

Philippians 3

No confidence in the flesh

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Further, my brothers and sisters, **rejoice in the Lord!** It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is **a safeguard** for you.

It sounds as though Paul is finishing off, reiterating the command to 'rejoice in the Lord'! This is a key practice in the light of what follows and we will return to it.

But then his tone changes dramatically in v 2. Think swear words. He has three ways of describing certain people! This is not 'nice-y-anity' as Lynne said last week.



² Watch out for those **dogs**, those **evildoers**, those **mutilators of the flesh**.

This is a major 3-fold insult. Even in our culture calling someone a dog or a b---h is really offensive.

Dogs were the Jewish nickname for Gentiles. Here Paul is saying to watch out for these Jews, Judaizing Christians because they were like unbelieving Gentiles and pagans.

Whether these Jew or Judaizers were actually in Philippi is a mute point, but the sentiment was obviously there. The character type was that they regarded ceremony and outward appearance as critically important. They were show offs glorying in their piety and did everything according to the law, judging everyone else who didn't. They believed in the external ceremonial aspects of Judaism that started with circumcision on the 8th day of life.

Paul calls them evildoers. This is a comparison to the rankest sort of paganism ever! The ceremonial cutting of the flesh is on a par with pagans who mutilate their flesh in rituals. In fact there is little or nothing separating their practices from those who sacrificed to gods and believed in the power of divination and served the spirit of python, which we heard about in Acts 16. It is that bad. He regards them as unbelievers v 18-19.

¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as **enemies of the cross of Christ**. ¹⁹ **Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.**

A true Jew however is one whose heart has been circumcised. Romans 2: 28-29.

²⁸ A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

And this is on the basis of faith. Abraham was made righteous by faith, because he believed way before he was circumcised.

Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; circumcise your hearts, you people of God. Jer 4: 4.

³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who **put no confidence in the flesh**— ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

What does circumcision symbolize? It stands for a cleansing of the heart and the removal of what blocks us from intimacy with God. This is an inward attitude, a spiritual way of being, unseen by others, as opposed to looking good on the outside or *having confidence in the flesh*.

What is meant by 'the flesh'?

Gk sarx = flesh (opposed to God)

"A standard of judging God's desires for oneself and the world that is contrary to God's desires and purposes."¹

The soul chooses to follow either the spirit or the flesh.

It is linked with the spiritual world through the spirit and the material world through the body.

The soul is the site of our personality and influence.

It also possesses the power of free will.

The body is the outer shelter of the soul, while the soul is the outer sheath of the spirit.

It ought to be under the control of the spirit.

We don't turn to God's will automatically. Rather we have full sovereign power to decide for ourselves, either to follow God's will or to resist and be in control.

The order which God presents to us is spirit, soul and body, not soul first or body first. In the original state of humankind, the soul was governed by the spirit, but this became dethroned in Genesis 3.



The spirit receives 'spiritual death' as a result of Genesis 3. This separation from God puts ME in charge.

The soul expresses sin in the mind as evil thoughts; in the will as rebellion and in the emotions as wrong desires and passions. The body expresses sin in a physical way: sinful acts like adultery, murder, lust, words that destroy...

So putting the flesh in charge is a bad idea and the wrong way round. But it is usually our default mode.

Once again Paul lays it out for them. You think you have reason to boast and judge everyone else. Well here are my credentials, they put you to shame!

*If someone else thinks they have **reasons to put confidence in the flesh**, I have more:*

⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

This guy had a pedigree a mile long.

Paul says he was circumcised as a Jew on the 8th day! I was gonna put a picture up but...I am sure you can imagine. I am not sure what I'd call this, but maybe not put it on my resume.

But in his time this was the real deal. He was da man. His parents and forebears were traceable right down the line to Jacob and he was of Benjamin's tribe, the noblest of all the 12 tribes loyal to the House of David along with Judah. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, not tainted by any other influence and all this points to the purity of Paul's bloodlines.

His parents sent him to boarding school in Jerusalem and he was taught by Gamaliel, the most famous rabbi in the land. As a Pharisee, son of Pharisees he belonged to the strictest sect of the Jewish religion who kept 100's of laws, and he was affected bigtime by PO. Performance

¹ Fowl, S, 149

Orientation. Perfectionism. In the keeping of the law he says you couldn't fault him; he was blameless.

And he was full of zeal. In Pharisee mode he put all this into practice to try and stamp out believers in Jesus whom he regarded as heretical. He was violent, fiery and very scary, perhaps on a par with Hitler.

Full of arrogance and pride he had a righteous façade, which drove him to earn favour with God the basis of religion -that no one else could match. But it is a fatal righteousness rooted in self and striving.

And then he met Christ. And he was silent for three days and blind. Saul became Paul!

⁷ *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*

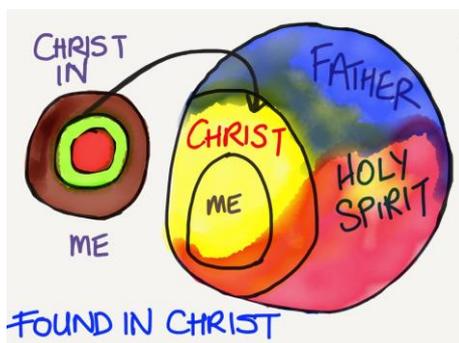
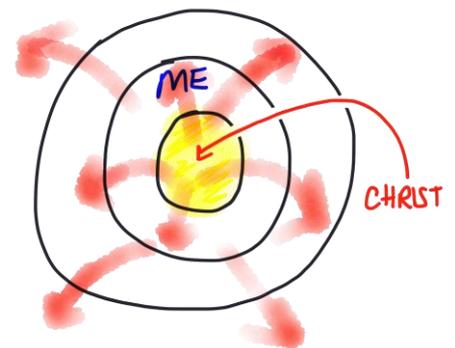
⁸ *What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

This is the guts of the gospel! And we need to get our heads around it.

Everything I ever was I now consider as rubbish, excrement to be flushed down the toilet. In hellenistic Greek it seems to stand somewhere between "crap" and "s**t. Like a seagull emptying the contents of its gut on your head. I once knew a minister who said the bit about the toilet in church and was roundly criticized for being so graphic! I am sorry but this is what the Greek means. Everything we ever try to do and be of ourselves is **not just worthless but noxious and even abhorrent** when it comes to making any difference to our salvation. Shit - this is all that the "flesh" can produce—and it is both worthless and revolting.

Nothing. No good thing, no bad thing we do makes a scrap of difference because righteousness only ever comes from God on the basis of faith.

And Paul says all I want now is **to know Christ, to gain Christ and to be found in Him**. I want no more of doing or being anything else but **being in Christ**. To be in Christ is our citizenship v 20.



Friends this is the gospel.

Righteousness exists outside of us, it has nothing to do with us, only that we receive it from Jesus and learn how to be found in Him. And for this end Paul says he will let go of the past and strain toward that resurrection in Christ, that citizenship in heaven which Jesus assures us of. This will be the focus of all of his life. To be in Christ.

¹⁰ *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,* ¹¹ *and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

¹² *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* ¹³ *Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,* ¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

My life didn't get off to a great start. As the baby of the family with a sick mother, I thought I was adopted, unwanted, responsible. I felt pretty crap about myself unlike Paul.

So I did things to survive, to manage my life. One of those was to try and be good. Good to please Mum and not upset her. Good enough to not be more shamed and embarrassed and need to say sorry. Good to earn my way up the academic ladder and be some sort of success. Good to break the cycle and not have my kids feel the things I felt. Good to be unique in ministry. Good to get degrees and qualifications. We can add PO, perfectionism, striving, stress...self confidence,

Actually, you might say come on Helen there must be something good in us! The desire to be good! Surely that's a worthy desire.

One day I was walking out of Richard's office and as I was saying good bye, I also said: I'll be good. And he looked at me and said: Just watch that! And in that moment, it was like the clouds parted and I suddenly saw the flaw in so much of the underlying lies that were driving my life.

Talk about being undone.

I may not have had the pedigree that you or Paul had, but I was doing exactly the same thing by putting confidence in my ability to be a version of 'good' and therefore acceptable to God and to myself.

The flesh (Gk: sarx) is not to be in charge. It is unredeemed.

It has its own motivations and desires, not sourced in the Spirit or in the righteousness of Christ. Should we be worried by this? Yes we should. We should not trust ourselves, but should understand what it means to be found in Christ and start there.

DISCUSSION:

What are the messages/influences that could make you self reliant and self confident?

What's the antidote to putting confidence in the flesh?

What can this look like? Give some concrete examples.

What does it mean to be found in Christ?

Some comments re an antidote to the flesh.

We need to be in the Body of Christ and to be accountable to each other. To let others in, to let them comment. In superficial relationships you don't necessarily say things that need to be said.

A lack of freedom from the flesh is because we are too far away from the Son of God. We experience more temptations, have less tolerance, less victory when we are not in close proximity to the Son. We can't live the heavenly life in the natural state.

The flesh is rigorous. It creeps up quickly. Especially when I'm tired, stressed and busy and not so in control.

Then we get temper, triggers or lapses in morality. I slip into lust, into fantasizing about someone, into an illicit, unfaithful relationship, porn. It's so subtle. Temptation becomes full blown and bears fruit. One root left to grow develops a long tap root that is really hard to dig out without leaving something behind. The flesh is a web of complexity that is hard to untangle.

Confidence in the flesh will lead to independence rather than interdependence, a tendency to isolation, to not seek help.

The more healing and attunement we find, the less the flesh has to act out and be in control. The more you yield your flesh to the gracious inspection of the Holy Spirit, the more confidence we will have in God.

Abide in the vine: soak in the life of God. Could you not watch one hour with Me?

- Be led by the Spirit
- Fruitfulness flows from intimacy
- On hour in the presence of God may be worth 20 years of hard work!
- The most costly of gifts: another hour in the secret place.
- Down, down, down. Intimacy comes in returning and rest.
- The lie is that I don't have time. It's wasted time.
- Time with God this is where it starts. To be found in Christ. To gain Christ and the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

We began with Paul's injunction: rejoice in the Lord. It is a safeguard for you. Have you lost joy? You are putting confidence in yourself!