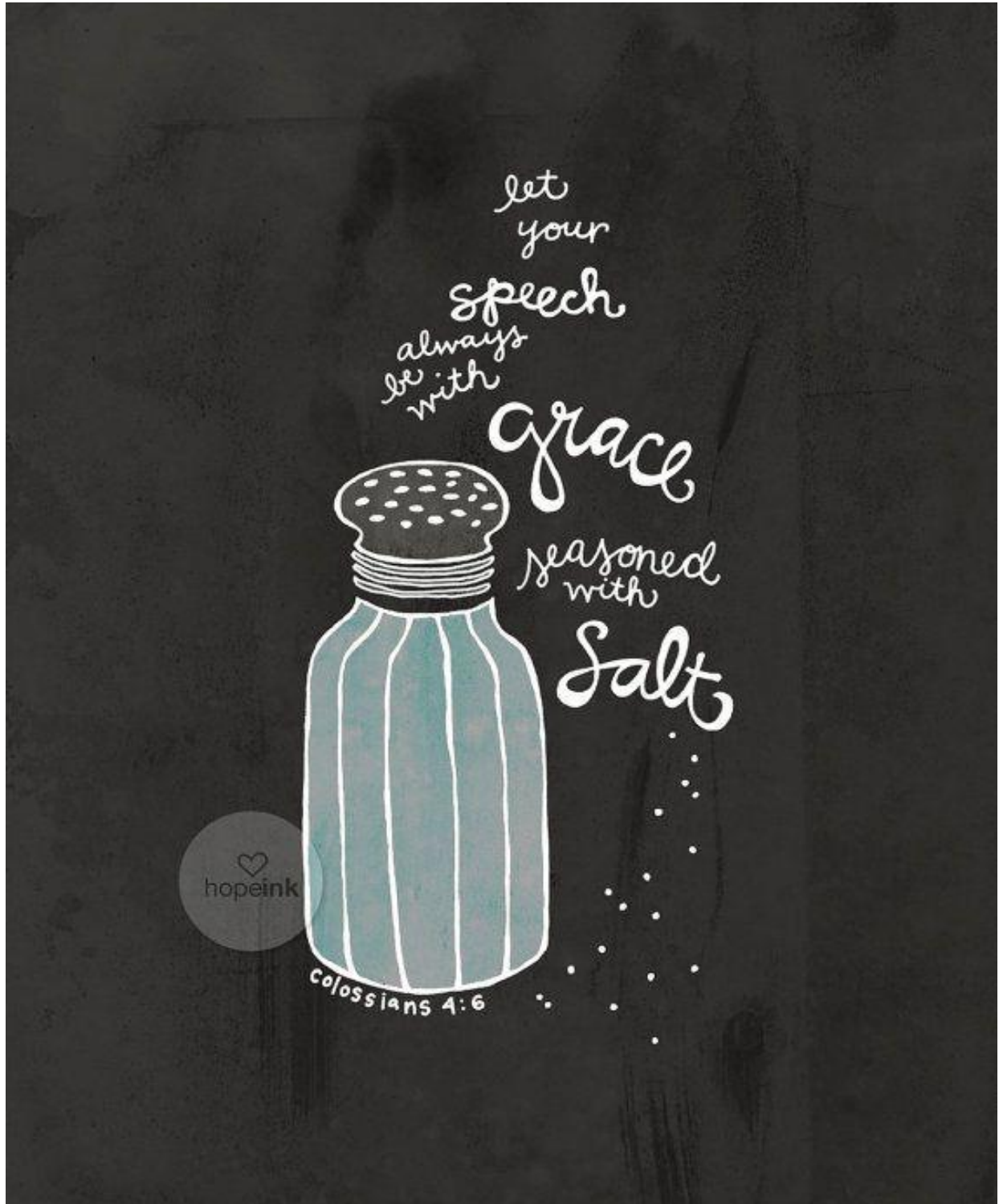
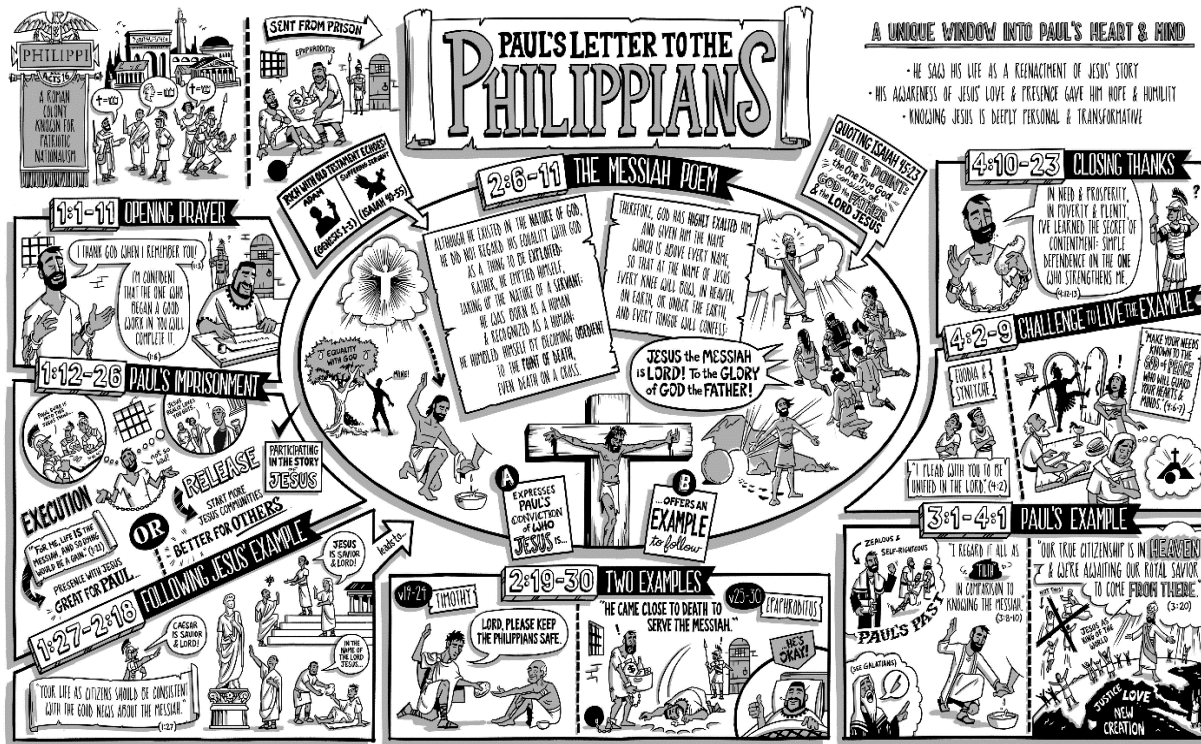


# The Raw Message Of Philippians 3

by David Lee Burris





created by the Bible Project

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

*1) Paul loves to lavish us with encouraging reality before and as the bases of any commands*

*is ought!*

Jesus humbled Himself 8  
to the will of the  
Father, 1Peter 5:6,  
Matt 26:39, Is 53:10

Jesus is now seated on  
the throne next to the  
Father, Rev 5:13,  
20:13-14, Is 45:23,  
Rom 14:11, Eph 1:20

Be committed to  
doing the Father's  
work in order to  
produce, in you, the  
fruit of righteousness  
which results in  
sanctification, Rom  
6:22

Phil 1:10- work to become  
blameless and faultless,  
not by our own works, but  
thru the work of the  
Father by the Holy Spirit  
we can work toward  
sanctification

service to others,  
regarding others more  
highly than yourself.  
Phil 2:3

7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a  
bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of  
men.  
8 Being found in appearance as a man, He  
humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the  
point of death, even death on a cross.  
9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him,  
and bestowed on Him the name which is above  
every name,  
10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL  
BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth  
and under the earth,  
11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus  
Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.  
12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always  
obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now  
much more in my absence, work out your  
salvation with fear and trembling;  
13 for it is God who is at work in you both to will  
and to work for His good pleasure. choose God and His plan  
14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing;  
15 so that you will prove yourselves to be  
blameless and innocent children of God above  
reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse  
generation, among whom you appear as lights  
in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day  
of Christ I will have reason to glory because I  
did not run in vain nor toil in vain.  
17 But even if I am being poured out as a drink  
offering upon the sacrifice and service of your  
faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.  
18 You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and  
share your joy with me. *Matt 5:12*  
*Timothy and Epaphroditus*  
19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy  
to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged  
when I learn of your condition.  
20 For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will  
genuinely be concerned for your welfare  
21 For they all seek after their own interests, not  
those of Christ Jesus.  
22 But you know of his proven worth, that he  
served with me in the furtherance of the gospel  
like a child serving his father.  
23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as  
soon as I see how things go with me;  
24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be  
coming shortly.  
25 But I thought it necessary to send to you  
Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker  
and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger  
and minister to my need;  
26 because he was longing for you all and was  
distressed because you had heard that he was  
sick.  
27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death,  
but God had mercy on him, and not on him  
only but also on me, so that I would not have  
sorrow upon sorrow.  
28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly  
so that when you see him again you may rejoice  
and I may be less concerned about you.

29 Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and  
hold men like him in high regard;  
30 because he came close to death for the work of  
Christ, risking his life to complete what was  
deficient in your service to me.

## Chapter 3

### The Goal of Life

1 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,  
4 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.  
7 But whatever things were gain to me, those  
things I have counted as loss for the sake of  
Christ.  
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,  
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,  
10 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  
12 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  
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.  
15 Let us therefore as many as are perfect have  
this attitude; and if in anything you have a  
different attitude, God will reveal that also to  
you;  
16 however, let us keep living by that same  
standard to which we have attained,  
17 Brethren, join in following my example and  
observe those who walk according to the  
pattern you have in us.

Rom 2:29, 9:6-8,  
Col 2:11

if anyone had  
reason to boast,  
it was Paul;  
educated by  
Gamaliel in  
Jerusalem and  
raised to be a  
Pharisee,  
Acts 22:3, 23:6,  
Rom 11:1, 2Cor  
11:22, Gal 1:14

called into  
fellowship with  
His Son, 1Cor  
1:9, 2Cor 13:14,  
Jn 17:3, 2Pet  
1:3

Becoming one  
with Jesus in  
His death and  
resurrection,  
Rom 6:4-5, 8:17-13  
2Cor 1:5, 4:7-11,  
1Pet 4:13, Eph  
1:19-20, 4:13,

the same power that  
raised Jesus from the  
dead dwells within  
me, Rom 8:11

Jesus made my  
spirit perfect thru  
justification, but I  
must press on and  
walk in the spirit,  
resulting in  
sanctification,  
keeping my goal  
and my hope on  
Jesus and the prize  
of the upward call  
of being His bride

CHAP. 3:1–21.—AGAINST JUDAIZERS—HE HAS GREATER CAUSE THAN THEY TO TRUST IN LEGAL RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT RENOUNCED IT FOR CHRIST’S, IN WHICH HE PRESSES AFTER PERFECTION—AGAINST CARNAL PERSONS—CONTRAST OF THE BELIEVER’S LIFE AND HOPE.

**1. Finally** [*to loipon*]—or (not time, but a transition to another general subject) “Furthermore” (*Bengel*), as in 1 Thess. 4:1; ‘as to what remains,’ &c. It often, at the conclusion of epistles, means “finally” (Eph. 6:10; 2 Thess. 3:1). But it is not restricted to this, as *Alford* thinks, supposing that Paul used it here intending to close his epistle, but was led by mention of Judaizers into a longer dissertation. **the same things**—concerning ‘rejoicing,’ the key-note of the epistle: the more remarkable from one writing from prison (ch. 1:18, 25; 2:17; 4:4, where cf. “again I say” with “the same things” here). “In the Lord” marks the true sphere of joy, in contrast with “confidence in the flesh,” carnal joy. **not grievous**—‘irksome.’ **for you it is safe.**

**2. Beware** [*blepete*]—‘Have your eye on’ so as to beware of. Contrast “mark,” viz., so as to follow (v. 17). **dogs** [*tous kunas*]—‘the dogs;’ viz., those *impure* persons “of whom I have told you often” (vv. 18, 19); “the abominable” (cf. Rev. 21:8 with 22:15; Matt. 7:6; 15:26, 27, heathenish in spirit; Titus 1:15, 16): “dogs” in filthiness and snarling (Deut. 23:18; Ps. 22:16, 20; 59:6, 14, 15; 2 Pet. 2:22). The Jews regarded the Gentiles as “dogs” (Matt. 15:26); but by their own unbelief they ceased to be the true Israel, and are become “dogs” (cf. Isa. 56:10, 11; 66:3). (the) **evil workers** (2 Cor. 11:13). Not simply ‘evil-doers,’ but men who ‘worked’ ostensibly for the Gospel, but really for evil (v. 19: cf. Rom. 16:18): [*tous kakous ergatas*] ‘the evil workmen; i. e., bad teachers’ (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). concision [*katatomēn*]. Paul digresses at this word. *Circumcision* [*peritome*] had now lost its spiritual significance, and was to those who rested on it at all for justification a senseless *mutilation*. **Christians have the true circumcision—viz., of the heart; legalists have only “concision”—i.e., the cutting off of the flesh.** To make “cuttings in the flesh” was prohibited (Lev. 21:5): it was a heathenish practice (1 Ki. 18:28): yet this, writes Paul indignantly, is what these *legalists* are virtually doing *in violation of the law*. **There is a gradation (*Birks*) in St. Paul’s language as to circumcision. In his first discourse (Acts 13:39) circumcision is not named, but included in “the law of Moses,” which cannot justify. Six or seven years later, in Gal. 3:3, where first it is named, its inefficiency is maintained against those Gentiles who, beginning in the spirit, thought to be perfected in the flesh. Later, in Rom. 2:28, 29, he goes further, and claims its substance for every believer, assigning the shadow only to the unbelieving Jew. In Col. 2:11; 3:11; also Eph. 2:11, still later, he expounds the true circumcision as the believer’s exclusive privilege. Last of all, here, the very *name* is denied to the legalist: a term of reproach is substituted—“concision.”** Once obligatory on all the covenant people, then reduced to a national distinction, it was more and more associated with the open hostility of the Jews, and the perverse teaching of false brethren. **3.** ‘We are the (real) circumcision’ (Rom. 2:25–29). **worship God in the Spirit.** So C, Vulgate. But X A B G read ‘worship by the Spirit of God.’ The Spirit is the influence whereby our religious *service* [*latreia*] is rendered (John 4:23, 24). Legal worship consisted in outward acts, restricted to certain times and places. Christian worship is *spiritual*, flowing from the in working Holy Spirit; not restricted to isolated acts, but embracing the whole life (Rom. 12:1). In the former worship, men trusted in something human, whether descent from the theocratic nation, or the righteousness of the law, or *mortification of “the flesh”* (Romans 1:9). **rejoice** (make our *boast*) **in Christ Jesus**—not in the law. **have no confidence in the flesh**—the outward and earthly, but in the Spirit.

4. 'Although I (emphatical) possess materials of confidence *even* in the flesh' (as well as in Christ); *lit.*, 'I *having*,' &c., but not using. **I more**—I have more 'whereof I might *have confidence* in the flesh.' 5. In three particulars he 'might have confidence in the flesh:'—(1.) His pure Jewish blood (2 Cor. 11:22); (2.) His legal preciseness and high status; (3.) His zeal for the law [*peritome octaemeros*]—'being in circumcision an eighth day person;' *i. e.*, not circumcised in later life as a proselyte, but on the eighth day after birth, as the law directed as to Jew-born infants: not after the thirteenth year, as an Ishmaelite. **of the tribe of Benjamin**—son of Rachel, not of the maid-servant: one of the two tribes that returned from Babylon (Ezra 4:1). **Hebrew of the Hebrews**—neither one or other parent Gentile. The "Hebrew," wherever he dwelt, retained the *language*. Thus Paul, though settled in Tarsus, a Greek city, calls himself a Hebrew. A 'Grecian,' or Hellenist, is the term used for a *Greek-speaking Jew* (*Trench*). **touching the law**—*i. e.*, as to legal status and strictness. **a Pharisee**—'of the strictest sect' (Acts 26:5). 6. **Concerning**—'*As touching* zeal' (cf. Acts 22:3; 26:9). Sad irony. Even in this mournful Judaist zeal, he can, if they will, set himself on a level with them (*Ellicott*) (Gal. 1:14). **blameless** [*genomenos amemplos*, 'one in whom nothing is wanting that can be desired: *amomos*, 'one in whom there is nothing to blame']—'*having become* blameless' as to *ceremonial* righteousness: having attained *in man's eyes* legal perfection. As to holiness *before God*, which is the inner spirit of the law, and which flows from "the righteousness of God by faith," he declares (vv. 12–14) that he has *not* attained perfection. 7. **gain** [*kerdē*]—'gains:' all possible advantages of outward status which he heretofore enjoyed. **I counted** [*hēgēmai*]—'I *have* counted for Christ's sake loss.' Not plural, as 'gains;' for he counts them all but one great "loss" (Matt. 16:26; Luke 9:25). 8. **Yea, doubtless** [*alla men oun* (A adds *ge kai*)]—'nay more.' Not only '*have* I counted' *those* things 'loss for Christ's sake, but, moreover, I *even* DO count ALL things but loss,' **for** (the sake of) **whom I have suffered the loss**. Not merely have I "*counted*" them "loss," but "have" actually 'lost them.' **all things** [*ta panta*]—'them all.' The Greek has the article, referring to the preceding "all things." **dung** [*skubala*, from *kusi balein*]—'refuse (**excrements, dregs**) cast to the dogs,' as the derivation expresses. **A "loss" is of something having value; but 'refuse' is thrown away as a nuisance.** **win**—"gain," as v. 7; 1 Tim. 6:6. A man cannot make other things his "gain," and also 'gain Christ.' He who loses all, and even himself, on account of Christ, gains Christ: Christ is His, and He is Christ's (Song 2:16; 6:3; Luke 9:23, 24; 1 Cor. 3:21, 23). Paul was transported from legal bondage into Christian freedom without gradual transition. Instantaneously opposition to Pharisaic Judaism took the place of opposition to the Gospel. God's providence fitly prepared him for overthrowing legal justification. 'The righteousness of faith,' in Paul's sense, is the righteousness of Christ appropriated by faith, as the objective ground of confidence, and also as a new subjective principle of life. It includes the essence of a new disposition, and so of sanctification, though the two ideas are distinct. It is not any arbitrary act, as if God treated as sinless a man persisting in sin, simply because he believes in Christ; but the objective on the part of God corresponds to the subjective on the part of man—viz., faith.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Brown, D., Fausset, A. R., & Jamieson, R. (n.d.). [A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Acts–Revelation](#) (Vol. VI, pp. 432–436). London; Glasgow: William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited.

# THE JOY OF HUMILITY

*PHILIPPIANS 3:1-6*

*Rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*

**All the things Paul accomplished (Philippians 3:5-6) were but stumbling blocks to his acceptance with God. We are reminded of the words of our Lord as recorded by Isaiah:**

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.  
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.” (55:8-9)*

The verses we are looking at in this section were the result of Paul’s deep love for his friends at Philippi, who were being asked to mix the grace of God with the works of the flesh. Sinister teachers of legalism had crept into the body, attempting to seduce the Philippians into adding circumcision to the plan of salvation. Paul warned against these intruders and then explained that their premise was unsound. For if anyone could be recommended to God by virtue of accomplishment, Paul argued that he would be that person! If Paul had failed to achieve acceptance with God through all his inherited and earned virtues, then, he reasoned, no one could climb up to God on his own merits.

## THE APOSTLE’S SERIOUS WARNING

The opening command sets the tone for the entire chapter—“rejoice in the Lord.” The Philippians were not to rejoice in who they were and what they had done. They were to rejoice in Jesus Christ and all that He had done. Paul acknowledged that he was repeating a warning he had already given them, but he said, “To write the same things to you is not tedious.” All the things Paul was about to say had been said before in this letter. He had already spoken of unity, of adversaries, of standing firm, of being in one spirit, and of holding forth God’s Word as a light to a dark generation. Yet he would repeat his admonitions because he loved these brethren in Philippi and cared about their spiritual safety.

**Paul's concern for the Philippians was no different than the uneasiness he expressed when he was bidding farewell to the Ephesian elders:**

*For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:29–31)*

**Paul was neither angry nor was he bitter, but he was bold and blunt. Earlier he had demonstrated a spirit of tolerance toward those who were preaching the gospel from wrong motives. But there was no tolerance here for the Judaizers who were telling the believers that they must become Jews before they could become Christians.**

**They were actually teaching that a man had to be circumcised after the manner of Moses or he could not be a part of God's family. We read of such an invasion of the gospel of grace in Acts 15:1. "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you're circumcised according to Mosaic custom, you cannot be saved.'"**

**This perversion of the gospel had Paul exercised in his spirit, and he used the term *beware* three times. He branded these false teachers as "dogs," "evil workers," and "mutilation." He was not making reference here to three different brands of false teachers but was describing the Judaizers in three different ways.**

## ***BEWARE OF THE DOGS***

**The term *dogs* in Philippians describes the false teachers who were bringing legalism into the gospel. They were like the false prophets of Isaiah's day:**

*His watchmen are blind, they are all ignorant; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yes, they are greedy dogs which never have enough. And they are shepherds who cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his own gain, from his own territory. (56:10–11)*

## ***BEWARE OF EVIL WORKERS***

The “evil workers” were those who wormed their way into the congregation and taught a form of teaching other than the gospel. They were aggressive in disseminating their works-salvation; They believed that their zeal in influencing others to follow them was a part of their being accepted by God. They were like the Pharisees who traveled anywhere to make just one convert (Matt. 23:15).

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul called these same intruders “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13). F. B. Meyer described the modern version of such teachers:

They are not set upon doing all the harm they can in the world, but are fanatical, unbalanced, and unable to distinguish between a part and the whole, magnifying some microscopical point in Christianity until it blinds the eye to the symmetry, proportion, and beauty of Heaven’s glorious scheme.

## ***BEWARE OF THE MUTILATION***

The word *mutilation* refers to the cutting of circumcision. When these false teachers were requiring the believers to be circumcised in order to be saved, they were mutilating the flesh of these brothers. The gospel of grace preached by Paul declared that salvation came through Jesus Christ and not through the works of the flesh. If, then, the gospel was complete in the realm of faith, anything that would be added to that would be as nothing with God. In other words, all the cutting involved for the rite of circumcision was nothing more than meaningless mutilation of the flesh.

Someone has observed that these teachers invited men to Christ with the Scriptures in one hand and a knife in the other. Paul condemned them in his letter to the Galatians:

*As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. (6:12–13) <sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah, D. (2016). [Count It All Joy: Discover a Happiness That Circumstances Cannot Change](#). Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.





**BEWARE**

of DOGS,  
of EVIL WORKERS,  
of THE MUTILATION

PHILIPPIANS 3:2

## **Paul, Puppies, and People with Tattoos**

We love the letter of Philippians for its uplifting, faith-affirming tone. Although Paul wrote it in prison, it resonates joy. Paul's circumstances didn't put him in a bad mood. But something else did. He writes:

*Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. (Phil 3:1–3)*

We have no trouble understanding Paul when he says, “Look out for the evildoers.” But dogs? People who mutilate the flesh? Did Paul hate puppies and people with tattoos? Not exactly. Like any statement in the Bible, this one requires context to help us get inside the writer's head.

### **Dogs in the Ancient World**

In the ancient world (except in the Egyptian and Phoenician cultures), dogs were routinely despised. Their instinctive, base behavior—such as eating dead, decayed flesh or consuming their own vomit—disgusted ancient people (Exodus 22:31; 1 Kings 14:11; Proverbs 26:11). The appropriate insult to heap on someone you considered worthless was “dead dog” (2 Sam 16:9).

Paul, with his thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, would have been acquainted with the use of the term in the Bible and in his culture. The label makes sense here since Paul follows it by warning “look out for the evildoers.” Paul didn't hate puppies. He hated evil.

### **Mutilators of the Flesh**

But what about “those who mutilate the flesh”? What sense can we make of that? As odd as it sounds, this phrase is one of the keys to understanding just who Paul is referring to in Philippians 3.

The phrase literally reads “look out for the mutilation.” The Greek word behind “mutilation” is the noun *katatomē*. Paul likely chose it deliberately because it sounds a bit like another Greek word—*peritomē*, which means “circumcision.” Right after Paul warns the Philippians to “look out for the mutilation,” he adds explanation: “For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). Paul was using a satirical play on words to make his point.

Paul was not objecting to circumcision itself. He never characterizes circumcision as something to be abhorred (Romans 3:1–2; 1st Corinthians 7:18). Paul was objecting to those who taught that circumcision was essential for salvation—for inclusion in the community of believers.

The idea that any ritual could merit salvation was incompatible with salvation by grace through [obedient] faith. Gentiles who believed according to the [obedient] faith of Abraham were “blessed along with Abraham” (Gal 3:9), because “in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal 3:26). Whether Jew or Gentile, those who believe [and obey] are the *spiritual* children of Abraham; they are heirs to the promises God made to him (Gal 3:29). His opponents’ perversion of the gospel infuriated Paul. Using the term “mutilation” was his sarcastic way of showing contempt for the false teaching.

**Paul’s derogatory terms for his opponents were not cast out lightly. They were born out of a deep concern for the gospel message: we cannot merit salvation, nor can we earn grace. Salvation comes through faith in the grace God showed us through Jesus’ work on the cross!<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> Heiser, M. S. (2017). [The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms](#) (pp. 191–193). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

*But what things were gain to me, those  
I counted loss for Christ. Yea  
doubtless, and I count all things but  
loss for the excellency of the  
knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:  
for whom I have suffered the loss of  
all things, and do count them but  
dung, that I may win Christ.*

*-Philippians 3:7-8*

## WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE!

One of the most frequently repeated maxims about translation, including Bible translation, is that “every translator is a traitor.” The point of this saying is not that translations are unreliable—it’s that they aren’t perfect. Every translation loses something of the original meaning. In most cases this is inadvertent, but sometimes it’s deliberate, as in Philippians 3:8:

*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.*

The verse might sound straightforward, but the translator has softened what was likely its intended force. The Greek word translated “rubbish” is *skybalon*, while the term appears only here in the New Testament, it’s found in the classical Greek literature as a word for human excrement.

### Why So Crass?

Paul also uses rough—even crude—language elsewhere in his writings. For example, in Galatians, Paul’s primary opponents are Jews (or Jewish Christians) insisting that Gentile converts practice certain parts of the Mosaic law to ensure their inclusion in the people of God. One such element was circumcision. Paul gets so exasperated that at one point he wishes the people insisting on circumcision would just castrate themselves (Galatians 5:11–12). And Paul is not the first or only biblical writer to use such strong language.

### The Precedent for Euphemism

It would be misguided to view the translators’ choice of “rubbish” over “excrement” in Philippians 3:8 as dishonest. While it’s true that the term is in the text, the translator shows sensitivity to propriety and the expectations of “polite society.” In seeking to soften offensive language, the translator follows the lead of the biblical writers themselves.

**The Old Testament writers were especially adept at using euphemisms in place of scatological language—terms associated with certain bodily functions and their corresponding body parts. For example, Zechariah 3:3–4 speaks of the high priest’s garments as being “filthy” (*tsō’*). The Hebrew word is literally “what goes out,” a euphemistic reference to excrement. Thus, Zechariah depicts Joshua the high priest as one who has soiled himself and now stands before God. The imagery is repulsive—but that’s the point: Sin is repulsive! Modern translators have to decide whether to use biblical euphemisms or opt for new substitutions.**

## **Paul’s Point**

To understand why Paul used coarse language in Philippians 3:8, we need to look at what he was calling “rubbish.” In Philippians 3:4–7, Paul lists all the things that he had presumed made him acceptable to God: his circumcision, his zeal for the Mosaic law, his previous status as a Pharisee, and his efforts to snuff out Christianity. He now considers all of these things as excrement—something not only viscerally offensive, but ceremonially unclean for sacred space in the old tabernacle and temple (Deut 23:12–14; Ezek 4:12–13). Paul couldn’t have chosen a more vivid way of communicating his point that, next to Christ’s work on the cross, none of those things mattered to God.

## **Shock and Awe with a Purpose**

**The Bible is not a prudish book. Paul at times resorted to earthy language to jolt his audience to attention and to punctuate the seriousness of his teaching. Isaiah and Ezekiel did the same thing. Yet Scripture also demonstrates that thoughtless, flippant crudity is no virtue (Ephesians 5:4; Phil 4:8). The Bible provides a model of transparency without indecency that’s worth imitating.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Heiser, M. S. (2017). [\*The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms\*](#) (pp. 194–196). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-2

*As far as the rest is concerned... —  
climax Attention raised*

Finally (Τὸ λοιπόν), my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. <sup>2</sup>Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

PHILIPPIANS 3:11-14

that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the sharing of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I pursue if I may also make it my own (κατάλαβω), because Christ Jesus has made me his own (κατελήμφθην). <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own [κατειληφέναι]. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

## CHAPTER 3

### ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter consists in the main, of exhortations to holy living, and to an effort to make great attainments in the divine life. It is full of tenderness and affection, and is one of the most beautiful appeals which can be found to induce Christians to devote themselves to the service of the Redeemer. The appeal is drawn in great measure from the apostle's statement of his feelings, and which the Philippians could feel, for they knew him well.

2. *Beware of dogs.* Dogs in the east are mostly without masters; they wander at large in the streets and fields, and feed upon offals, and even upon corpses; comp. 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:19. They are held as unclean, and to call one *a dog* is a much stronger expression of contempt there than with us; 1 Sam. 17:43; 2 Kings 8:13. The Jews called the heathen *dogs*, and the Mohammedans call Jews and Christians by the same name. The term *dog* also is used to denote a person that's shameless, impudent, malignant, snarling, dissatisfied, and contentious, and is evidently so employed here. It is possible that the *language* used here may have been derived from some custom of affixing a caution, on a house that was guarded by a dog, to persons approaching it. Lenfant remarks that at Rome it was common for a dog to lie chained before the door of a house, and that a notice was placed in sight, "Beware of the dog." The same notice I have seen in this city affixed to the kennel of dogs in front of a bank, that were appointed to guard it. The reference here is, without a doubt, to Judaizing teachers, and the idea is, that they were contentious, troublesome, dissatisfied, and would produce disturbance. The strong language which the apostle uses here, shows the sense which he had of the danger arising from their influence. It may be observed, however, that the term *dogs* is used in ancient writings with great frequency, and even by the most grave speakers. It is employed by the most dignified characters in the Iliad, and the name was given to a whole class of the Greek philosophers—the *Cynics*. It is used in one instance by the Savior; Matthew 7:6. By the use of the term here, there can be no doubt that the apostle meant to express strong disapprobation of the character and course of the persons referred to, and to warn the Philippians in the most solemn manner against them.



***Beware of evil workers.*** Referring, doubtless, to the same persons that he had characterized as *dogs*. The reference is to Jewish teachers, whose doctrines and influence he regarded only as evil. We do not know what was the nature of their teaching, but we may presume that it consisted much in urging the obligations of the Jewish rites and ceremonies; in speaking of the advantage of having been born Jews; and in urging a compliance with the law in order to justification before God. In this way their teachings tended to set aside the great doctrine of salvation by the merits of the Redeemer.

***Beware of the concision.*** Referring, doubtless, also to the Jewish teachers. The word rendered *concision*—κατατομή—means properly a *cutting off, a mutilation*. It is used here contemptuously for the Jewish circumcision, in contrast with the true circumcision. It is not to be understood that the Apostle meant to throw contempt on circumcision, and as practised by the pious Jews of other times (comp. Acts 16:3), but only as it was held by the false Judaizing teachers. As they held it, it was not the true circumcision. They made salvation to depend on it. Such a doctrine, as they held it, was a mere *cutting off of the flesh*, without understanding anything of its true nature. Perhaps, also, there may be included the idea that a doctrine so held would be in fact a cutting off of the soul; that is, it tended to destruction. Their cutting and mangling the flesh might be regarded as an emblem of the manner in which their doctrine would cut and mangle the church. The meaning of the whole is, that they did not understand the true nature of the doctrine of circumcision, but that [now] it was a mere cutting of the flesh, [but that] tended to destroy the church.

***3. For we are the circumcision.*** We who are Christians. We have and hold the true doctrine of circumcision. We have that which was intended to be secured by this rite—for we are led to renounce the flesh, and to worship God in the spirit. The apostle in this verse teaches that the ordinance of circumcision was not designed to be a mere *outward* ceremony, but was intended to be emblematic of the renunciation of the flesh with its corrupt propensities, and to lead to the pure and spiritual worship of God. In this, he has undoubtedly stated its true design. They who now urged it as necessary to salvation, and who made salvation depend on its outward observance, had lost sight of this object of the rite. But this, the real design of circumcision, was attained by those who had been led to renounce the flesh, and who had devoted themselves to the worship of God; see Notes on Romans 2:28, 29. . .

***7. But what things were gain to me.*** The advantages of birth, of education, and of external conformity to the law. “I thought these to be gain—that is, to be of vast advantage in the matter of salvation. I valued myself on these things, and supposed that I was *rich* in all that pertained to moral character and to religion.”

Perhaps, also, he refers to these things as laying the foundation of a hope of future advancement in honor and in wealth in this world. They commended him to the rulers of the nation; they opened before him a brilliant prospect of distinction; they made it certain that he could rise to posts of honor and of office, and could easily gratify all the aspirings of his ambition.

*Those I counted loss.* “I now regard them all as so much loss. They were really a disadvantage—a hindrance—even an injury. I look upon them, not as gain or an advantage, but as an obstacle to my salvation.” He had relied on them. He had been led by these things to an improper estimate of his own character, and he had been thus hindered from embracing the true religion. Paul says, therefore, that he now renounced all dependence on them; that he esteemed them not as contributing to his salvation, but, so far as *any* reliance should be placed on them, as so much loss.

*For Christ.* Gr., “On account of Christ.” That is, so far as Christ and his religion were concerned, they were to be regarded as worthless. In order to obtain salvation by him, it was necessary to renounce all dependence on these things.

8. *Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss.* Not only those things which he had just specified, and which he had himself possessed, he says he would be willing to renounce in order to obtain an interest in the Savior, but *everything* which could be imagined. Were all the wealth and honor which could be conceived of his, he would be willing to renounce them in order that he might then obtain the knowledge of the Redeemer. He would be a gainer who should sacrifice all in order to win Christ. Paul had not only acted on this principle when he had become a Christian, but had ever afterwards continued to be ready to give up everything in order that he might obtain an interest in the Savior. He uses here the same word—ζημίαν—which he does in the Acts of the Apostles, chap. 27:21, when speaking of the *loss* which had been sustained by loosing from Crete, contrary to his advice, on the voyage to Rome. The idea here seems to be, “What I might obtain, or did possess, I regard as loss in comparison with the knowledge of Christ, even as seamen do the goods on which they set a high value, in comparison with their lives. Valuable as they may be, they’re willing to throw them all overboard in order to save themselves.” *Burder*, in Ros. Alt. u. neu. Morgenland.

*For the excellency of the knowledge.* A Hebrew expression to denote *excellent knowledge*. The idea is, that he held everything else to be worthless in comparison with that knowledge, and he was willing to sacrifice everything else in order to obtain it. On the value of this knowledge of the Savior, see Notes on Ephesians 3:19.

***For whom I have suffered the loss of all things.*** Paul, when he became a Christian, gave up his brilliant prospects in regard to this life, and everything indeed on which his heart had been placed. He abandoned hope of honor and distinction; he sacrificed every prospect of gain or ease; and he gave up his dearest friends and he separated himself from those whom he tenderly loved. He might have risen to the highest posts of honor in his native land, and the path which an ambitious young man desires was fully open before him. But all this had been sacrificed in order that he might obtain an interest in the Savior, and partake of the blessings of his religion. Paul has not, indeed, informed us of the exact extent of his loss in becoming a Christian. It is by no means improbable that he had been excommunicated by the Jews; and that he had been disowned by his own family.

***And do count them but dung.*** The word here used—σκύβαλον—occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means, properly, *dregs; refuse; what is thrown away as worthless; chaff; offal, or the refuse of a meal table or of slaughtered animals, and then filth of any kind.* No language could express a more deep sense of the utter worthlessness of all that external advantages can confer in the matter of salvation. In the question of justification before God, all reliance on birth, and blood, and *external* morality, and forms of religion, and prayers, and alms, is to be renounced, and, in comparison with the merits of the great Redeemer, to be esteemed as vile. Such were Paul's views, and we may remark that if this was so in his case, it should be in ours. Such things, can no more avail for our salvation than they could for his. We can no more be justified by them than he could. Nor will they do anything more in our case to commend us to God than they did in his. . .

**12. *Not as though I had already attained.*** This verse and the two following are full of allusions to the Grecian races. "The word rendered 'attained' signifies, one to have arrived at the goal and won the prize, but without having as yet received it." *Pict. Bib.* The meaning here is, I do not pretend to have attained to what I wish or hope to be. He had indeed been converted; he had been raised up from the death of sin; he had been imbued with spiritual life and peace; but there was a glorious object before him which he had not yet received. There was a kind of resurrection not yet arrived at. It is possible that Paul here may have had his eye on an error which prevailed to some extent in the early church, that "the resurrection was already past" (2 Tim. 2:18), by which the faith of some had been perverted. How far this error had spread, or on what it was founded, is not known; but it is possible that it might have extensive advocacy.

Paul says that he entertained no such opinion. He looked forward to a resurrection which had not yet occurred. He anticipated it as a glorious event yet to come, and he purposed to secure it by every effort which he could make.

*Either were already perfect.* This is a distinct assertion of the apostle Paul that he did not regard himself as a perfect man. He had not reached that state where he was free from sin. It is not indeed a declaration that no one was perfect, but that he did not regard himself as having attained to it. Yet who can urge better claims to having attained perfection than Paul could have done? Who has surpassed him in love, and zeal, and self-denial, and true devotedness to the service of the Redeemer? Who has more elevated views of God, and of the plan of salvation? Who prays more, or lives nearer to God than he did? That must be extraordinary piety which surpasses that of the apostle Paul; and he who lays claim to a degree of holiness which even Paul did not pretend to, gives little evidence that he has any true knowledge of himself, or has ever been imbued with the true humility which only the gospel produces. It should be observed, however, that many critics suppose the word here used—τελειόω—not to refer to *moral* or *Christian* perfection, but to be an allusion to the *games* that were celebrated in Greece, and to mean that he had not completed his course and arrived at the goal, so as to receive the prize. According to this, the sense would be, that he had not yet received the crown which he aspired after as the result of his efforts in this life. It is of importance to understand precisely what he meant by the declaration here; and, in order to this, it will be proper to look at the meaning of the same word elsewhere in the New Testament. The word properly means, to *complete*, to *make perfect*, so as to be full, or so that nothing shall be wanting. In the New Testament it's used in the following places, and is translated in the following manner: It is rendered *fulfilled* in Luke 2:23; John 19:28: *perfect*, and *perfected*, in Luke 13:32; John 17:23; 2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 3:12; Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:19; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23; James 2:22; 1st John 2:5; 4:12, 17, 18; *finish*, and *finished*, John 5:36; Acts 20:24: and *consecrated*, Hebrews 7:28. In one case (Acts 20:24), it is applied to a *race* or *course* that is run — “That I might finish my course with joy;” but this is the only instance, unless it be in the case before us. The proper sense of the word is that of *bringing to an end*, or rendering complete, so that nothing shall be wanting. The idea of Paul evidently is, that he had not yet attained that which would be the *completion* of his hopes. There was something which he was striving after, which he hadn't obtained, and which was needful to render him perfect, or complete. He *lacked* now what had hoped yet to attain; and that which he lacked may refer to all those things which were wanting in his character and condition then, which he expected to secure in the resurrection. What he would then obtain, would be—perfect freedom from sin, deliverance from trials and temptations, victory over the grave, and the possession of immortal life.

As those things were needful in order to the completion of his happiness, we may suppose that he referred to them now, when he says that he was not yet “perfect.” This word, therefore, while it will embrace an allusion to moral character, need not be understood of that only, but may include all those things which were necessary to be observed in order to his complete felicity. Though there may be, therefore, an allusion in the passage to the Grecian foot-races, yet still it would teach that he did not regard himself as in any sense perfect. In all respects, there were things wanting to render his character and condition complete, or what he desired they ultimately might be. The same is true of all Christians now. We are imperfect in our moral and religious character, in our joys, in our condition. Our state here is far different from that which will exist in heaven; and no Christian can say, any more than Paul could, that he has obtained that which is requisite to the *completion* or *perfection* of his character and condition. He looks for something brighter and purer in the world beyond the grave. Though, therefore, there may be—as I think the connection and phraseology seem to demand—a reference to the Grecian games, yet the sense of the passage isn’t materially varied. It was still a struggle for the crown of perfection—a crown which the apostle says he had not yet obtained.

*But I follow after.* I pursue the object, striving to obtain it. The prize was seen in the distance, and he diligently sought to obtain it. There is a reference here to the Grecian races, and the meaning is, “I steadily pursue my course.”

*If that I may apprehend.* If I may obtain, or reach, the heavenly prize. There was a glorious object in view, and he made the most strenuous exertions to obtain it. The idea in the word “apprehend” is that of the taking hold of, or the seizing suddenly of and with eagerness; and, since there is no doubt of its being used in an allusion to the Grecian foot-races, it is not improbable that there is a reference to the laying hold of the pole or post which marked the goal, by the racer who had outstripped the other competitors, and who, by that act, might claim the victory and the reward.

*That for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.* By Christ Jesus. The idea is, that he had been called into the service of the Lord Jesus, *with a view* to the obtaining of an important object. He recognized (1.) *the fact* that the Lord Jesus had, as it were, *laid hold* on him, or seized him with eagerness or suddenness, for so the word used here—κατελήφθην—means (comp. Mark 9:18; John 8:3, 4; 12:35; 1 Thess. 5:4; and (2.) the fact that the Lord Jesus had laid hold on him, *with a view* to his obtaining the prize. He had done it in order that he might obtain the crown of life, that he might serve him faithfully here, and then be rewarded in heaven.

We may learn, from this, (1.) That Christians are seized, or laid hold on, when they are converted, by the power of Christ, to be employed in his service. (2.) That there is an object or purpose which he has in view. He designs that they shall obtain a glorious prize, and he “apprehends” them with reference to its attainment. (3.) That the fact that Christ has called us into his service with reference to such an object, and designs to bestow the crown upon us, need not and should not dampen our exertions, and/or diminish our zeal. It should rather, as in the case of Paul, excite our ardor, and urge us forward. We should seek diligently to gain that, for the securing of which, Christ has called us into his service.

The fact that he has thus arrested us in our mad career of sin; that he has by his grace constrained us to enter into his service, and that he contemplates bestowment upon us of the immortal crown, should be the highest motive for effort. The true Christian, then, who feels that heaven is to be his home, and who believes that Christ means to bestow it upon him, will make the most strenuous efforts to obtain it. The prize is so beautiful and glorious, that he will exert every power of body and soul that it may be his. The belief, therefore, that God *means* to save us, is one of the highest incentives to effort in the cause of religion.

13. *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.* That is, to have obtained that for which I have been called into the service of the Redeemer. There is something which I strive after which I have not yet gained. This statement is a confirmation of the opinion that in the previous verse, where he says that he was not “already perfect,” he includes a moral perfection, and not merely the obtainment of the prize or reward; for no one could suppose that he meant to be understood as saying that he had obtained the crown of glory.

This *one thing* I do. Paul had one great aim and purpose of life. He didn’t attempt to mingle the world and religion, and to gain both. He did not seek to obtain wealth and salvation too; or honor here and the crown of glory hereafter, but he had one object, one aim, one great purpose of soul. To this singleness of purpose he owed his extraordinary attainments in piety, and his uncommon success as a minister. A man will accomplish little who allows his mind to be distracted by a multiplicity of objects. A Christian will accomplish nothing who has not a single great aim and purpose of soul. That purpose should be to secure the prize, and to renounce everything that would be in the way to its attainment. Let us then so live that we may be able to say, that there is one great object which we always have in view, and that we mean to avoid everything which would interfere with that.

***Forgetting those things which are behind.*** There is an allusion here undoubtedly to the Grecian races. One running to secure the prize would not stop to look behind him to see how much ground he had run over, or who of his competitors had fallen or lingered in the way. He would keep his eye steadily on the prize, and strain every nerve that he might obtain it. If his attention was diverted for a moment from that, it would hinder his flight, and might be the means of his losing the crown.

So, the apostle says it was with him. He looked *onward* to the prize. He fixed the eye intently on that. It was the single object in his view, and he didn't allow his mind to be diverted from that *by anything*— not even by the contemplation of the past. He did not stop to think of the difficulties which he had overcome, or the troubles which he had met, but he thought exclusively of what was yet to be accomplished. This doesn't mean that he wouldn't have regarded a proper contemplation of the past life as useful and profitable, but that he would not allow any reference to the past to interfere with the one great effort to win the prize.

It may be, and is, profitable for a Christian to look over the past mercies of God to his soul, in order to awaken gratitude in the heart, and to think of his shortcomings and old errors, as to produce penitence and humility. But none of these things should be allowed to divert the mind from its purpose to win the incorruptible crown.

It may be remarked in general, that a Christian will make more rapid advances in piety by looking *forward* than from looking *back*. Forward we see everything to cheer and animate us — the crown of victory, the joys of heaven, the society of the blessed — the Savior beckoning to us and encouraging us. Backward, we see everything to dishearten. Our own unfaithfulness; our coldness, deadness, and dullness; the little zeal which we often have, all are fitted to humble and discourage. He is the most cheerful Christian who looks *onward*, and who keeps heaven always in view; he who is accustomed much to dwell on the past, though he may be a true Christian, will be likely to be melancholy and dispirited, to be a recluse rather than a warm-hearted active friend of the Savior.

Or if he looks backward to contemplate what he's done — the space that he has run over—the difficulties he has surmounted— and his own rapidity in the race, he will be likely to become self-complacent and self-satisfied. He will trust in his past endeavors, and feel that the prize is now secure, and will relax his future efforts. Let us then look onward. Let us not spend our time either in pondering the gloomy past, and our own unfaithfulness, or in thinking of what we have done, and thus becoming puffed up with self-complacency; but let us keep the eye steadily on the prize, and run the race as though we had just commenced it.

***And reaching forth. As one does in a race.***

***Unto those things which are before.*** Before the racer there was a crown or garland to be bestowed by the judges of the games. Before the Christian there is the crown of glory, the eternal reward of heaven. There is the favor of God, victory over sin and death, the society of the redeemed and angelic beings, and assurance of perfect and eternal freedom from all evil. These are enough to animate the soul, and to urge it on with an ever-increasing vigor in the Christian race.

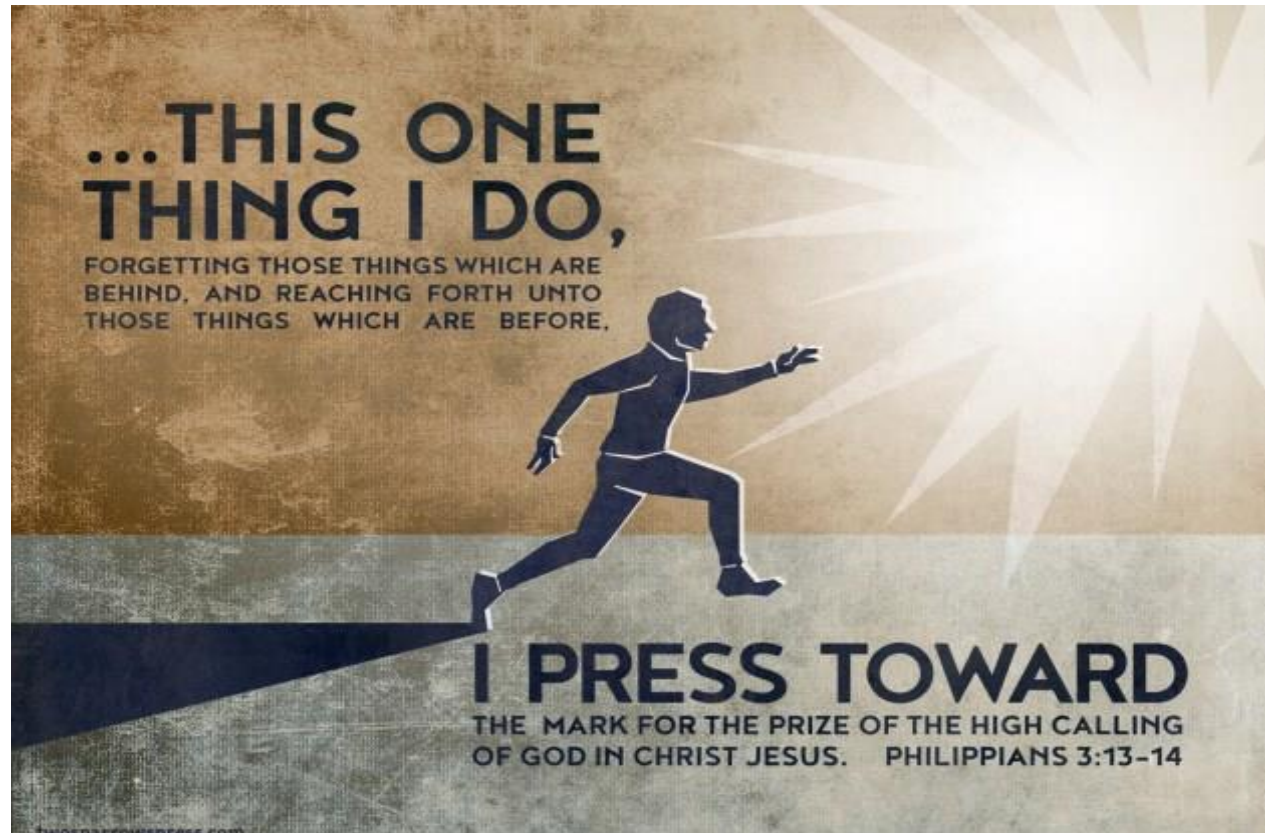
**14. *I press toward the mark.*** As he who was running a race did. The “*mark*” means the object set at a distance at which one looks or aims, and hence the *goal*, or *post* which was set up at the end of a race-course, and which was to be reached in order that the prize might be won. Here it means that which is at the end of the Christian race—in heaven.

***For the prize. The prize of the racer was a crown or garland of olive, laurel, pine, or apple; see Notes on 1 Cor. 9:24. The prize of the Christian is the crown that is incorruptible in heaven.***<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Barnes, A. (1884–1885). [Notes on the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians](#). (R. Frew, Ed.) (pp. 189–211). London: Blackie & Son.

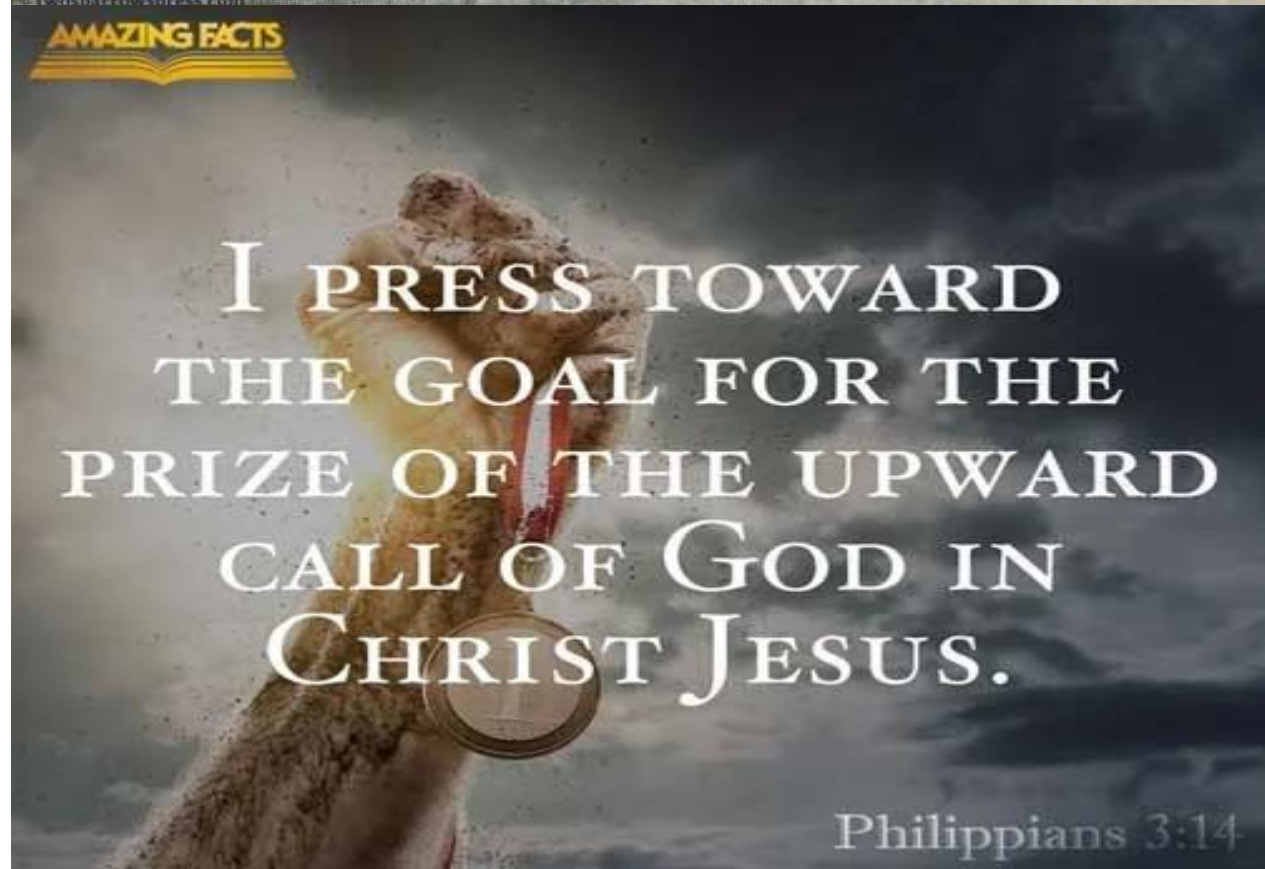




**...THIS ONE  
THING I DO,**  
FORGETTING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE  
BEHIND, AND REACHING FORTH UNTO  
THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEFORE.

**I PRESS TOWARD**  
THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE OF THE HIGH CALLING  
OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14

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**AMAZING FACTS**

**I PRESS TOWARD  
THE GOAL FOR THE  
PRIZE OF THE UPWARD  
CALL OF GOD IN  
CHRIST JESUS.**

Philippians 3:14

# OBSTACLES & HAZARDS OF YOUR ROUTINE RUN!

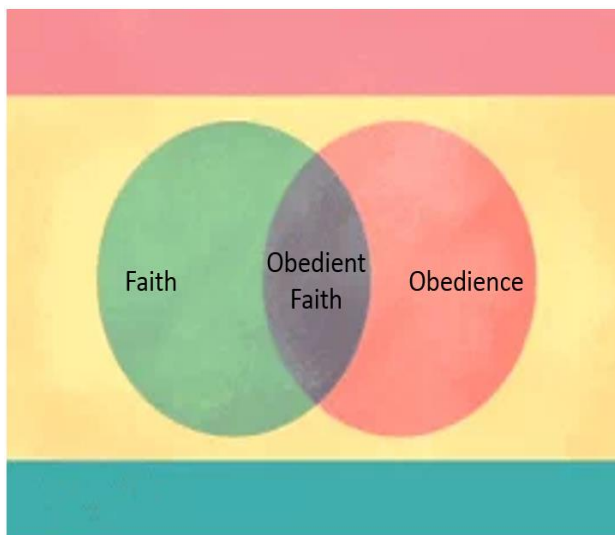


**Stepping in Poop**  
A Christian life metaphor

## AT THE NEXUS OF GRACE & GLORY

# Five Steps For Saving:

- HEARING:
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- BELIEVING:
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- REPENTING:
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- CONFESSING:
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- BAPTISM:
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 – 38



*O That Will Be Glory*

2. *Wh* O that will be glory for me, e grace,

*I an* Glory for me, glory for me; ce,

*When by His grace I shall look on His face, e*

*That will be glory, be glory for me. me.*

