

Philippians 3:4-16

Connecting Context

Verses 3:1-3

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; ³ for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Who Are We?

1 We are the true circumcision.

Romans 2:25-29

For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷ And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

•“Not in the letter” means not in the law. Worshipping God “in the letter” will bring you praise from man. Worshipping in the Spirit will bring you praise from God. What? Praise from God? Wow.

2 We are those who worship in the Spirit of God.

John 4:23-24

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

•We don’t “endeavor” to worship in spirit and truth. We are those who DO worship in the Spirit of God.

3 We are those who glory in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence. ³⁰ But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—³¹ that, as it is written, “**He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.**”*

- 4 We are those who do not put their confidence in the flesh.
 • The word “flesh” means slightly different things depending on its context.

Generally speaking, “flesh” can refer to actual flesh (Lk. 24:39, Jn. 6:51), kindred relationships (Rom. 9:3), the state of being human (Gal. 1:16, Gal. 2:20, Eph. 6:12), personal abilities or religious accomplishments (Phil. 3:3-4, Gal. 3:3), human desires (Rom 13:14), the “flesh” as opposed to the spiritual (Mt. 16:17, Jn. 1:13, Jn. 6:63), and our condition before coming to faith in Christ (Rom. 7:5, Gal. 5:24, Eph.2:3, Jn. 3:6, Rom. 8:9). If we are unaware of these different uses, we can become confused as to who we are in Him when we read the word “flesh”.-C. D. Hildebrand

- We put our confidence (trust, reliance) in the Lord, not in our flesh.

Verses 4-6

Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 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; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

4. Even though Paul has just said that he did not put his confidence in the flesh, now he asserts that if there were anyone who could put confidence flesh, he could even more so than any other.
 a. Question: Confidence in the flesh for what purpose? Answer: To be right with God, or to be righteous.

It begins with his former "advantages" within Judaism, which in his case far outstrip any that could be exhibited by those who might come to them (the Philippians) (4-6); -Fee

5. This is quite a claim, but one which he now backs up!
 b. Circumcised the eighth day—from birth following the law; not a convert who was circumcised as an adult
 c. Of the nation of Israel—thought born a Roman citizen, he was not of any other nation than Israel
 d. Of the tribe of Benjamin—an esteemed tribe who was loyal to King David

He belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, a tribe highly thought of, the tribe that remained loyal to David, and which formed with Judah the foundation for the restored nation after the captivities.-Wuest

- e. A Hebrew of Hebrews—his claim to be a pure Jew, of no Gentile descent
 f. A Pharisee as to the Law—part of the strictest sect of the Jews; well-educated, well-connected, esteemed

6. As to zeal...as to righteousness in the Law

His zeal for the Law was demonstrated most surely by his untiring dedication to stamping out the nascent Christian movement, probably related to his conviction that God had especially cursed Jesus by having him hanged (Gal 3: 13; Deut 21: 23). In their own way, his Judaizing opponents are also persecuting the church; but Paul surpasses them even here. -Fee

The Greek word for "zeal" would almost have a technical meaning at that time for a strict Jew who was a member of the fanatical party among the Pharisees who called themselves Zealots. Paul had at one time considered his persecution of the Church a meritorious work. -Wuest

- a. **As to zeal**—persecuting the church. In the eyes of the Jews, Paul was respected because he was working to extinguish Christians. It was evil, but according to the zeal that is in the Law, he thought he was doing God’s will!
- b. **As to the righteousness in the Law**—blameless. This is a stunning proclamation. Paul followed the Law exactly.
- c. **Note: It’s not that it is impossible to keep the Law. Paul is claiming here that he did. What he is saying is that even though he was blameless according to the Law, it was not reason to have confidence. Fulfilling the law is clearly here FLESH.**

Luke 1:5-6

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.¹

Galatians 3:3

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

- In Galatians “the flesh” refers to keeping religious laws (through our own efforts).

Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by following religious laws—by your own religious effort?

➔Notice the pairing of law and flesh as opposed to the Spirit and faith.◀

Verse 7

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

7. Following the Law and Paul’s perfect religious heritage were “gain” to him.

¹ It is commonly taught that no one can/could obey the law, but here we have at least two examples of those who Scripture declare were “blameless” according to the law. Certainly, there were others. God did not give a law that no one could keep, and then judge them for not being able to keep it. Read the Pentateuch again. There is not one law that was given that was impossible to keep. What is impossible is that the righteousness that comes from the Law could save us or impart to us the righteousness we have through faith in Jesus.

a. Paul forsook right-standing by “those things”.

The word “loss” was translated from the Greek word “ZEMIA,” and ZEMIA means “detriment” (Strong’s Concordance). Paul considered all his fleshly attainments as detriments to his spiritual life. -Andrew Wommack

“Counted” is the translation of a word meaning “to consider, deem, think, account.” It is in the perfect tense which speaks of a process completed in past time having present results. -Wuest

After mature consideration, Paul came to a settled conviction with regard to the matter. “Loss” is singular. The various gains are all counted as one loss. -Wuest

Verse 8

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, →

8. He doesn’t list what “more than that” is, but we can safely assume it would be anything that pointed to his self righteousness.

For Paul it is a theological truism that grace and self-confidence are in radical antithesis; grace plus anything cancels out grace. -Fee

- a. Paul counted all things “loss”—a detriment (something that will cause damage or injury). He viewed his religious pedigree not as an advantage, but as a disadvantage.**
- b. IN VIEW of the “surpassing value”—huperechō: superior, superiority: - better, excellency, higher, supreme. What he gained through his religious accomplishments was greatly inferior to what he gained from knowing Jesus and gaining Christ.**

The greater simply replaced the lesser by the sheer force of its “greatness.” -Fee

- c. For Whom I have suffered the loss of all things—Paul’s decision to follow Christ resulted in great loss: loss of reputation, loss of religious standing, loss of family affection and financial standing.**

But not only did he forfeit all this when he was saved, but his parents would have nothing to do with a son who had in their estimation dishonored them by becoming one of those hated, despised Christians. They had reared him in the lap of luxury, had sent him to the Jewish school of theology in Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the great Gamaliel, and had given him an excellent training in Greek culture at the University of Tarsus, a Greek school of learning. But they had now cast him off. He was still forfeiting all that he had held dear, what for? He tells us, “that I may win Christ.” -Wuest’

- a. In comparison to knowing Jesus and gaining Christ, he viewed what he gave up as refuse/garbage/worthless.

It is also well attested to denote "refuse, " especially of the kind that was thrown out for the dogs to forage through. Although it could possibly mean "dung" here more likely Paul is taking a parting shot at the "dogs" in v. 2,-Fee

In the light of such expansive language, therefore, the object of his "knowing" is not simply "Christ," nor even "Christ Jesus," but "Christ Jesus my Lord." Here is the evidence of intimacy and devotion. Paul regularly refers to Christ with the full title and name, "our Lord, Jesus Christ"; only here does he reverse the order and substitute the first person singular pronoun. The "Christ Jesus," because of whom he gladly considers all else to be loss, is none other than "my Lord." The reason for such devotion and longing is not expressed here, but it rings forth clearly in Gal 2:20, "who loved me and gave himself for me." This is not simply coming to know the deity – it is that, of course – but even more so, it is to know the one whose love for Paul, expressed in the cross and in his arrest on the Damascus road, has transformed the former persecutor of the church into Christ's "love slave," whose lifelong ambition is to "know him" in return, and to love him by loving his people. Fee

Paul counted all his self-righteousness as dung in comparison to knowing Christ. What a word picture! All our self-righteousness is manure compared to knowing Christ. People frame their "manure" and hang it on their walls for all to see. -Andrew Wommack

- b. It would be worth putting all of our own religious systems and ways we think we can be "right" with God on the "Chopping Block". What will remain is a simple right-standing with God based on faith in Jesus.

This latter expression does not refer to Paul's acquisition of Christ as Saviour, but to Paul's appropriating into his life as a Christian, the perfection, the graces, the fragrance of the Person of Christ. The word "win" is the translation of the same Greek word translated "gain" in verse seven-Wuest

- c. Often, this verse (8) is not taken in context. It is taught that in order to "know" or "gain" Christ, we must forsake all things—it is presented as a process, not a completed fact. "Knowing" and "gaining" Christ are not a goal. They are what happened when we were born again; when we received the righteousness that is by faith (not the law).

**↘It is important to notice↙
 that verse 8 is part of a long sentence
 that continues in verse 9!**

← *And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,* →

9. Connect the verses: “Knowing” Christ, “Gaining” Christ, and “Being found in Him”— How do these things happen?
- They DON’T come by the righteousness we obtain by following law.
 - They come through the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of FAITH IN CHRIST.

About "righteousness" Paul makes four affirmations : to gain Christ means (1) to be done with "my own righteousness" which (2) is ek nomou (from/ predicated on law); this new righteousness (3) is "the from God (ek theou) righteousness," which (4) is Paul's "through faith in Christ." Fee

- Verse 9 is one of Paul’s pivotal verses. By pivotal verse, we mean that if you don’t see this one verse, you cannot possibly understand the point Paul is trying to make. Here are two other prime examples (there are many others):

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 8:9

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

- It’s actually where he was going all along. From here we can look back and see why he was saying all he just said, AND we can look forward from this verse and understand the rest of what he is about to say. If we do not “see”/understand verse 9, we cannot understand what we just read nor that which we are going to read.

Verses 10-11

← *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

10. All of these things are ours already based on faith in Jesus Christ.
- We know Him initially and forever. This is a huge component of the New Covenant.

Jeremiah 31:33-34

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

- Notice the REASON we “know Him” is because our iniquities have been forgiven and He remembers our sins no more.
- It isn’t through completing a list of “spiritual disciplines” that we know Him. It is a blessed benefit of the New Covenant—of being forgiven.

✎Being righteous and knowing Jesus are inseparable.
It is because we are righteous BY FAITH that we know Jesus.✎

- b. Our knowledge of Him grows through study of the Scriptures, especially the study of the life of Christ.

John 14:7-10

Jesus said, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”

⁸ Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.”

⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?”

- c. As we walk with Him and learn about Him we gather an experiential knowledge of God. Most people who come to Jesus know little to nothing about Him, but over time they not only know Him as Savior and Lord but come to know Him as Father, brother, and friend.

- d. We know the power of His resurrection when we are born again, having died in Him and risen with Him.

1 Peter 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

- e. We experientially live in the power of His resurrection.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Romans 8:11

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

- f. We died and were buried with him.

Romans 6:4

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Colossians 2:12-13

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Hence Paul expresses present suffering as "being conformed (sum morphizomenos) to his death," which word he then picks up at the end (v. 21) to describe what happens to "the bodies of our present humiliation" when they are raised; they will "be conformed (sum morphon) to the body of his present glory."-Fee

...and the aim, as well as the character, of such suffering is to "become like him in his death," which almost certainly means suffering that is in some way on behalf of the gospel, thus for the sake of others, since no other suffering is in conformity to his.-Fee

g. Those who follow Him suffer persecution and trials as a result of following Him.

1 Corinthians 15:30-32

And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? ³¹ I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. ³² If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

The Greek word for "fellowship" here means "a joint participation." The sufferings of Christ spoken of here are of course not His substitutionary sufferings on the Cross, but His sufferings for righteousness' sake while on earth. Paul speaks of these and of his joint-participation in them in Colossians 1:24.-Wuest

11. Is Paul saying that he is working to attain the resurrection from the dead? NO!!! He is saying that in order to obtain the resurrection from the dead, he forsook his own righteousness based on the law for the righteousness which is from God by faith in Jesus.

The expression, "if by any means" is not an expression of doubt but one of humility. It is a modest but assured hope.-Wuest

a. When we are born again, resurrection from the dead is assured us.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

1 John 5:13

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

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.

12. Here is where “we” get off the train. Paul’s whole point has been that keeping religious laws could not give him anything that is in Christ. He forsook the righteousness that was his by keeping the law and embraced the righteousness that is of God by faith in Jesus. He is not talking about obtaining salvation or righteousness. He is talking about being perfected.

Then he says "either were already perfect." The Greek word used here does not mean "sinless, flawless," but spiritually "mature." Paul uses it three times in contrast to the Greek word meaning spiritually "immature." The tense is the perfect. Paul states that he has not come to the place in his Christian life where growth in spiritual maturity has been completed, beyond which there is no room for further development, and that as a result he is now in a state of absolute spiritual maturity. -Wuest

- a. After forsaking list number one, Paul did not then turn around and write another list. WE THE CHURCH HAVE INSERTED THE LIST RIGHT HERE. Because Paul says that he has not already obtained “it” and that he was not “already” perfect, that we now must make a list to bring us to perfection and to obtain “it”. This would be the opposite of what Paul just said.

➔No list on earth will ever bring us anywhere God wants us to be.◀

A list won’t save us.

A list doesn’t perfect us.

A list doesn’t help us reach our goals to serve Him.

- b. What is Paul saying? The answer is in the same verse! He is talking about obtaining/taking hold of that which Jesus had taken hold of him.

- 1) We were perfected on the cross.

Hebrews 10:14

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

- 2) This perfection is brought to perfection (completion).

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

- 3) We are foolish to think we can perfect ourselves in the flesh.

Galatians 3:2-3

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

Using Hebrews 10:14 and Philippians 1:6 we can conclude that we are both perfected (telieoo) in regard to everything Jesus accomplished on the cross, and subsequently brought to a state of completion (epiteleio), which most certainly refers to our maturation, or one might say, to fulfilling what Jesus already accomplished. This would include aspects such as being transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2) and from glory to glory by beholding Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18). We aren't born again knowing every right from wrong, but grace teaches us to forsake worldly lusts and to live godly (Ti. 2:12). The fruit of the Spirit grows (Gal. 5:22). Our character develops (Rom. 5:3-4). We become rooted and grounded in God's love (Eph. 3:17). Our understanding and appreciation of what was accomplished through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection becomes clearer to us (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Our discernment between good and evil matures (Heb. 5:14).

*Let me put it this way. Everything that Scripture teaches was accomplished by Christ's death is "finished." Yet, there is a process of our current perfection being brought to completion from beginning to end. **What is essential to understand is that it is Jesus who brings to completion this work that He started—not we through our own efforts.** This growth comes by the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.-C.D. Hildebrand*

4) Even the process of bringing our perfection to completion is HIS DOING!!!

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*²⁴ He who calls you is faithful, **who also will do it.***

5) We all have a work to do (Eph. 2:10) which God has prepared for us. He has laid hold of us for a purpose, as he did Paul. Our part is to lay hold of that calling and to do it.

Colossian 4:17

And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

Not that I have already made acquisition or that I have now already been brought to that place of settled spiritual maturity beyond which there is no progress, but I am pursuing onward if I may lay hold of that for which I have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.-Wuest Expanded Translation

He meant that he had not completely grasped that for which the Lord Jesus had grasped him.-Wuest

Verse 13-14

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

13. At this time, Paul had not yet fully finished the work he'd been called to do. It wasn't like that proverbial carrot dangling before him. He would and did eventually obtain that for which he had been laid hold of by Christ.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

- a. Forgetting what lies behind—the work he had done.

The phrase "those things which are behind," refers to the things he had depended upon to find favor with God (3:5, 6). "Forgetting" is stronger in the Greek, "completely forgetting."-Wuest

- b. Reaching toward what lies ahead—the work he still had to do.

14. Paul is determined to do God's will. Pressing on here is not talking here about not sinning or performing "spiritual disciplines". Paul was not struggling with sin. This is not talking about gaining Christ or knowing Christ by His own efforts. Paul does not switch the law of Moses for a new and better list—the false laws of Christianity. He is talking about continuing forward.

- a. Previously Paul was striving to obey the law. He was being zealous "for God" by persecuting the church—of trying to snuff out Christians.

- b. Now, Paul reaches for a different prize which he called "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus". This would be accomplished by fulfilling the ministry God had for him, that of preaching "the gospel of the grace of God."

Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Acts 20:17-24

*From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰ how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. ²⁴ **But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.***

The words "the high calling" have the idea of "a calling which is from heaven and to heaven."-Wuest