

# Philippians

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish

June 24, 2020



## Philippians 3:1-14

### Vs. 1

- Here we are at only the half-way point in Paul's message to the Philippians and he says, "Finally, my brethren" as if he's wrapping up, giving evidence that he may indeed have been a Baptist! Further proof is that he has two important things to say to them in this first verse.
- First, if the primary quality of a Christian is love, then close behind love is joy. For so long Christian piety was defined by wearing black as if you were always on your way to a funeral, walking around with a sour look on your face, and lying awake at night worrying that someone somewhere was having a good time. Yet throughout the New Testament the theme most intertwined with love is JOY! "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!" Not in your circumstances, because circumstances can change, while joy in the Lord remains constant. In John's account of the Last Supper, Jesus tells the disciples in 16:22 that no one can take your joy from you. Why not? Because our joy is in the Lord: not in money, not in family, not in beauty, not in celebrations – all of that is changeable, but God is with you ALWAYS. In whatever circumstance the Christian may be in, joy is always with him.
- Second, Paul lays down the value of repetition. Any good teacher understands this. I have many books I have read through more than once. Repetition is required to teach a child math or language or music. So often people will say, "it wasn't anything I hadn't heard before, but it's always good to be reminded".

## Vss 2-3

- Here Paul returns to things he has said to the Philippians perhaps many times before. To his mind this is like lifesaving drills on a ship – you can never practice enough.
- Dogs, evil workers, and the false circumcision/the party of mutilation all refer to the same people: the people who demand that to be Christian one must first be Jewish. Dogs in the first century were not the family fur babies we think of today. Every city, town, or village was troubled by packs of feral dogs who were always threatening. Here in fact, the Jewish teachers would travel in groups (Acts 19:14), like packs of dogs. The irony is that Jewish teachers, rabbis, as they taught, would refer to Gentiles as dogs. Their students understood any reference to dogs was a reference to Gentiles. Paul turns it all around on them: Gentiles are not dogs, you are! You are not the people of the true circumcision, WE ARE, for our worship is in the Spirit of God and our glory, our confidence, is in Christ Jesus, not in the simple mutilation of the flesh. A good Baptist would point out here that it's just like infant baptism, something that is done *TO* the baby by others, whereas Scripture teaches that salvation comes to a person by grace through their faith in Christ Jesus.

## Vss 4-7

- Throughout his work, Paul repeatedly preached that it was a person's heart that was key, not what they showed on the outside. He offers his own life as proof. If what is on the outside matters the most, then before he met Christ his life should have been ideal, but like the Rich Young Ruler of Matthew 19 and Mark 10, he knew something vital was missing. He was circumcised when he was 8 days old, showing what a good, God-fearing Jewish family he had. He stresses that he was of the nation of Israel, implying he traced his lineage back to Jacob making Paul part of one Israel's first families. Moreover, he was of the tribe of Benjamin, the elite of the elite. Put all that together and he is a Hebrew of Hebrews. When Mark Twain made his famous trip to Europe, he made a similar claim when he

was introduced to a lady who had never heard of him and said, “Oh, you’re an American” to which Twain replied, “No ma’am, I am THE American.”

- But proper lineage wasn’t enough to claim superiority from outer appearance. In regard to the Jewish Law, he reminds his readers that he was a Pharisee. There were never more than a few Pharisees, 6000 at most, because the process was so rigorous. You might say they were Special Forces of the Jewish religion. The name Pharisee means “Separated Ones”. They literally separated themselves from common life in order to devote themselves to keeping the tiniest piece of the Law.
- Throughout the Old Testament, one of the defining qualities of a good Jew was zeal. In Numbers 25, Phinehas saves his people due to his great zeal for God. So, Paul too wants to point to his zeal, how he volunteered to viciously persecute the church. He practiced his Jewish faith with intense fanaticism.
- Thus, he was blameless as a Jew, perfect as a Jew. He had reached the very height of Jewish perfection. When these Jewish “evil workers” come to town teaching a false gospel, Paul has way more Hebrew credibility than they do. And what’s it worth to him? Absolutely nothing. When he met Christ everything changed. It was like being a livery worker when the automobile came along. How good you worked with horses in New York City wasn’t going to matter anymore. When Paul met Jesus it didn’t matter what faith had meant before. All that mattered was Christ.

#### Vss 8-11

- When Paul begins by saying “More than that” there is meant the idea of lengthy consideration. As he looks back over his life, everything he valued, everything he strove for as a young man he now considers less than nothing, just garbage to be thrown away when compared to “the surpassing value” of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord.
- It seems what Paul is saying here is that all his life he’s been trying to get right with God. That sense that somehow all he had done so far wasn’t enough. There was still an empty place. There was still a hunger. The word

he uses to describe that hunger is righteousness. All the work to keep the most tedious piece of the law still left him empty. He tried building up his own righteousness but in the end, it was nothing more than *skubala*, excrement, dung, the stuff that's thrown out to the feral dogs in the street. And then he found Jesus, or rather, Jesus found him. Now he knows what real righteousness is – being in right relationship with God through faith in Christ. Going forward, he wants to take his own advice and work out his salvation with fear and trembling, so that Paul may **KNOW** Jesus personally and know the power of Christ's resurrection and join the Lord in His sufferings, a koinonia of suffering, so that he may be conformed to Christ's death, gladly laying down his life as God wills, and joining Christ in the resurrection from the dead, eternally alive with Him.

#### Vss 12-14

- Paul says he hasn't reached the place in his relationship with Christ where he wants to be and then he says something that western English speakers like us choke on a bit: he hasn't yet become "perfect". The Greek word is *teleios*. The word carries a variety of meanings. It may mean full grown. It may refer to someone who is a master craftsman as opposed to an apprentice. It would refer to a teacher as opposed to a student. In pagan worship it referred to the highest quality of sacrificial animals. In the days of the early church the word was used to refer to those who had died for Christ, martyrs.
- So Paul acknowledges that he is short of where he wants to be, so he presses on...he presses on so that he made grab on to what Christ grabbed on to. He wants to lay hold on to the promise and purpose that Jesus Himself laid hold to. He's not there yet, but that's where his eye is fixed. So again, thinking about what the Romans may have in store for him, Paul turns his situation as an imperial prisoner into a positive. His eyes are fixed on the future. He is reaching forward, pressing onward, to his goal, like a runner stretching for the tape, flat out to the finish and the prize waiting on the other side of the finish line. Forget every past achievement. Focus only on the goal ahead.