

Philippians 3:4b-14 If anyone else thinks that he has grounds for 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; ⁶in regard to zeal, persecuting the church; in regard to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless. ⁷But, whatever things were a profit for me, these things I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. ⁸But even more than that, I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith. ¹⁰I do this so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, ¹¹in the hope that in some way I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

In Bible Class we've been going through the book of Ecclesiastes. King Solomon was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write that book toward the end of his life. He came to the conclusion that apart from God, everything this vapor. It's like when you breathe out on a cold winter's day. That little cloud of mist appears for a moment and then it is gone.

One of the subjects that came up in our discussion was this concept of a legacy. People ask, "What is your legacy going to be? What impact will you leave behind when you are gone?" When you think about it the only logical answer to that is "Who cares?" I'm going to be dead and in the grave, so who cares what anybody else thinks about me? That is a very hard pill for people to swallow.

At my grandfather's 90th birthday party someone asked him what he was most proud of. It wasn't the 47 years he spent in the public ministry or serving on the Michigan District Praesidium. It was that his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren remained faithful to their Lord. That wasn't a legacy he created. It was one that God created for him. That's the kind of attitude Paul is talking about here. Be Confident in Christ. We bring nothing, but Christ brings everything, so go forward in confidence.

Paul begins this final section of his letter to the Philippians, his epistle of joy, by writing, "**Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.**" While they are rejoicing, though, he wants them to be aware of a very serious danger right there in their own hometown. "**Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evildoers. Beware of the mutilation.** ³**For we are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God.**"

He is referring to a group of people we call the Judaizers. They were people who taught that Jesus is the Savior, but you also had to obey all of the Old Testament rules, especially regarding circumcision. That's why he calls it the mutilation. What they were claiming as necessary wasn't at all anymore. It was shifting the focus away from Jesus and putting it on themselves.

Paul reminds everyone what he was like before his conversion to Christianity when he was still known as Saul, "**If anyone else thinks that he has grounds for 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; ⁶in regard to zeal, persecuting the church; in regard to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.**"

None of that was boasting. If anyone could have gotten into heaven on the basis on what he did, it would have been Paul. He had diligently studied the Old Testament as well as all the Pharisees' extra laws. When Christianity began to rise up, he was the first to try to crush it. So if the Judaizers were going to start an argument as to who had kept the Old Testament better, it would have been Paul hands-down.

But now that he has become a Christian, he realized that everything he had been living for was a lie. He writes, "**⁷But, whatever things were a profit for me, these things I have come to consider a loss because of Christ.**" All of his best efforts didn't bring him one step closer to God. If anything, they pushed him farther away. As painful as that knowledge must have been at first, he needed to know it.

He even says, "**For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish.**" It's hard to get that word "rubbish" into good English. It is used to describe hay that has rotted. It is the kind of stuff that comes from the south end of a north-bound mule. So all of this stuff that was once his personal glory, he now realizes is nothing more than a stinking, rotten mess.

Today the Judaizers are long since gone, but the spirit of the Judaizers lives on. That's how the sinful nature works and thinks. It happens when we try to compare ourselves to other people to make us feel better about ourselves. "I may not be perfect, but at least I haven't completely messed up my life like that guy did" as if some sins are less damnable than others. Maybe there are some sins we haven't or wouldn't commit. That's not because we are so special. It is because God in his mercy never gave us the opportunity.

Here's another example. There is no greater privilege that God gives to a human being than to serve him in the ministry. But that doesn't mean that I can boast about it. It doesn't mean that my personal opinions somehow become more valuable or more God-pleasing than yours. I had nothing to do with any of this. It is all God's doing. Where I failed, I claim that as my own. All the credit belongs to him.

Be Confident in Christ. We bring nothing but Christ brings everything.

Paul shows where the real glory of a Christian comes from. We want to **"gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith."** Previously Paul was all about his own righteousness—he felt he could earn God's love. Now he realizes what a waste of time that was.

It was a waste of time because he was boasting about things that weren't worth boasting about. He was trying to earn something that God already gives us free of charge through Christ. It's be like going to buy a \$20,000 car, but insisting on paying the salesman \$50,000. You don't get extra credit for that. It'd be like staying at work for four hours after the business closes even though the work is done and you won't be paid anything extra.

The week after next is Holy Week. We will see everything that Christ did to give us perfect righteousness with God—his own perfect righteousness. We will see him march straight into his enemies' waiting hands. This was his Father's will. He went even though he knew exactly what was going to happen to him when he got to the cross. It was such a terrible thought that he prayed repeatedly that there could be some other way.

But there wasn't so Jesus went. On the cross all of those terrible things came true. We cannot even begin to understand the depth of what Jesus suffered there. All kinds of people have been crucified throughout history, but there never was a crucifixion like this. Consider that an eternity in Hell is not too long for a person to pay for his sins. In those few hours that Jesus hung on the cross he suffered an eternity of Hell for every sinner and every sin. That's the only way true righteousness could be ours.

Paul writes, **"I do this so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death."** Didn't Paul already know Jesus? Of course he did. Jesus is the one who stopped him in his tracks on the way to Damascus. Jesus had taught him the truth personally over many years. His point is that Jesus is the only thing he wanted to know.

Not only that but he didn't want his knowledge about Jesus to be just head knowledge. It wasn't just a matter of memorizing a fistful of passages. He wanted Jesus to transform every part of his life. He was willing to suffer for his Savior and he would. That didn't help pay for his sins at all. Jesus' sacrifice took care of that. But just like the world by and large rejected its Savior, it will reject God's people too.

Paul concludes his statement, **"in the hope that in some way I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead."** Some people read these words and say that Paul wasn't certain of whether or not he was going to go into heaven. Obviously they didn't actually read the rest of this letter. His point is that he doesn't know how he is going to die. Will he die as a martyr or of old age? Will he be a captive or a free man?

In the same way, none of us know when our last day is going to be. I'm trying to save up for retirement, but I don't know if I'm going to live that long. I had a high school classmate who wasn't feeling well so he took the day off work. He was found dead in his recliner. That was almost 20 years ago. I don't live in fear of that. Whatever way God is pleased to take me home to heaven will be great for me. I just want to live faithfully while I wait patiently for that day to come.

Be Confident in Christ. Christ brings everything so go forward in confidence.

But maybe my last day is somewhere off in the future. Maybe God has many decades of life left in store for us. Maybe Jesus' return is thousands of years in the future. Then what? We'll just keep doing what Paul did, **"Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me."**

"Christ Jesus also took hold of me." Are there more beautiful words than those? Coming to faith is easy. God did all of the work. Our heavenly Father has been planned our souls' salvation before day one of creation. Our brother, Jesus, did all the heavy lifting for us by living, dying, and rising again for us. The Holy

Spirit led us to our Savior through Holy Baptism and keeps us with our Savior through his Word and through Holy Communion which we will be receiving momentarily.

Living like a believer takes work on our part. That's what Paul was talking about when he said, "**I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me.**" The only way that we would be done growing as a Christian is if there would be no way to tell the difference between our lives and Jesus' life. Someone who claims he knows enough about the Bible just proves how little he really knows.

So what's the solution? Paul tells us to forget what is behind us. That's easier said than done. We need to leave the past in the past. The sins that we committed when we were younger don't need to keep weighing us down. Take them to the foot of the cross and leave them there. Know that every single one of them has been washed away in Jesus' blood. Then we can really move forward.

It also means that any of the good things that we did in the past we need to leave in the past too. Otherwise we are like the man who was a high school football star 30 years ago and thinks his letter jacket will still impress people. Just like we leave the bad things we did at the foot of the cross, we leave the good things there too. After all, everything we did, we did for him. Now we've got a new day to live for his glory.

Paul concludes, "¹³**Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**" He compares the life of a believer to a long-distance runner competing in a race.

One thing that you notice with Olympic-level runners is that they keep their eyes focused on the track in front of them. If they are looking around to where everyone else is, they're going to run slower. They can look once the race is over. There are times too when the finish line seems to be a long ways off. Their muscles are screaming in pain. Everything seems to be telling them, "You might as well quit. You're not going to make it."

A runner presses on in a situation like that because of his training. He knows his body like a finely-tuned machine. We press on because we know we are not running alone. Our Savior is right there with us. He is the one who provides us with the strength and determination to carry on. We look ahead to see the example of the many faithful believers who successfully ran that race before us. Unlike an Olympic race, the prize is already ours. We're racing to get what Christ already won for us.

Be Confident in Christ. We bring nothing, but Christ brings everything, so go forward in confidence. Sometimes businesses have a mission statement detailing their core values. They are sometimes so vague that they could apply to anything from farming to organized crime. A good mission statement for a believer is the same one that Paul spoke in the beginning of this book: "**Yes, for me to live is Christ.**" Everything I do, everything I think, everything I say is all about him.