puts down. Gilt-edged securities, he had considered them, but they had grossly depreciated, and now he was forced to write them off as worth just nothing. The scrip was just scrap....There it all is, then - what riches they once had seemed; but now it had all fallen about his ears. It took his blinded eyes to see how worthless it all was. His spiritual finance was in a hopeless tangle. Becoming his own auditor, he could only certify the whole as dead loss, and himself a miserable and hopeless bankrupt. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss . . ." (Php 3:7). ([Philippians 3:1-11 Profit and Loss Account](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** - In this intensely autobiographical section, Paul examines his own life. He becomes an "auditor" who opens the books to see what wealth he has, and he discovers that *he is bankrupt!*

**Eadie** - The apostle had declared of himself, that he belonged to those who have no confidence in the flesh; and lest his opponents should imagine that his want of confidence in the flesh was simply the absence of all foundation for it, and that he was making a virtue of necessity, he adds, that he had all the warrant any man ever had—nay, more warrant than most men ever had—to trust in the flesh. ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

**Spurgeon** - So that, if anybody could have boasted of what he was by birth, what he was by profession, what he was by the display of religious zeal, Paul could have boasted as boldly as anyone could, for in all those respects he was second to nobody. You know that it is a very easy thing, or it ought to be a very easy thing, for some people to be humble, for they have nothing to be proud of, but here is a man who had much of which he might have been proud. According to the letter of the law, he was a diamond of the first water; yet see what a different verdict he gives after grace has opened his eyes.

**Confidence** (4006) ([pepoithesis](#) from [peitho](#) = to persuade, come to a settled conviction) means full persuasion and expresses a belief in someone or something to the point of placing one's trust or reliance in them - the idea is having been persuaded and remaining persuaded. It is a belief that one can rely on someone or something. The nuance of meaning depends on the context - it can mean confidence or trust in others (2 Co 1:15), in God (Eph 3:12) or in oneself (i.e., self-confidence) (2 Co 10:12).

**Flesh** (4561) ([sarx](#)) s used 147 times in the NT. A simple definition of **sarx** is difficult because **sarx** has many nuances (e.g., some Greek lexicons list up to 11 definitions for **sarx**!). The diligent disciple must carefully observe the **context** of each use of sarx in order to accurately discern which nuance is intended. The range of meaning extends from the physical flesh (both human and animal), to the human body, to the entire person, and even to all humankind! In this context sarx refers to "the outward side of life as determined by normal perspectives or standards." (BDAG)

**IF ANYONE ELSE HAS A MIND TO PUT CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH I FAR MORE: ei tis dokei (3SPA1) allos pepoithenai (RAN) en sarki ego mallon:**

- [Philippians 3 Resources - multiple sermons and commentaries](#)

**If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more**- Paul says he has more good reasons to put confidence in his human credentials than other Jews.

**Dwight Edwards** - Paul now challenges the fleshiest of the flesh to stand up. Whoever he or she is, no matter how much reason

they have to boast of in the flesh, Paul has more. If anyone wants to match fleshly credentials, Paul is more than willing for he has a very impressive array. In fact, he now describes them:

**Has a mind (1380) (dokeo)** may denote either to think or to seem and could be read "if any man thinks in himself". Paul is about to summarize his "spiritual resume" and he has much that he could brag about. And so in these next few passages Paul places himself on the same ground as his antagonists to show that even according to their standards, he had superior ground for confidence. He reviews the inventory of the human attainments and merits in which he might trust. These are Paul's "religious credentials". For argument's sake, Paul plays the part of his opponents in order to show them how much better he can play the part of a Judaizer than they could!

**I far more** - Spurgeon notes that "If anybody might, Paul might. If birth, if education, or if external religiousness could have saved anybody in the world, it would have saved Saul of Tarsus." If anybody could have boasted of what he was by birth, what he was by profession, what he was by the display of religious zeal, Paul could have boasted as boldly as anyone could, for in all those respects he was second to nobody. You know that it is a very easy thing, or it ought to be a very easy thing, for some people to be humble, for they have nothing to be proud of; but here is a man who had much of which he might have been proud. According to the letter of the law, he was a diamond of the first water; yet see what a different verdict he gives after grace has opened his eyes.

**Eadie** - As his manner is, the apostle "goes off" in an allusion to his own history and experience. As he proceeds, the emotion deepens into vehemence, and while he muses for a moment on his own inner life, the thoughts welling "out of the abundance" of his heart arrange themselves into a lyrical modulation. He boasts of being a true son of Israel, not sprung from one of the tribes which had so early apostatized, but from the honoured tribe of Benjamin. He was also of untainted descent—an adherent of the "most straitest sect"—ardent in his profession, as evinced by his persecution of the church—performing with scrupulous exactness every rite of fasting, tithing, or sacrifice, so that had salvation been awarded to the fervent and punctual devotions of the chamber or the sanctuary, he might have died in confidence and peace. Therefore he now proceeds to enumerate the advantages which he possessed, in which he might have trusted, and in some of which he did once trust. The Judaizing fanatics could not say, that he made light of these privileges because he had none of them; for he had more than most of them, and yet he felt their utter insignificance. The persons whom the apostle had in his eye were in some respects behind him: at least he says—"I more." Some of them might be proselytes circumcised in manhood; others might be of mixed blood; others may have been originally of Sadducean creed: while few of them had manifested that uniform obedience to the law which had distinguished him, and that downright devotedness to Judaism which had led him to seek the extirpation of its young and vigorous rival by violence and blood. ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

**Philippians 3:5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee** ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [peritome oktaemeros, ek genous Israel, phules Benjamin, Hebraios](#) ec [Hebraion, kata nomon Pharisaios](#)

**Amplified:** Circumcised when I was eight days old, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew [and the son] of Hebrews; as to the observance of the Law I was of [the party of] the Pharisees, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Lightfoot:** I was circumcised on the eighth day, a child of believing parents. I am descended of an old Israelite stock. I belong to the loyal and renowned tribe of Benjamin. I am of a lineage which has never conformed to foreign usages, but has preserved throughout the language and the customs of the fathers. Thus much for my inherited privileges; and now for my personal career. Do they speak of law? I belong to the Pharisees, the strictest of all sects.

**Phillips:** I was born a true Jew, I was circumcised on the eighth day, I was a member of the tribe of Benjamin, I was in fact a full-blooded Jew. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** eight days old in circumcision, my origin from Israelitish stock, belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew from true Hebrew parents [i.e., not a Hellenist], with reference to the law, a Pharisee,

**Young's Literal:** circumcision on the eighth day! of the race of Israel! of the tribe of Benjamin! a Hebrew of Hebrews! according to law a Pharisee!

- Ge 17:12; Luke 2:21; Jn 7:21, 22, 23, 24
- [Philippians 3 Resources - multiple sermons and commentaries](#)

## PAUL'S RESUME SUMMARIZED:

### Pride in Ritual:

### "circumcised the eighth day"

**Guy King** says circumcised the eighth day "shows that he was a true Jew; Ishmaelites were circumcised at thirteen years old; proselytes - that is, Gentiles who embraced the Jewish faith - were circumcised at any age, upon admission to Judaism. Paul never forgot his Jewish nationality, and wherever he went he always sought to preach first in the synagogue. Only after they refused him a hearing did he assert, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles", Acts 18:6. Though he became the apostle of the Gentiles, and though he is writing to Gentiles, he yet says, "To the Jew first", Romans 1:16; and in the very same Epistle (10:1), he declares, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved ". Are we so earnest for the spiritual blessing and welfare of the nation to which we belong? ([Philippians 3:1-11 Profit and Loss Account](#))

[See below](#) for Brian Bill's summary of Paul's spiritual resume.

As outstanding as Paul's pedigree was, it was still woefully short of God's standard for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Once Paul came to his spiritual senses so to speak (a saved mind), he wrote...

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Eph 2:8-9-[note](#))

He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness** but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,(Titus 3:5-6-[note](#))

**Circumcised the eighth day** - Paul's parents were obedient Jews and carried out the circumcision of the infant Paul as required by the law of Moses. Every loyal Jew practiced the sacred rite of circumcision on the eighth day. Zacharias and Elisabeth brought John the Baptist to be circumcised the eighth day (Luke 1:59). Likewise Mary brought the infant Jesus for circumcision on the eighth day (Luke 2:21)

**Spurgeon on circumcised on the eighth day** - The rite which introduced him to the outward covenant of Abraham had been performed exactly when ordained by the law. He was not one who had been circumcised as proselytes were, late in life, nor at an irregular season on account of ill health, traveling, or parental neglect; but to the moment as the Mosaic ritual required he had as a babe been received into the congregation of Israel.

**Circumcision** ([4061](#)) (**peritome** from **perí** = around + **témno** = cut off) means to cut around and refers to cutting and removal of the foreskin. As noted in Php 3:3 peritome is used in the NT figuratively to refer to circumcision of the heart by the Spirit and thus identifies a regenerate man. This is the "circumcision" God desires (Dt 10:16, 30:6, Jer 4:4, 9:26, Ezek 44:7, 9. cf Ezek 18:31 like casting away the cut off foreskin. Ro 2:28, 29-[note](#)) to boast about (for the boast is in God)

**In circumcision an eighth-day man** Converts to Judaism were circumcised in maturity, Ishmaelites in their thirteenth year. But Paul was neither. He was no proselyte but was a pure-blooded Jew.

**Eadie** - Circumcision on the eighth day was according to divine enactment. Ge 17:12; Lev. 12:3-(See note for why circumcision was on the 8th day, no sooner). The apostle was a born Jew, and on the appointed day had received the seal of the Abrahamic covenant. The rite was for no reason deferred, and if any merit accrued from strict compliance with the law, he had it. The apostle makes good his declaration not only of "I possess", but of "I more". The proselytes and Idumeans could not say so, for only in riper years could they be circumcised. Paul, therefore, left all such boasters behind him. ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

**Lehman Strauss** applies this to the modern church - Many unsaved people today are leaning hard on the fact that they were sprinkled with water as an infant or confirmed by some denominational rite as a child, just as Saul of Tarsus leaned on his circumcision. While none of us dare set himself up as a judge, one wonders how many there will be in hell who are counting on some rite of their church to get them to Heaven. It is not until one becomes saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ that he is willing to count such things loss.

**ILLUSTRATION** - J Vernon McGee - One of the things that hurt me and held me back in my early ministry was the fact that I had not

been brought up in a Christian home. My dad was a heavy drinker who would not darken the door of a church. He was very bitter and very prejudiced. He did make me go to Sunday school, and I thank God for that. But I never saw a Bible or heard a prayer in my home. When I went away to seminary, I did not know even the books of the Bible. I would meet other fellows who had been brought up in Christian homes. They seemed to know so much. I always felt deprived, felt that I had missed something. Well, Paul did not have this handicap. He could say, "I was circumcised on the eighth day," which means he had godly parents. - Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

#### of the nation of Israel: ek genous Israel:

- Acts 22:3; 2 Cor 11:22
- [Philippians 3 Resources - multiple sermons and commentaries](#)

### Pride in Relationship: "of the stock of Israel"

Not only was he not a proselyte, but he was not the son of proselytes. If any of his readers were Gentile proselytes to Judaism the things recorded in Ephesians would have been true of them...

remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph 2:12-note)

Paul's pedigree is presented. Even the most stellar pedigree will not merit entry into heaven.

**Mattoon** - Israelites stressed their special relationship to God. The name "Israel" was given to Jacob by God Himself. By calling himself an Israelite, Paul stresses the absolute purity of his family tree. It's not, however, the blood of a man's ancestors that saves him and cleanses him from sin. It's the blood of Jesus Christ.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.  
John 1:12-13

**Nation** ([1085](#)) (**genos** from **ginomai** = to become or come into being) refers to offspring or posterity and in this context refers to the entire nation of Israel.

**Of (ek)** means "out of" and here is used to denote origin, the class or country of Paul who was not out of Esau but out of Jacob and thus a member of God's chosen earthly people.

**Out of Israel** - He was no convert to Judaism, but a blood-born Jew of the original aristocracy. He was a descendant of the man to whom God said: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:28).

**Lehman Strauss** - Many there have been since Paul's day who have thought to inherit eternal life because they were attached to a family name known to be Christian. It will be well for us all to know now that the grace of God does not flow through human veins. Paul was the possessor of a coveted relationship with Israel, but this too he was willing to let go for Christ.

#### of the tribe of Benjamin: phules Benjamin:

- Ro 11:1
- [Philippians 3 Resources - multiple sermons and commentaries](#)

### Pride in Respectability: "of the tribe of Benjamin"

**Tribe** ([5443](#)) (**phule** from **phulon** = race, tribe, class <> **phuo** = generate, produce) means race, lineage, kindred. It describes a nation or people descended from a common ancestor (See [Benjamin, The Tribe Of](#))

Paul belonged to the tribe of **Benjamin**, a tribe highly thought of, source of the first king of Israel (whose name - "Saul - he bore), the tribe that remained loyal to David (when 10 others revolted), and which formed with Judah the foundation for the restored nation

after the captivities.

**Mattoon** - Paul could trace his family tree. Not all the Jews could do this because the records were lost during the Babylonian captivity. He belonged to the "elite" of Israel. Benjamin was a son of Rachel, Jacob's wife. Of the twelve, he was the only one born in the Promised Land. From the tribe of Benjamin came the first king of Israel, King Saul. When the tribes split in two, the ten tribes of the North sided with Jereboam and Benjamin remained loyal to Judah in the South. When the Jews returned from exile, the nucleus of the nation was from Benjamin and Judah (see post-exilic record in Ezra 4:1). The Feast of Purim ([Judaism 101](#)) is based upon the deliverance of the Jews recorded in the book of Esther ([Purim Music Video - Purim with a beat. Give it a listen as you ponder "For such a time as this!"](#)) The central figure in this book is Mordecai, a Benjamite. Paul belonged to the highest aristocracy of Israel. He was stating that his ancestors were the "pilgrim fathers."

**Eadie** - The apostle means to derive some honour from his tribal lineage. It could scarcely be from this, that the first king of Israel belonged to this tribe, or that the apostle bore the royal name. Benjamin was a favourite son by a favourite wife, and the tribe is styled by Moses the "beloved of the Lord." Deut. 33:12. That tribe also had the capital and temple in its canton, was long identified with the great tribe of Judah, and had returned with it to Palestine, while the more northern tribes had almost ceased to exist as distinct branches of the house of Israel. He could give his genealogy. Ro. 11:1.

**Guy King** - It was specially noteworthy for its having the Holy City within its borders, and as being the birthplace of the people's first king, after whom Paul's Jewish name was taken. Inhabitants thereof are proud of being Lancastrians, Devonians, Northumbrians, and so on: thus would some Israelites be proud of being a Benjaminian, or is it Benjamite? Paul was. ([Philippians 3:1-11 Profit and Loss Account](#))

**Lehman Strauss** - "Of the tribe of Benjamin." The tribe of Benjamin was known for its unwavering loyalty to the throne of David when the ten tribes separated to divide the kingdom. This tribe was respected for its allegiance at a time when the majority were disloyal. The house of Judah was the divinely appointed kingly line (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 11:3), and in spite of the hardness of Rehoboam's heart, the tribe of Benjamin followed God's choice. After the nation was restored from the captivities, the tribe of Benjamin was held in high respect for its integrity and faithfulness. **Respectability** is a noble trait in any family, but such an ancestral heritage will never put a sinner in good standing with God. You may have some right to be proud of such an inheritance, but keep such pride in its place. No family tradition or valor can change the sinful hearts of that family's descendants in the sight of God. It is true the holy city was within the borders of the tribe of Benjamin, but that could not make Paul a holy man before the Lord. To be a Benjamite was something in which the flesh might well be proud. And in this Saul of Tarsus did pride himself until he met Jesus Christ.

**J Vernon McGee** - It is an advantage to be able to say, "My father was a minister of the Word of God," or, "My father was a layman who stood for the Word of God." On the other hand, sometimes it can work for a hindrance. I find people who say, "Dr. McGee, I was brought up in such-and-such a church; my grandfather was a founder of the church. There is even a window in the church dedicated to him. So I'll never leave that church." That can be a hindrance if the church has become liberal and the Word of God is no longer preached there. But for Paul, being of the tribe of Benjamin was a definite asset. - Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

#### a Hebrew of Hebrews: Hebraios ec Hebraion:

- Ge 14:13; 40:15; 41:12; 1Sa 4:6; Jonah 1:9; Acts 6:1; 2Cor 11:22
- [Philippians 3 Resources - multiple sermons and commentaries](#)

### Pride in Race: "a Hebrew of Hebrews"

**Wuest** says Paul "was the son of Hebrew parents who had retained their Hebrew language and customs, in contrast to the Hellenized Jews who read the Old Testament in the Greek language. ([Philippians Commentary Online- Recommended](#))

In contrast with Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists), Paul came from a family that had retained the original Hebrew language and customs.

**Mattoon** - The Jews spread across the world. Thousands were in Rome and over one million resided in Alexandria. They retained their customs, laws, and religion. Many forgot their own language and became a Greek speaking people in a Greek environment. A Hebrew not only had a pure, racial descent, but retained the Hebrew tongue.

**Guy King** - though living at Tarsus, Acts 11:25, and educated at the great University there, Paul was pure Jew. Concerning Timothy

it is said, Acts 16:1, that "his father was a Greek"; but there was no such heathen blood in our apostle. Both his parents were pure Jews, so that he is properly here described as "a Hebrew sprung from Hebrews." One can imagine how, as a rising young Rabbi in training, he set so much value on his pure, unmixed descent. He felt that, in his future work, it would stand him in good stead. ([Philippians 3:1-11 Profit and Loss Account](#))

**Lehman Strauss** - "An Hebrew of the Hebrews." Paul traces his pedigree to the first Hebrew, Abraham himself. There was never a mingling with Gentile blood in his family. His mother and father were pure Jews. Though living at Tarsus and receiving his education there, he never departed from true Hebrew tradition. He was, as one writer says, "Hebraic-ally Hebrew," not like the Hellenistic Jews who conformed to Greek language and customs. He was proud of his racial distinction. But with all of his racial position and pride, Saul was a lost soul until he came face to face with Jesus Christ. Before his conversion he was much like many since his time who take great pride in being American, English, Russian, German, and so on, but who allow that pedigree to become a barrier between Christ and themselves. The gospel of Christ has a universal appeal and is designed by God to go into all the world to every creature. Let no man, regardless of his race, think that he does not need saving.

**Spurgeon** - That is, one who observed all the minutiae and details of the ceremonial law,, and a good deal more, — the traditions of the elders which hung like moss about the old stone of Jewish ceremonialism. Paul had observed all that.

- [Hebrew - Bridgeway Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Hebrew - Fausset's Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Hebrews - Hastings' Dictionary of the New Testament](#)
- [Hebrew - Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament](#)
- [Thayer's on Hebraios](#)

**Eadie** explains that...

the force of the phrase (**Hebrew of Hebrews**) goes beyond immediate parentage. He was aware of no hybrid Gentile admixture, though his ancestors may have lived in Gentile countries. He was sprung of pure Hebrew blood, there having been no cross marriage to taint the descent. Thus does the apostle characterize his lineage:—circumcised on the eighth day, and therefore no foreign convert admitted in mature life, but having parents who coveted and transmitted the Abrahamic rite for their family;—of the stock of Israel, and having a hereditary right to the seal of the national covenant with all its blessings;—of the tribe of Benjamin, able to ascertain and prove his descent, and not of one of any of the tribes geographically lost or individually absorbed by the rest;—a **Hebrew of the Hebrews**, descended from a long line of pure ancestry, without any accidental infusion on either side of foreign blood. There is a species of climax. A proselyte might circumcise his child on the eighth day; another might be of the stock of Israel and yet his mother might not be a Jewess, as was the case with Obed and Timothy; for such a one might be of the tribe of Benjamin and yet not a **Hebrew of the Hebrews**. Extraction of undoubted purity distinguished him, while some of his opponents, with all their Judaizing zeal, could make no such assertion - "I far more"

Having enumerated his privileges as a member of Abraham's race, the apostle proceeds to show how he improved them. What he had enjoyed as a child was not lost upon him as a man. He was not contented with being one of the Jewish mass, but he sought in riper years to realize the advantages of his birth. Not satisfied with a passive possession of blood and birth, he laboured to appropriate all its blessings. He was a religious man—sincerely and intelligently attached to the law and all the venerated traditions of the fathers, and not simply a born Jew, proud of his ancestry, but indifferent to their faith—venerating the name of Moses, but careless of his law, save in so far as national customs had habituated him to its observance. Could the same be said of all his adversaries who now made such an outcry about the Abrahamic rite? ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

as to the Law, a Pharisee: kata nomon Pharisaios

- Acts 23:6; 26:4,5
- [Philippians 3 Resources - multiple sermons and commentaries](#)

**Pride in Religion:  
"As touching the law, a Pharisee"**

The previous traits show Paul's perfect pedigree and now he begins to describe his personal practices. He was a committed law keeper (in contrast to the Sadducees who were not so committed). It is notable that Paul joined the strictest of sects in regards to keeping the law (Pharisees), whereas a lesser man might well have joined the easier sect.

As Paul wrote in Galatians 1:14-note - "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions."

**A Pharisee** - Paul was a passionate adherent of the strictest religious tradition among the Jews. The Pharisees were noted for their strong attachment to the law—for their observance of all its ceremonial minutiae—and their determination, at all hazards, to uphold its validity.

- [Pharisees - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)
- [Pharisees - Hastings' Dictionary of the New Testament](#)
- [Pharisees - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)

**Mattoon** - The Pharisees were the *spiritual athletes* of Judaism. They were not in abundance, usually no more than 6000. Their very name means "The Separated Ones." They separated themselves from all common life and tasks in order to keep every detail of the Law. They had very high morals. When others carelessly violated the Law, the Pharisees maintained a careful obedience to it. When discussing the need for practical righteousness, notice what Jesus said. Matthew 5:20 (note) "*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" The Pharisees were devoutly sincere in their religious convictions, but they were sincerely wrong because their standard of what righteousness was all about was based on man's assessment, not God's. Man tends to focus on outward actions, and, yes, they are important. God, however, is looking at our heart. Christ is the only one Who can cleanse us of the filth of this flesh.

**Lehman Strauss** makes an excellent point - We dare not look upon the ancient Pharisee as he has come to be looked upon in our time. We think of a Pharisee as the personification of false pride, arrogance, and contempt, but actually the Pharisee of the oldest order in Israel stood for a morality of the highest and strictest kind. When others flagrantly violated the law, the Pharisees maintained careful obedience to it. They held the Word of God and the tradition of the elders in highest esteem. H. A. Ironside wrote: "Of the various Jewish sects existing in his day, the Pharisees were the most intensely orthodox." Paul was as proud of his religious pedigree as he was proud of anything else. At least two times he bore witness to his being a Pharisee. As he stood bound before the council at Jerusalem, he said: "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6). When on trial before Agrippa, he testified: "After the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5). When our Lord stressed the need for practical righteousness He said: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). No one can lightly set aside religious convictions as those of the Pharisees, those orthodox defenders of the Mosaic law. But then one may be devoutly **sincere in his religious convictions** and at the same time be **sincerely wrong**. The world has in it many people who were proud of their religion until they received Jesus Christ. And then, like Paul, they saw the utter folly of holding to some tradition that was unable to save them from their sins.

**Wiersbe** - While we today are accustomed to use the word "Pharisee" as the equivalent of "hypocrite," this usage was not prevalent in Paul's day. Measured by the righteousness of the Law, Paul was blameless. He kept the Law and the traditions perfectly. ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

**Guy King** - As a sect, they came under the scathing denunciation of our Lord, because of the arrogance of their outward conduct alongside the putridity of their inward corruption - "whited sepulchres", as He called them, Matthew 23:27. There was, of course, a different type of Pharisee, strongly political, eager nationalist, anti-Roman, who, especially during their history in the time between the Old and New Testaments, the period of the Maccabees, showed heroic qualities on behalf of their race. Ah well, they were a mixed company; but we have a feeling that Paul himself was of the ardent, the upright, the better sort. ([Philippians 3:1-11 Profit and Loss Account](#))

**Pharisee** as described in **Easton's Bible Dictionary** were...

separatists (Hebrew persahin, from parash, "to separate"). They were probably the successors of the Assideans (i.e., the "pious"), a party that originated in the time of [Antiochus Epiphanes](#) in revolt against his heathenizing policy. The first mention of them is in a description by Josephus of the three sects or schools into which the Jews were divided (B.C. 145). The other two sects were the [Essenes](#) and the [Sadducees](#). In the time of our Lord they were the popular party (John 7:48). They were extremely accurate and minute in all matters appertaining to the law of Moses (Matt. 9:14; 23:15; Luke 11:39; 18:12). **Paul**, when brought before the council of Jerusalem, professed himself a **Pharisee** (Acts 23:6, 7, 8; 26:4, 5).



There was much that was sound in their creed, yet their system of religion was a **form (external)** and nothing more (Jesus described them)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like **whitewashed tombs** which on the **outside** appear beautiful, but **inside** they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. (Mt 23:27)

Theirs was a very lax morality (Matt. 5:20; 15:4, 8; 23:3, 14, 23, 25; John 8:7). On the first notice of them in the New Testament (Matt. 3:7), they are ranked by our Lord with the Sadducees as a "generation of vipers." They were noted for their **self-righteousness** and their pride (Matt. 9:11; Luke 7:39; 18:11, 12). They were frequently rebuked by our Lord (Matt. 12:39; 16:1, 2, 3, 4).

From the very beginning of his ministry the Pharisees showed themselves bitter and persistent enemies of our Lord. They could not bear His doctrines, and they sought by every means to destroy His influence among the people. (see more description of [Pharisees](#))

**Eadie** sums up noting that "Paul was not only a Pharisee, but "the son of a Pharisee" —brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, a famous teacher of the sect. His mind had never been tainted by Sadducean unbelief, nor had he been fascinated by the ascetic theosophy of the Essene. If the apostle would not bind the law on the Gentile churches, it was not because he had not studied it or had not understood it, nor yet because he had either lived in indifference to its claims or been trained in prejudice against its venerable authority. ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

**Philippians 3:6 as to zeal, a persecutor (PAPMSN) of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found (AMPMSN) blameless ([NASB: Lockman](#))**

**Greek:** [kata zelos diokon \(PAPMSN\) ten ekklesian, kata dikaiosunen ten en nomo genomenos \(AMPMSN\) amemptos](#)

**Amplified:** As to my zeal, I was a persecutor of the church, and by the Law's standard of righteousness (supposed justice, uprightness, and right standing with God) I was proven to be blameless and no fault was found with me. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Lightfoot:** Of zeal? I persecuted the Church. This surely is enough! Of righteousness? In such righteousness as consists in obedience to the law, I have never been found a defaulter.

**Phillips:** As far as keeping the Law is concerned I was a Pharisee, and you can judge my enthusiasm for the Jewish faith by my active persecution of the Church. As far as the Law's righteousness is concerned, I don't think anyone could have found fault with me. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** with regard to zeal, persecuting the Church, with reference to that kind of righteousness which is in the law, become blameless

**Young's Literal:** according to zeal persecuting the assembly! according to righteousness that is in law becoming blameless!

**as to zeal a persecutor of the church: kata zelos diokon (PAPMSN) ten ekklesian:**

- 2Sa 21:2; 2 Ki 10:16; Acts 21:20; Ro 10:2; Gal 1:13,14) (Acts 8:3; 9:1-19; 22:3,4; 26:9,10; Co 15:9; 1Ti 1:13
- [Philippians 3 Resources - multiple sermons and commentaries](#)

### **Pride in Reputation: "concerning zeal, persecuting the church"**

**Mattoon** - To a Jew, zeal was the greatest quality in religious life. Phineas saved people from the wrath of God, and was given an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God. (See Nu 25:11-13) Ps 69:9 says "**zeal** for Your house has consumed me, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me." Paul worked hard at his religion, but with all his zeal, he was still a lost sinner. He measured his zeal by his hatred for Christians. His reputation was of one who protected Judaism, but even a good reputation is a poor substitute for the salvation that God offers in Jesus Christ. He severely persecuted the church.

A man may have "zeal without knowledge," while another may have knowledge without zeal. Paul had both zeal and knowledge (of the OT).

**Dwight Edwards** adds that "Paul not only had knowledge but zeal. His zeal extended even to persecuting the church, which not many of the Pharisees were willing to do. Though Paul's zeal was misdirected, it helps us see the personality of this man who never did anything half way. For Paul, it was all or nothing and once that drive was harnessed in the right direction, he was greatly used for God's kingdom. We should not forget that men with misdirected zeal may hold great potential for the kingdom of God. They need to see what true success really is."

**Zeal** (2205) (**zelos** from **zeo** = to be hot or fervent) describes an eagerness and ardent interest in pursuit of something and can have a good sense but in context (and as used most often in NT) here **zelos** has an evil sense, meaning envy, jealousy, anger.

In Galatians 1:23-note Paul alluded to his reputation writing "they kept hearing, "He who once **persecuted** (dioko) us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy (attack and cause complete destruction, pillage, annihilate!)." Paul was like a pit bull in his pursuit of Christians, Luke recording "But Saul began **ravaging** the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison." (Acts 8:3) This word **ravaging** is from the Greek word *luminomai* which conjures up a picture of a boar tearing up tender saplings to get at their roots. This is what Saul was doing to the church. He was tearing it up and trying to destroy it. On the way to Damascus, persecuting the Church, he learned he was actually persecuting Jesus, Whom he met and his life was changed (cf Acts 26:14, 15).

In 1 Corinthians 15:9 Paul writes "For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I **persecuted** the church of God."

**Persecutor** (1377) (**dioko** from **dio** = pursue, prosecute, persecute) is a verb meaning to follow or press hard after, pursue with earnestness and diligence in order to obtain, go after with the desire of obtaining. **Dioko** can mean to make to run or flee, put to flight or pursue in a hostile manner, molest, drive away, to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing. In context **dioko** means to pursue with repeated acts of enmity. It means to systematically organize a program to oppress and harass people. This is a good description of Paul's zealous vendetta against the Church. While **dioko** is a verb here it is used as a noun in the present tense (Paul continually persecuted) and active voice (Paul made a volitional choice, a choice of his will to persecute the Jews who had joined the Church of Jesus Christ). It is interesting that while this use of **dioko** is in a negative connotation, Paul has 2 other uses of this verb with a positive connotation in this same chapter:

Philippians 3:12-[note](#) Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:14-[note](#) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

**Church** (1577) (**ekklesia** from **ek** = out + **klesis** = a calling, verb = **kaleo** = to call) literally means called out and as commonly used in the Greco-Roman vernacular referred to citizens who were *called out* from their homes to be publicly assembled or gathered to discuss or carry out affairs of state. In this context Paul refers to the Jews who shared belief in Jesus as their Messiah and Redeemer.

**Spurgeon** writes that Paul "was most zealous in the cause that he thought right. Bitterly, cruelly, even to the death, did he persecute the believers in Jesus."

**Eadie** - The apostle had been no passive supporter of the law. While he upheld it, he upheld it with his might. And when the supremacy of that law seemed to be endangered by the growth of Christianity, with characteristic ardour and impetuosity he flung himself into the contest. He could not be a supine and listless spectator. The question was to him one of conscience and submission to divine authority, and therefore he deemed it his duty to imprison, torture, and kill the abettors of the infant faith, whose most malignant feature, as he thought, was its antagonism to Moses. Others might stand aloof, fold their hands in indifference, and yield a facile acquiescence in events as they occurred. But the disciple of Gamaliel was in terrible earnest. Believing that in speaking "words against Moses" there was open blasphemy, and that the glory of God and the spiritual interests of his country were in imminent hazard, he felt himself doing God service when he resolved to hunt down and extirpate the rising heresy, and "breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." Foremost among the zealots stood Saul of Tarsus. Had his adversaries ever shown a similar fervour—had they so openly committed themselves? His zeal for the law outstripped theirs. ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

**Lehman Strauss** - Luke describes him as "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). So certain in his own mind was this zealot that he was right that he went about brutally stamping out the Christians in their own blood. We see him consenting to Stephen's death at the time of a great persecution against the Church (Acts 8:1). He had the reputation for being an honest and sincere protector of the Jewish religion. He was so completely overpowered by his zeal that he manifested a

blind hatred against Christ and His Church. Here was a man who worked hard at his religion. He felt it his religious duty to do so. He excelled in his reputation for practicing his religion. But with all of his zeal he was a lost sinner. "He measured his religious zeal by his hatred of Christians. We may do the same thing in a different way. Christians measuring their Christianity by their hatred of communism; fundamentalists measuring their fundamentalism by their hatred of modernists; Protestants measuring their Protestantism by their hatred of Romanists; and Romanists measuring their Romanism by their hatred of Protestants. It is a precarious reputation indeed which is measured by such standards." It is good to have a reputation if we are known for doing the right thing in the right way. But even a good reputation is a poor substitute for the salvation God offers in Jesus Christ. One glimpse of the Lord Jesus and Paul could say of his reputation: But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

**Warren Wiersbe** - *Paul's relationship to Israel's enemies*. But it is not enough to believe the truth; a man must also oppose lies. Paul defended his orthodox faith by persecuting the followers of "that pretender," Jesus (Matt. 27:62-66). He assisted at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), and after that he led the attack against the church in general (Acts 8:1-3). Even in later years, Paul admitted his role in persecuting the church (Acts 22:1-5; 26:1-11; see also 1 Tim. 1:12-16). Every Jew could boast of his own blood heritage (though he certainly could not take any credit for it). Some Jews could boast of their faithfulness to the Jewish religion. But Paul could boast of those things *plus* his zeal in persecuting the church. At this point we might ask: "How could a sincere man like Saul of Tarsus be so wrong?" The answer is: *he was using the wrong measuring stick!* Like the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22) and the Pharisee in Christ's parable (Luke 18:10-14), Saul of Tarsus was looking at the *outside* and not the *inside*. He was comparing himself with standards set by men, not by God. As far as obeying *outwardly* the demands of the Law, Paul was a success, but he did not stop to consider the *inward sins* he was committing. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it clear that there are sinful *attitudes* and *appetites* as well as sinful *actions* (Matt. 5:21-48). When he looked at himself or looked at others, Saul of Tarsus considered himself to be righteous. But one day he saw himself as compared with Jesus Christ! It was then that he changed his evaluations and values, and abandoned "works righteousness" for the righteousness of Jesus Christ. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**ILLUSTRATION OF PERSECUTED CHURCH** - All throughout history courageous Christians have stood for Christ in the heat of fiery persecution. During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad. Now that's Holy Spirit wrought boldness. And we'll have the privilege of meeting these 93 students in heaven someday! What a testimony!

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**Theodore Epp on Zeal Without Knowledge** - Paul said about himself, "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church" (Phil. 3:6). This reveals the pride of personal devotion to his religious choices. In a sense, it was Paul's pride of reputation. He was more devoted than any of his contemporaries.

He was not only a Pharisee, but he was also a very zealous one. He was a conscientious and relentless persecutor of all who were considered heretics outside of his pharisaic Judaism.

In Paul's unsaved state in Judaism, he actually thought he was doing the will of God by persecuting the believers in Jesus Christ. He measured his religion by his hatred for Christians.

It is regrettable that even today some believers measure their Christian zeal by what they are against.

Some have so much bitterness against modernists--those with liberal theology; others contend zealously over the issue of the Holy Spirit or over a particular translation of the Bible.

Some have bitterness toward sinners, not distinguishing the sin from the sinner. But remember, a reputation of zeal against anything is not a proof of salvation in itself.

I believe that when we are rightly related to Jesus Christ, we will have much zeal against those things that dishonor Him, but it is possible for people to be zealous against some things without having a right relationship with Christ.

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14).

**as to the righteousness which is in the Law found blameless: kat a dikaiosunen ten en nomo genomenos (AMPMSN) amemptos:**

- Mt 5:20; 23:25; Mk 10:20,21; Lk 1:6; Acts 26:5; Ro 7:9; 9:31,32; 10:2, 3, 4, 5
- [Philippians 3 Resources - multiple sermons and commentaries](#)

## Pride in Righteousness: "The righteousness which is the law blameless"

**A. T. Robertson** sums up that Paul had "A marvelous record, scoring a hundred in Judaism.....He was the star of hope for Gamaliel and the Sanhedrin."

**William Lane** (in his commentary on Mark - NICNT) has the following quote (from H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck) that relates to and helps understand Paul's confidence that he really was "**blameless**" -- "That man possesses the ability to fulfill the commandments of God perfectly was so firmly believed by the rabbis that they spoke **in all seriousness of people who had kept the whole Law from A to Z.**"

**Charles Swindoll** - In today's terms, that proud Pharisee known as Saul of Tarsus won all the marbles—the Pulitzer, the Medal of Honor, the Most Valuable Player, the Heisman, the Gold Medal . . . the Nobel of Ancient Jewry. Had they had newspapers or magazines in his day, his picture would have been on the front page, and the headlines would have read, RELIGIOUS ZEALOT OF THE DECADE. His was the name dropped by everybody who was anybody. Any search for a model to follow would have led to the scholar from Tarsus, but you would have to move fast to stay up. He wasn't nearly finished with his plan to rid the world of Christians. The last entry in his Daytimer read, "Next stop: Damascus." On that fateful trip, everything changed. (Laugh Again)

**Righteousness which is in the Law** - This refers **not** to God's righteousness imputed or credited ([logizomai](#)) to man by faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Instead this represents man's righteousness, often referred to as self-righteousness as was exemplified by the pride filled Pharisees in Jesus' and Paul's day. As a Pharisee Paul was one of an elite corps of 6,000 Pharisees who believed that they could attain salvation by keeping the Law, basically a list of "*do's and don'ts*". This **righteousness** which is based on self effort and external obedience to rules and regulations is unacceptable to God. Self righteousness can never bring a sinner into **right** relationship with God. This is the **righteousness** that Paul is describing in this passage.

**Which is in the Law** - Means having its source in obedience to the law. There are only two ways to attain **righteousness** - keep the Law perfectly which no man can do (except the Man Christ Jesus!) or believe in the **Righteous One** Christ Jesus (Ex 9:27, Isa 24:16, 53:11, Acts 3:14, 7:52, 22:14, "Righteous Branch" Jer 23:5,33:15 "The LORD our Righteousness" - Jer 23:6, 33:16). As this former self-righteous Pharisee later wrote it is "by His (God's) doing (Salvation is God's miraculous work!) you are in Christ Jesus, Who became to us wisdom from God, and **righteousness** and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor 1:30)

**Warren Wiersbe** - Like most "religious" people today, Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven! It was not bad things that kept Paul away from Jesus—it was good things! He had to lose his "religion" to find salvation. ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

**Eadie** adds that this **righteousness** "does not signify either equity or fair dealing between man and man, but depicts that aspect of state or relation to the Divine law, which secures, or is believed to secure, acceptance with God. It is here characterized as being found in the law, or having its source in obedience to the law. With respect to such **righteousness**, he was perfect. ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

**Spurgeon** - Paul had been kept from the vices into which many fell. In his young days, he had been pure; and all his days, he had been upright and sincere. As far as he knew, to the best of his light, he had observed the law of God. In another place, he calls himself the chief of sinners (1 Ti 1:15); and so he was, because he persecuted the Church of God; but, in another sense, I may say of him that there is no man who stood so good a chance of being justified by works as Paul did, if there could have been any justification in that way.

**Righteousness** (1343) (**dikaioσune** from **dikaioσ** = being proper or right in the sense of being fully justified and in accordance with what God requires) is the character or quality of being right and thus conveys the idea of conforming to a standard or norm. The **righteousness** of God is all that God is, all that He commands, all that He demands, all that He approves and all that He provides (thru Christ). God is totally righteous because He is totally as He should be.

The "right" kind of **righteousness** is rightness of character before God and rightness of actions before men. This right kind of righteousness (which comes by grace through faith in the Gospel and is enabled by the Holy Spirit) stands in opposition to the **righteousness** which is of the Law and involves self-effort.

Paul referred to this kind of righteousness in his other epistles...

Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. (Ro 10:5-note)

**Comment:** Of course he won't merit eternal life and so he must also die eternally by that righteousness.

"Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law." (**Galatians 3:21**)

**Comment:** What Paul is saying is that the purpose of the Law was never given as a means by which a man might secure his own righteousness either by his good works and/or in his futile attempts to try to perfectly keep the Law.

Men are born into Adam and inherit his sinful nature which is opposed to God and at enmity with Him. Unregenerate (not born again by grace through faith) man attempts to construct his own set of standards by which he defines his own righteousness. Obedience to such standards can never satisfy God because His standard is absolute perfect obedience and sinlessness, qualities not possible for men born with Adam's proclivity to commit sins. God's righteousness is imputed (credited, reckoned to one's account) as a gift to man and not earned.

**J Vernon McGee** - Now if you break the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," you'll have the evidence, or you may leave your fingerprints back at the scene of the crime. The same thing could be said about murder -- you would have a corpus delicti on your hands. It is impossible to commit adultery without somebody else knowing about it. But you can covet and nobody would be the wiser. If Paul had kept quiet, we might think he had reached the place of sinless perfection, but he very frankly said he had not. He says that the Law "slew him." - Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

**Plummer** writes, "Minute duties were scrupulously performed, and no Pharisee, however strict, could have blamed him for laxity". [Would that we were as "blameless" relating to the Christian code.](#)

**Found blameless** - Eadie explains this as follows "He thought himself, and others thought him, without a flaw. He did whatever the law had enjoined; abstained from whatever the law had forbidden; omitted no duty, and committed no violation of legal precept. In **form** at least, and in **external compliance**, his obedience was exemplary, without occasional lapse or visible inconsistency... Such, then, is the record of the apostle's grounds of confidence in the flesh, and who of those opposed to him could boast of more of them? He had no confidence in the flesh, or mere externalism; and yet, if any man was ever warranted to have such confidence, it was he who had more of it than most, but who now with changed views so vehemently decried it, as opposed to the spirituality of the gospel and fatal to salvation. ([Philippians 3 Commentary - Online](#))

William Tyndale and the Geneva Bible translated **blameless** as "unrebukeable" in this particular verse.

**Blameless** (273) (**amemptos** from **a** = negates following word + **mémphomai** = find fault) means irreproachable, faultless, without defect or blemish and thus describes not being able to find fault in someone or some thing (cf use in He 8:7 [note] regarding the Old Covenant). The idea is that the person is such that he or she is without the possibility of rightful charge being brought against them. Paul's desire for the Philippian saints is that there be no legitimate ground for accusation when the Lord returns to judge (see discussion of the bema or Judgment Seat of Christ for believers) (1Th 3:13-note for Paul's similar desire and prayer for the saints at Thessalonica).

This adjective was often used to characterize someone who is flawless in the sight of other people. The related adverb **amémptōs** (differs by mark over the "o") is the very word archeologists have found on Christian tombs from ancient Thessalonica. When people wanted to identify a deceased friend or loved one as a Christian, they inscribed "**amémptōs**" or "**blameless**" on his or her grave, such behavioral blamelessness (not just the imputed and forensic) is the Lord's desire for His church.

**Barclay** adds that **amemptos** "expresses what the Christian is to the world. His life is of such purity that none can find anything in it with which to find fault. It is often said in courts of law that the proceedings must not only be just but must be seen to be just. The Christian must not only be pure, but the purity of his life must be seen by all. ([Philippians 3 Commentary](#))

That Paul was **blameless** (in regard to the Law) is indeed a remarkable claim when one considers the minutiae of Pharisaic legislation. But more importantly Paul did not keep the Law perfectly in God's eyes (Ro 7:9, 10-note), but only in the eyes of men.

At this point you might ask "How could a sincere man like Saul of Tarsus be so wrong?" The answer is that he was using the wrong measuring stick! His standard of measure was human and not divine. Like the rich young ruler (Mk 10:17-22) and the Pharisee in Christ's parable (Lk 18:10, 11, 12, 13, 14), Saul of Tarsus was looking at the outside and not the inside. He was comparing himself with standards set by men, not by God. As far as **obeying outwardly** the demands of the Law, Paul was a success, but he did not grasp the gravity of the **inward sins** he was committing. In the Sermon on the Mount (See in depth verse by verse notes), Jesus makes it clear that there are sinful **attitudes and appetites** as well as sinful **actions** (Mt 5:21ff-note). When he looked at himself or

looked at others, Saul of Tarsus considered himself to be righteous **externally** speaking. But one day he saw himself compared with the risen Lord Jesus Christ and saw internally that he was sinful at his very core! It was then that this heart was genuinely "circumcised" and he forsook "works righteousness" accepting by faith the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

**Lehman Strauss** - Here is a man who carried the righteousness of the law far enough so as to become blameless before men. It was not uncommon to find such men. We think of the young man who said to our Lord concerning the law, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth" (Mark 10:20). Such claims set a man apart as being of great stature. Oh, he had sinned, but then he would bring the required sacrifice in obedience to the ceremonial law and be pronounced clean. Paul was an unexcelled example of a Jew who was ritually, respectably, racially, religiously, reputably, and righteously correct in the eyes of all his fellowmen. But not until he was brought in contact with the glorified Christ did he learn the truth of the Old Testament prophet that, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). That day as he traveled the road to Damascus he saw his pedigree as a filthy rag, a worthless polluted garment. Until that crisis hour of his conversion he had been going about to establish his own righteousness (Rom. 10:3), but Christ changed all of that. Later Paul wrote: "For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

**J Vernon McGee** - On the credit side of the ledger Paul had been adding up his background and his character and his religion. It seemed like an impressive list -- and it was, on the human plane. Suddenly it all became a debit -- he no longer trusted in those things because he met Jesus Christ. He had hated Him before and was on the way to Damascus to persecute His followers, but now the One on the debit side was moved to the credit side. He put his entire trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, my friend, if the bookkeeping system of this country were transformed like that, it would upset the economy of the world. It would be a revolution. Actually, any conversion is a revolution because what things are gain become a loss, and loss becomes gain. It turns you upside down and right side up. It gets you in an altogether different position. That is what conversion is.-- Thru The Bible

**Spurgeon** sums up Paul's "self" description remarking that "I do not know what more he could have had. If a Jew had tried to select a man who had something to glory in, he could not have picked any man to stand in the front of Paul. He was truly a Jew, he had received the initiatory rite, and on the right day. He was born of the innermost tribe, the tribe of Benjamin, in whose country stood the temple itself. He was O, Pharisee, who pushed the law to the extreme; he tithed his mint and his cummin. Nobody could have anything to glory in which Paul had not."

**ILLUSTRATION:** When Roy DeLamotte was the chaplain at Paine College in Georgia, he preached the shortest sermon in the college's history. His sermon title was much longer than his message: "What Does Christ Answer When We Ask, 'Lord, What's in Religion for Me?'" Here's his one-word sermon: "Nothing." A relationship with Christ, not religion, is what makes us righteous. Someone has said that many of us subscribe to the oldest religion in the world – the do-the-best-you-can religion. The problem with this is that our best is really a mound of smelly manure in the nostrils of Yahweh. Even the good things are garbage to God. Are you ready to put your faith in Him right now so that you will be found in Him? (Brian Bill)

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**Ray Pritchard sums up Php 3:4-6** - Here is Paul's personal spiritual pedigree. He lists seven different points about his background:

- A. Right Ritual: Circumcized on the eighth day
- B. Right Race: An Israelite
- C. Right Family: The tribe of Benjamin
- D. Right Religion: Hebrew of the Hebrews
- E. Right Occupation: A Pharisee
- F. Right Zeal: A persecutor of the church
- G. Right Morality: Outwardly keeping all of God's commands

If you aren't impressed, it's only because you aren't a Jew living in the first century. There's a term we sometimes use to describe people from a very high position in society. We call them "blue bloods." Paul was a Jewish "blue blood." He was as "in" as you could be in the first century. He had it all—Jewish descent, an excellent Jewish education, high social standing, a reputation for keeping the Law, and a reputation for moral purity. What more could you want? Now stop right there. That's the whole point of this passage. What more could you want? If being religious could get you heaven, then Paul should have had a guaranteed front-row seat right next to Moses and Elijah. His spiritual resume was as good as it gets. Talk about your high draft pick. He was number one.

The point is, most people in the world stop right here and go no further. They take a look at their spiritual resume and figure, It's not too bad. Maybe it's not as good as Paul's, but it's surely good enough to squeak into heaven. They go to church occasionally, they try to be good, they haven't killed anyone lately, they try to help others in need, and they figure that somehow it's all going to work out in the end. They subscribe to the oldest religion in the world—the Do-the-best-you-can religion. They figure as long as you do your best, when you die, God will smile, shake his head, and say, "Aw, come on in." Most people sincerely believe that doing your best is enough. What more could you want? ([Philippians 3:1-11: From Rubbish to Jesus](#))

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**ILLUSTRATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS** - At the end of World War I, General Pershing sent word to the troops in Europe announcing a victory parade through the streets of Paris. There were two requirements for the soldiers to qualify to march in the parade: They had to have a good record; and, they had to be at least 186 centimeters tall. Word came to one company of American soldiers and the excitement built about how great it would be to march in that victory parade. Being Americans, no one knew for sure just how tall 186 centimeters was. But the men began comparing themselves, lining up back to back to see who was the tallest. The taller men in the company were ribbing the shorter ones, "Too bad for you, Shorty! We'll think of you when we're in Paris!" Then the officer came to find out if there were any candidates for the parade. He put the mark on the wall at 186 centimeters. Some men took one look at the mark and walked away, realizing that they weren't even close. Others tried, but fell short by a small amount. Finally, the tallest man in the troop stood up to the mark and squared his shoulders. But he discovered that he was a quarter of an inch shy of the mark (6' 1/2"). When those men compared themselves with themselves, some thought they were tall enough to qualify. But when the standard came, it proved that none qualified.

It is commonly thought that the way to get into heaven is by being a good person. People who believe that compare themselves with others and think, "I'm good enough because I'm better than my no good neighbor who drinks beer and watches sports on TV every Sunday. I usually go to church; I don't get drunk (at least not on Sunday); I don't gamble (sure, I buy an occasional lottery ticket, but I don't gamble as much as he does). I don't hit my wife (we yell a lot, but I've never hit her!). I pay my taxes (well, at least most of what I owe; nobody declares everything!)." That's the way people justify themselves and convince themselves that they're going to get to heaven. They compare themselves with others and figure that they're in the top half that's going to make it. How good does a person have to be to get into heaven? Jesus made it clear in the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). In that sermon, Jesus hit at the Pharisees, who thought that they were good enough to qualify for heaven. They had never murdered anyone. But Jesus said that if we've been angry with our brother, we have broken God's law and are guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (Matt. 5:22). The Pharisees prided themselves on never committing adultery. Jesus said that to lust after a woman in our heart is to break that commandment (Matt. 5:28). The absolute righteousness of God, not just in our outward behavior, but in our thoughts, is the standard we must live up to if we want to get to heaven by our good works.

God's Ten Commandments are like a ten-link chain that holds a boat to a dock. It only takes one broken link to cause the boat to be swept away by the current and dashed to pieces by the waterfall just down stream. Some, who are pretty good people outwardly, may look at someone who has broken every link in the chain and think, "I'm better than he is." But one broken link is just as effective as ten broken links in plunging that boat to destruction. That's why Paul concludes in his argument in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Or, as he puts it in Galatians 2:16, "by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified."

In spite of the repeated clear teaching of God's Word, the error persists that everyone who by human standards is a decent person, will get into heaven on the basis of his good deeds. At the root of that persistent heresy is pride, which is what keeps most people from Christ and the gospel. As we saw in our last study, Paul was plagued by a group of false teachers, called Judaizers, who infected the churches he founded with a subtle error that appealed to pride. They did not deny that a person must trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. But they added works, especially the Jewish rite of circumcision, to faith in Christ as an essential requirement for salvation. Paul strongly warns the Philippians to beware of this subtle, but damnable, error (Phil 3:2).....

Let's bring these inherited and acquired qualities into our cultural framework. I've asked some people, "Are you a Christian?" and they've replied, "Of course, what do you think I am, a Hindu?" They thought that because they were American and America is predominately Christian, therefore they are Christian. If you think that because you were born in a "Christian" nation or family, you're therefore a Christian, you must write that plus off as a loss if you want to gain Christ by faith. Others think that because they were baptized, either as an infant or later, they are Christians. Others put faith in their church attendance or membership. Some trust in the fact that their doctrine is orthodox or that they have served faithfully in the church. The most common idea of all is that ***Because I've always tried my best to live a good life, that will get me into heaven.***

Please note that Paul was sincere, totally committed, zealous, faithful, outwardly righteous, and yet utterly wrong and headed straight for hell! He was using the wrong measuring stick, comparing himself with others and trusting in his own good deeds and dedication as the basis for his eternal destiny. But when he saw the blinding glory of the righteous Lord Jesus Christ, he was undone. He had to write off everything he had been trusting in as a total loss. I like the way Bishop Lightfoot brings out the nuance of the Greek text of Phil 3:7: "All such things which I used to count up as distinct items with a miserly greed and reckon to my credit-- these I have massed together under one general head as loss" (Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians [Zondervan] p. 148).

**ILLUSTRATION** - In the 1730's in England, a young man named George Whitefield desperately wanted to be right before God. As a student at Oxford, he was part of the Holy Club, along with John and Charles Wesley. The members of that club rose early every day for lengthy devotions. They disciplined themselves so as not to waste a minute of the day. They wrote a diary every night in which they examined and condemned themselves for any fault during that day. They fasted each Wednesday and Friday and set

aside Saturday as a Sabbath to prepare for the Lord's Day. They took communion each Sunday. They tried to persuade others to attend church and to refrain from evil. They visited the prisons and gave money to help the inmates and to provide for the education of their children. Whitefield nearly ruined his health by going out in cold weather and lying prostrate before God for hours, crying out for deliverance from sin and Satan. For seven weeks he was sick in bed, confessing his sins and spending hours praying and reading his Greek New Testament. **Yet, by his own admission, he was not saved, because he was trusting in all these things to save him.** Finally, "in a sense of utter desperation, in rejection of all self-trust, he cast his soul on the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, and a ray of faith, granted him from above, assured him he would not be cast out" (Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield* [Cornerstone Books], 1:77; see pp. 60-77 for full account). The burden of his sins was lifted, he was filled with joy, and he went on to become the great evangelist used of God in the First Great Awakening.

Thankfully we do not all have to go through the agony of soul that George Whitefield went through. But we must all come to the same place he did, where we throw overboard as worthless all trust in human merit and cling to the Lord Jesus Christ as our only basis for acceptance with God. If we lose all our pride and self-trust in exchange for Christ and His merit, we gain everything! (Steven Cole - [Philippians 3:4-9 The Losses & Gains of True Christianity](#))

## Losing to Gain Philippians 3:1-11 Brian Bill

The longest sermon on record was preached by Clinton Lacy in February of 1955. It took 58 hours and 18 minutes to deliver it. It was after suffering through this sermon soliloquy that someone remarked: "Blessed is the preacher whose train of thought has a caboose."

Erwin Lutzer, pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, likes to say to his preaching class: "If you can't strike oil in 30 minutes, stop boring." That reminds me of the preacher who announced after a long, dry sermon, that he wished to meet with the church board following the close of the service. The first man to arrive was a visitor. The minister turned to him and said, "You misunderstood my announcement. This is a meeting of the board." The man replied, "I know, but if there's anyone here more bored than I am, I'd like to meet him."

This message will be shorter than usual not because I don't want to have a meeting of the bored after the service, but because we want to allow ample time for communion and then a commissioning for Kathy Marley and Sue Shavers as they leave for Kenya this week.

Let's jump into our text by turning to Philippians 3 where we will learn that a relationship with Christ, not religion, is what makes us righteous. In this extremely autobiographical section, filled with strong speech and vivid word pictures, Paul begins in verse 1 with a preacher's favorite phrase: "Finally..." Now those of you who have listened to sermons for awhile should know that this doesn't necessarily mean that the message is almost over. Paul still has two more chapters in the book! This literally means, "As for the rest." He's addressed a number of topics and now wants to tackle a few more.

True to form, he once again focuses on the need to "rejoice in the Lord." Notice that we are to rejoice in the Lord, meaning that joy comes only from Jesus. I love how Paul works this theme into every seam of Philippians. It seems whenever he changes subjects in this letter, he interjects the responsibility we have to rejoice. Notice that it is "no trouble" for him to repeat the need for rejoicing, referring to it as a "safeguard" for them. This word is the opposite of the verb meaning "to trip up, or cause to stumble." Paul's passion is for the believers to stand firm, to be steady and secure. His concern is three-fold as he establishes that we are made righteous through a relationship with Christ, not by being religious.

### 1. Watch out for the expectations of others (Php 3:2-3).

Php 3:2 begins with a warning: "**Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh**" Using strident speech, Paul moves from some sweet words to several strong warnings. Let me give some background. In the opening seven chapters in the Book of Acts, the Gospel message was preached to those with a Jewish background. But when you come to chapter ten, Peter goes to the Gentiles with the gospel, and this causes some concern and conflict for those who believed that a person needed to become Jewish first. At the end of chapter eleven, it seems like the matter is settled. Notice Acts 11:18: "**So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.**"

Now that the door had been opened, Paul was sent out to the Gentiles in Acts 13, but it didn't take long for the "Judaizers," men who taught that people had to submit to Jewish rules, to come along and cause the church to have its first doctrinal disagreement in Acts



15. The conclusion of this conference was that Gentiles did not have to keep the Jewish law in order to be saved. James summarized their decision in Acts 15:19: **"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it more difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."** They concluded that grace always trumps the Law. But the dissenters were not happy with this decision so they followed Paul wherever he went, stirring up the churches and pulling people away from the gospel of grace.

The Philippians were to "watch out," or perceive with their eyes, by paying close attention to these men. They were to constantly look out for dangers that were coming their way. Paul describes these false teachers in three strong terms:

- **They are "dogs."** We need to get the lap dog or the nap dog out of our minds. These were not pampered pets or docile dogs, but rather dirty, despised and diseased scavengers. I wanted to sing the song, "Who Let the Dogs Out?" but all of you would be out of here if I did! They often traveled in packs, intruding where they were not wanted and barking all the time. I saw a lot of these cantankerous canines when we lived in Mexico and during the summer I was in Zimbabwe. Paul is really asking, "Who Let the Dogs In?" The Jewish people often referred to Gentiles in a derogatory way as "dogs." The Judaizers had become just like those they had been trying to avoid.

- **They are "men who do evil."** Paul is picking up on the declaration of Jesus in Matthew 23:15: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are." They may come across as sincere but they are really sinister.

- **They are "mutilators of the flesh."** Paul is using a play on words here to show that these men, who have been preaching that circumcision is a requirement for redemption, are actually mutilating the message of the Gospel. Circumcision is taught in Genesis 17 and other passages and did distinguish God's people from the pagans around them, but when the spiritual meaning is lost, it is nothing more than a mutilation. Paul used even stronger words than this in Galatians 5:12 when he stated: "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!"

In contrast to these false charlatans, Paul describes real religion using four terms.

- **Christians are "the circumcision."** In a spiritual sense, every Christian has been circumcised in his heart.

- **A Christian "worships by the Spirit of God."** Instead of exalting the externals, a true believer, as Jesus said in John 4:24, worships in "spirit and truth."

- **A Christian "glories in Christ."** Our confidence is to be in Christ alone. 1 Corinthians 1:31: "Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'" Our focus should always be on extending the fame of Christ's name.

- **A Christian "puts no confidence in the flesh."** This literally means, "And not in flesh having confidence." As Paul does an inventory of his life, he knows he could make a case for putting confidence in his accomplishments.

**2. Weigh your accomplishments against Christ** (Php 3:5-8). In this section, Paul opens up his soul as he describes his spiritual resume. He lists seven achievements, some that were inherited and others that were earned. I'm grateful to Wil Pounds for this helpful outline. Here then is Paul's pedigree. He had the...

1. **Right Ritual.** Paul was "circumcised on the eighth day." He was a Jew by birth, not a convert later in life. This literally means, "In circumcision an eighth-day man."
2. **Right Relationship.** He was "of the people of Israel." He was from the spiritual stock that can be traced through Jacob. When the Jewish people wanted to stress their special relationship to God, they used the word "Israelite."
3. **Right Respectability.** Paul came from one of the most highly esteemed tribes: "of the tribe of Benjamin." Benjamin was the child of Rachael, the well-loved wife of Jacob. This patriotic tribe remained loyal to Judah when the other ten revolted.
4. **Right Race.** Paul declared that he was a "Hebrew of Hebrews," meaning that both of his parents were Jewish. He was a pure Jew, growing up speaking the language and practicing all the customs.
5. **Right Religion.** Paul stated, "in regard to the law, a Pharisee." Over time, the word "Pharisee" has come to be synonymous with hypocrite or legalist, but back then, a Pharisee was the highest level one could attain to.
6. **Right Reputation.** No one could question Paul's passion for the things of God. He was so sold on doing what he thought was right that, "as for zeal, [he was] persecuting the church."
7. **Right Righteousness.** Amazingly, Paul could take a look at his external actions and declare, "As for legalistic righteousness, faultless." He could say with the rich young ruler in Mark 10:20: "...all these I have kept since I was a boy."

**ILLUSTRATION:** Do you remember the Flonase commercial where there are a bunch of guys standing next to each other? All of them are using different medications and when various allergens are introduced, one by one, they all fall over until only the guy using Flonase is left. That's kind of like what Paul is saying here. Let's demonstrate by having you all stand. I'm going to ask different groups of you to sit down until only one person is left standing.

I'm reading a book right now called, *Blue Like Jazz* that several guys in the church have encouraged me to read. I can't recommend it yet because I've just started but I was struck by the author's autobiographical summary of his spiritual life, because it reminded me of the Apostle Paul's testimony: "I believe the greatest trick of the devil is not to get us into some sort of evil but rather have us wasting time. This is why the devil tries so hard to get Christians to be religious. If he can sink a man's mind into habit, he will prevent his heart from engaging God. I was into habit." (Donald Miller, Thomas Nelson, 2003, Page 13).

Paul had a bunch of holy habits and high spiritual scores until he met Christ on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. As good as he was, when he comes to verse 7, he writes: "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." That word "but" serves as a contrast and the word "profit" is actually in the plural, meaning that all the "right" things he had going for him were like credits on a profit/loss statement. That is, until he took the time to "consider" or count what he really had. This is a mathematical term, meaning to carefully add things up. When he did that, he recognized that all those things that he thought were gain were actually a "loss" when compared to knowing Christ.

Let me demonstrate by writing the word "profit" on the left side of this paper and the word "loss" on the right side. Let's compare Paul's life both before he met Christ and after.

- Pre-Conversion Post-Conversion
- Profit Loss Profit Loss
- Ritual Christ Christ Ritual
- Relationship Relationship
- Respectability Respectability
- Race Race
- Religion Religion
- Reputation Reputation
- Righteousness Righteousness

We could say that Paul is basically stamping the word "loss" across all those things he thought were profits. His credits have become debits. Weighed against the weightiness of Christ, nothing stands up. Verse 8 begins with an unusually strong phrase, "What is more," which in the Greek contains five particles that reads this way, "But indeed therefore at least even." And then he again uses the present tense of "consider" or count, to say that he concludes that "everything" is a loss compared to "the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ." He's basically saying that a relationship with Christ is much more important than religious activities.

The word "loss" is used in Acts 27 of the cargo that was thrown overboard in a storm. They had to get rid of stuff in order to save their lives. It was valuable but it had quickly become worthless when the sailors were faced with a crisis. The cargo had to go if they wanted to go on. This is similar to what Jesus taught in Matthew 13:44-46 when he said that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that a man gave up everything for, or like the merchant who, when finding a pearl of great value, "went away and sold everything he had and bought it." Both of these men had accumulated much but saw everything as worthless when compared to the surpassing treasure of Christ.

But then he goes one step further, using graphically gross language: "I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." The word "rubbish" here is cleaned up a bit because it actually means manure or human waste. Paul is saying that all of his gains are garbage, his self-righteous deeds are like dung, what he thought was excellent is really excrement. Some of us are uncomfortable with these kinds of words in church but let me say it strongly. If you are trusting in religion to get you to heaven, you will never get there because compared to a relationship with Christ, religion is rubbish. We are made righteous through a relationship with Christ, not by being religious. Our good deeds are like a smoldering pile of garbage. Paul is echoing the words of Isaiah 64:6: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags..."

Here's the rub. Most of us have no trouble admitting that our sins are smelly but secretly many of us think that our "good" deeds help balance things out. One pastor put it this way: "It is not your attitude toward your sins that foul you up; it's your attitude toward your own goodness." Friend, take some time to calculate your credentials and it will not take long for you to admit that apart from Christ everything is rubbish. Notice that it's only when we count those things as garbage that we will "gain Christ." We need to tear up our religious resume and instead trust in a relationship with Christ. And when we realize that we have nothing left but Christ, we will find that Christ is everything we ever needed. Missionary martyr Jim Elliot said it best: "He is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

A good thing can become a bad thing if it keeps us away from the best thing. As Jesus said in Mark 8:36, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"

It's possible to be sincere and be sincerely wrong. When Paul compared himself with these seven measuring sticks, he thought he was fine but when compared with Christ, all his gains were garbage.

### 3. Widen your experiential knowledge of Christ (Php 3:9-11).

Php 3:9 describes the amazing transaction that takes place when we refuse to trust in the refuse on our spiritual resumes and put our faith in Christ alone: "And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." This verse is really a summary of the Book of Romans. This passage hit John Bunyan, author of Pilgrim's Progress, as he walked through the cornfields one night, wondering how he could stand before God. Suddenly he saw himself – not just as a sinner, but as sin from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. He realized that he had nothing, and that Christ had everything.

Believers are "in Christ," a phrase that is used over 100 times in the epistles. We are inextricably united to Christ in an unbreakable bond. We could illustrate it this way. Imagine that this piece of paper represents your life and this open book (which I will be giving to our "Ten Tons of Love" collection project) represents Christ. As I put the paper into the book and then close it, the paper is completely covered. It is "in" Christ. When God looks at you, He sees Jesus because to be "in Christ" means that God imputes or counts the righteousness of Christ to your account. He becomes your gain as you get the credit for His perfect righteousness.

Verses 10-11 establish the two goals of the Christian life: To know Christ and to become like Him: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." The word "know" is experiential, not just intellectual and has the idea of "knowing absolutely." Jesus described it this way in John 17:3: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

Warren Wiersbe ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#)) points out some helpful truths about knowing Christ from these two verses:

- It's personal – "I" want to know Christ.
- It's powerful – the "power" of his resurrection.
- It's painful – the fellowship of sharing in his "sufferings."
- It's practical – "becoming" like him.

One day Paul came to realize that being good is not good enough. He could see himself standing before the doors of heaven with his long list of credentials.

**I've done the right rituals** – silence

**I have the right relationship as part of the people of Israel**– the angels yawn

**I have the right kind of respectability being from the tribe of Benjamin**– big deal

**I'm of the right race and speak Hebrew** – the doors don't move

**I'm one of the elite members of the religion** – no sound of keys turning in the locks

**I have the right reputation as one who is sincere and zealous**– the words hang in the air

Then Paul plays his trump card, thinking that this for sure will get him in: I have the right kind of righteousness because I am faultless – he waits expectantly for a flurry of movement but nothing happens. Heaven's gates are closed to him while Hell awaits him with open arms.

**ILLUSTRATION:** When Roy DeLamotte was the chaplain at Paine College in Georgia, he preached the shortest sermon in the college's history. His sermon title was much longer than his message: "What Does Christ Answer When We Ask, 'Lord, What's in Religion for Me?'" Here's his one-word sermon: "Nothing." A relationship with Christ, not religion, is what makes us righteous. Someone has said that many of us subscribe to the oldest religion in the world – the do-the-best-you-can religion. The problem with this is that our best is really a mound of smelly manure in the nostrils of Yahweh. Even the good things are garbage to God. Are you ready to put your faith in Him right now so that you will be found in Him? We could define faith this way.

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Him

It's time to do a new accounting of your life so that you will forsake all and take Him right now.