

# “THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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## PHILIPPIANS 3-4

The Salvadoran Civil War raged from 1980-1992. During the bloody conflict a group of Salvadorans fled their village, and crossed the Lempa River to seek refuge in southern Honduras. It was a costly crossing. People were gunned down on the beaches, or shot in the water. The Lempa River ran red that day. Those who made it across set up camp. And the new community's first task was to establish three committees who would establish basic services needed for their survival. There was a *construction committee* - an *education committee* - and *“the comite de alegria”* - or as we say in English, *“the committee of joy.”* This was the group who planned the celebrations. Its interesting that on the list of necessities for survival – right up there with digging latrines, and erecting roofs, and teaching kids to read – these folks saw the value of dancing – of joy and celebration!

As we learned last week, the book of Philippians is all about joy. *Dancing* in the midst of *danger*. Even though Paul is in a prison cell - though his circumstances are less than ideal - there is a joy in his heart that he wishes the Philippians, and all Christians, would experience. This is why he begins Chapter 3...

*“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.”* Notice Paul is a typical preacher. He says, *“finally,”* when he's only half-way through his letter. Never get too excited when you hear a preacher say *“finally...”* *“For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.”* One of the best teachers is repetition. Football teams run the same plays, and baseball players field grounders over and over in practice. They repeat the skill until it's second nature. This is why I've been known to repeat a Bible study. Some truths bear repeating – you need to revisit them time and time again. As you survey the Gospels you'll notice that Jesus often repeated Himself. Our Lord also knew that repetition is the best teacher. What Paul is about to tell the Philippians they've heard before, but he knows they need to hear it again.

He says, *“Beware of dogs...”* Some Bible scholars believe this was actually a future prophesy intended for the 2012 College football season. Paul warns the Auburns and Floridas and Techs to *“beware of them dawgs!”* I think the Greek spelling is *“d-a-w-g-s.”* *Of course, I'm kidding...* Actually when Paul uses the word *“dogs”* he's not thinking of UGA football players, or even the cute, cuddly canines we keep as pets. In ancient times dogs were wild, vicious predators. They were a threat to humans - carriers of disease. Here Paul uses the term as a metaphor for the false teachers who had followed him to Philippi. They were a pack of wild dogs - carriers of contaminated doctrine.

These were the guys we first met in Galatia. They were called, *“Judaizers.”* They believed you're made right with God through faith in Christ – PLUS a whole smorgasbord of rules, rituals, and good deeds. The Judaizers taught a *“tag team salvation”* - that both Jesus, and the Mosaic Law were necessary.

Once a legalistic lady told her pastor, “I believe the Christian life is like rowing a boat. One oar is the Law. The other oar is faith in Christ. If you drop either oar you row in circles. You need both oars.” The wise pastor replied, “*That’s a fine illustration, but there’s only one problem – you don’t get to heaven in a rowboat.*” The Judaizers advocated a mixture of *faith and works - Christ and Law - grace and grunt - the flesh and the Spirit*. But Paul was adamant - righteousness is the result of *Christ plus nothing*. Add anything to faith in Jesus and you’ve got *bad news*, not *good news*.

Paul says, “*Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh...*” One of the derogatory names the Jews used for the Gentiles was “*dogs*” - but here Paul calls the Jewish false teachers by their own denigrating title, “*dogs*.” The Judaizers taught in order to become a Christian you first have to become a Jew. Faith in Christ was not enough, you also had to follow the Jewish code and custom. And chief on their list was circumcision.

This is why Paul says, “*beware of the mutilation*” – *how does clipping a fold of flesh add virtue to a life?* Real righteousness is transmitted spiritually not physically. God wants *transformation*, not an *operation*. Rather than *works of the flesh*, salvation is a *gift of the Spirit*. It’s received through *faith in Christ*, not as a *reward for human effort*. It’s all God’s grace!

Paul is saying true children of God are not those who mutilate their body, but who purify their hearts by faith. Thus, the Philippians should, “*have no confidence in the flesh...*” Think of the term *flesh* as “*what we are apart from God.*” On occasion the NT uses the term to refer to the base, sensual, physical appetites of selfish humans. The word “*fleeshh*” sounds sketchy and sinful.

But “*flesh*” isn’t always synonymous with evil. At times Paul’s flesh dressed up in its Sunday best and went to church. It got religious. It behaved itself according to the strictest of religious decorum. The “*flesh*” can refer to man’s loftiest and noblest efforts - but the problem is they’re still *man’s effort* - and human effort can never make us right with God.

Paul says in verse 4, “*though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so...*” If there had been a man who could’ve earned his way to God it would’ve been Paul. In the next two verses he takes us on a tour of his trophy room... He was “*circumcised the eighth day...*” I’ve read that a baby’s blood doesn’t begin to clot until eight days after its born. Doctors, today, give a baby a shot of vitamin K to speed along the process. But God was aware of that detail from the beginning. That’s why He required circumcision on the 8th day. Paul was “*of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews...*” He had a *star-studded, pure-blooded*, religious pedigree.

“*Concerning the law, a Pharisee...*” The word “*Pharisee*” means “*separated ones.*” Think of them as a religious gang that rumbled with rules and rituals. “*The lords of legalism*” were the strictest of the Jewish rabbis, and treated outsiders with a judgmental attitude. They viewed Jewish tradition as *their turf*. “*Concerning zeal, persecuting the church...*” When Jesus and His crew crossed into their side of the hood the Pharisees got ugly, *especially Paul*. He wanted to rumble. The Pharisees opposed anyone who ignored their rules – that made the early Christians a target. “*Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*” *Surgery, pedigree, Pharisee, zealotry* – according to legalism Paul had flawless credentials.

But here's what he concludes, verse 7, "What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." The word "counted" means "to assess or evaluate." The Greek philosopher Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Paul had carefully calculated. He added up His righteousness, and put it on a scale, and balanced it with what God required.

It reminds of the drill sergeant who was in charge of new troops. Their first inspection was a disaster. They appeared sloppy and disheveled. The sergeant was so angry he was speechless. Finally he shouted, "Step out here and take a good look at yourselves!" Well, this is what Paul did. When he met Jesus he stepped back from all his religious achievements – he reflected on the pursuits that had driven his life - and it hit him... *nothing he'd been proud of came close to the joy, blessing, and righteousness he received in Jesus.*

In fact, Paul's religious ambitions got in God's way. For as long as he was depending on his own goodness he could never be good enough for God. In verse 8 Paul confesses, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ..." It's not *what you've done*, but *who you know* that makes you right with God. Paul knew Jesus, and He is more than enough. He's our ticket to heaven. All Paul's clerical credentials - his medals of honor - his religious merit badges – were worthless compared to knowing Jesus. He says in verse 9. "And be(ing) found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith..."

At one time in his life, Paul was proud of his accomplishments – they proved He was better than his peers. Surely his good works would also please God. Before he came to Christ Paul reminded me of my kids when they were tots. Kathy dressed and dolled them up. They'd look so cute. We had little sailor outfits we'd put on Zack and Natalie. They were adorable. But you'd get up close, and smell. Wow! Atrocious. They messed in their diapers – and you'd think "how could anything that looked so cute smell so rotten." That was Paul. He looked cute on the outside, but underneath he stunk with pride and self-righteousness.

When Paul came to Christ he learned that true righteousness is never man-made. The only way we can be right with God is through faith. When we trust Christ, then His righteousness gets inherited by us. In light of the merits of Christ, Paul now viewed all his good works and righteous deeds as "rubbish."

The word "rubbish" literally means "dung or manure." When Paul tried to earn a right standing with God it was "do do do..." *do-do*, but when He stopped *trying* and *trusted* He received Christ's righteousness. Are you trusting in your performance - what you *do*? Or are you resting in what Christ has *done*? As Corrie Ten Boon use to say, "Nestle don't wrestle." Your best efforts are *manure*, it's through faith we *mature*.

*And why is righteousness is so vital?* Access to God - relationship with God - is given only to those in a right standing with Him. Sin has to be forgiven, favor has to be bestow - to really know God. And this was Paul's goal. He states in verse 10, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection..."

Everybody needs a vision, an ambition in life. I like the poster of the teenage soccer player. He's on the ground – dirty, exhausted - wearing a painful expression on his face. The caption reads, "No pain, no gain – no gain, no goals – no goals, no scouts – no scouts, no scholarship – no scholarship, no college – no college, no girls – no girls? Get up man, get up!" My point is, we all need a goal – and I can think of no higher,

or more fulfilling, or more thrilling ambition than to know God. A personal relationship with the God who created you – now that’s the ultimate experience!

Again Paul states it in verse 10, *“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...”* but this is where a lot of us stop short. It’s cool to want to know God - it’s exciting to know the power of His resurrection. But Paul doesn’t end there. He also wants to know Christ in *“the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”* This challenges me! Have you ever had a friend who enjoyed being your friend as long as you were joyful and fun to be around... but the moment a problem arose they split? That’s a fair-weather friend with not much loyalty.

Think of your kids. The opposite occurs. You want to help them through their heartbreaks and tough times. What pained me most, is to see one of my kids suffering on the inside, but throw up a facade... *“I’m okay dad. No big deal. Everything’s cool.”* But it wasn’t. Here’s my point, if you really love someone you’ll want to walk with them, through their joy *and* suffering.

This is how Paul felt about Jesus. He wanted to know Christ, and His power... but also His sufferings. He desired the same kind of intimacy with Jesus we hope to have with our kids. Not only sharing His victories and joys, but also His pains and sacrifice.

Paul continues, verse 12, *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”* Paul had a goal... *to know Christ.* And achieving that goal became his utmost desire. *Paul* gave it his *all*. He put on the full court press... If you play basketball you know when the coach puts on the press it ratchets up the intensity. You’re in your man’s face. You beat him to the sideline. You anticipate the pass. A press is controlled mayhem. And this was the intensity Paul put into his desire to know Jesus!

Here’s the paradox... Righteousness is gained not by *trying*, but *trusting* – yet building up my faith demands my sincerest efforts. Faith is not passive, but active. Paul presses – he applies every ounce of energy and attention toward achieving the goal of knowing Christ.

Verse 13, *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended...”* At this point in his life Paul had been a Christian for 30 years – he’d come a long way, but he had a long way to go... *None of us have arrived. We’re all pressing!* The goal is to never stop growing spiritually. It’s been said, *“The largest room in the world is the room for improvement.”* Never stop pressing on. Paul continues, *“but one thing I do...”* Notice his focus! It’s *“this one thing I do, not these fifty things I dabble in.”* There’re a million activities in this world that will distract you from seeking God. Knowing God demands focus - clearing the schedule - making time!

In a few weeks, we’re going to watch the London Olympics, and we’ll see world class athletes compete. For many, all their lives have looked forward to their 10 second event. They sacrificed activities other kids enjoyed. Everything in their life is focused on London. This is the fixation Paul has on knowing Christ. Everything in his world is working toward this end. Paul says *“But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...”* One of the ways Satan distracts us from seeking to know Jesus is by bringing up our past. The Devil is an astute historian of forgiven sins. And so is the internet. A scary feature of the web is the ease in which you can send opinions, rants, videos, and other dumb stuff - *with just a click of a mouse* - into cyberspace where you can never get it back. There are services like [defendmyname.com](http://defendmyname.com) that clean up your online reputation for an expensive fee.

But Jesus has provided a similar service for years. Put your faith in Him, and He cleans up your record on the heavenly web. He blots out all the stupid, evil things you've ever done. What's been covered by *the blood of Jesus* has been forgotten *in the mind of God*. And we need to follow suit. Take your cues from our living Lord, and "*forget those things which are behind.*" I've heard it put, "*There are two things you can't do backwards – drive a car and live your life.*"

This is why I've never believed in dredging up hidden memories... If a hurt is festering or it's unresolved, deal with it, but there's no need to regurgitate the past. Don't let someone take you on a wild goose chase down memory lane. Our *focus* needs to be *forward*. Paul writes, "*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...*" Forget the past, and focus on the glorious future you have in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us we're a new creation. Learn to see yourself in Christ!

Paul sums it up in verse 14, "*I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.*" We started out by faith. We've walked by faith. Thus, we'll finish by faith.

Verse 17, "*Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ...*" Aka... the Judiazers. By adding to faith in Christ requirements for salvation, they've cheapened His work on the cross. If I could do anything to make myself right with God, Jesus would've never had to die in my place. The cross would have been in vain.

Even today, there are still enemies of the cross. People and preachers who try to dilute its importance. There are folks embarrassed by the cross, and view it as an insult to modern sensibilities – *the bloody, gory cross*. But apart from it there is no remission of sins. If not for the cross, we'd all go to hell. "*What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!*"

It reminds me of a poem, "*You're just out of date,*" said young Pastor Bates, to one of our faithful old preachers who'd carried for years, in travail and tears, the Gospel to poor sinful creatures. You still preach on Hades, and shock cultured old ladies with your barbarous doctrine of blood! You're so far behind you'll never catch up - you're a flat tire stuck in the mud!" For some little while, a bit of a smile, enlightened the old preacher's face. Being made the butt of ridicule's cut did not ruffle his sweetness and grace. He turned to young Bates, so suave and sedate, "*Catch up, did my ears hear you say? Why, I couldn't succeed if I doubled my speed. My friend, "I'm not going your way!"*" Paul and the Judaizers were also headed different directions. Paul loved the cross. The Jews despised it.

Paul continues to describe the false teachers in Philippi, verse 19, "*whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly...*" The real motivation behind the Jews was their selfish gain, and ecclesiastical profit. Paul writes, "*and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things.*" They were earthbound in their reasonings. They lacked the mind and heart of heaven. They needed the wisdom of God. "*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...*" This world is not our ultimate destination. It's not our home. We're just passing through. Heaven is the goal. Soon - I believe very soon - Jesus will split the skies and take us home to be with Him! My lot in life, my hope for the future, is not down here – its up there!

And He “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” As we’ve noted before our redemption will not be complete until Jesus has restored everything that sin has defiled. And that includes our mortal body. At the rapture these corruptible bodies will be raised incorruptible, and reunited with our spirit in the clouds. Here’s Paul’s point, if you’re pinned down by a band of Indians and know the US cavalry is just over the hill, *that’s where your eyes would be focused*. And that’s why we need to look to Jesus... *the cavalry is coming*.

Philippians 4, “Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.” Continue in the faith - until we get to heaven. “I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.” Apparently, Euodia and Syntyche were two squabbling sisters in the church. News of the tiff in Philippi had made it all the way to Rome. In the Greek language, Paul’s grammar seems to indicate both ladies were at fault in the dispute.

Notice how Paul settles the rift... He doesn’t rebuke them, or instruct them – he simply encourages them to get it together – “*be of the same mind in the Lord!*” There is no such thing as a conflict-free family. Disputes, and hurt feelings, and arguments will arise. A mature believer should not be surprised when humans, even redeemed humans, act like humans. Expect it! Don’t let it unravel your faith. When it occurs make sure you show love, and humility, and work it out.

Verse 3, “And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.” Pastor is a dangerous job at times. Here Paul encourages the pastor in Philippi to help mediate between two warring women. Certain disputes will require some outside help. When necessary, those in leadership should step in and try to facilitate communication and guide the parties in the right direction... Who was Paul’s “*true companion*” in Philippi? No one really knows for sure.

Verses 4-7 reel off a series of short commands... “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” This passage is one of my favorite in the Bible.

We experience **peace with God** when we come to Christ and receive His acceptance and forgiveness, but *peace with God* is not the same as **the peace of God**. The peace of God is a piece of God’s peace - a chip off the old block. It’s a slice of His composure, a sense of God’s invincibility, a surge of His irrepressible love. Here we have one of the few formulas in Scripture. We can’t manufacture God’s peace – it’s a supernatural work of His Spirit. But there’re steps I can take to put myself in position to experience His peace...

Here’s step one, verse 4 tells us to **rejoice in one thing**. I can’t always rejoice in my circumstances, but I can always rejoice in the goodness and grace of God. Verse 5 tells me to **be satisfied with few things**. “*Gentleness*” means “*moderation*,” or “*the ability to live without, travel light*.” If I allow myself to get enamored with earthly possessions and ambitions I set myself up for a major letdown. It’s said, “*Contentment in this life comes not from getting more, but from expecting less*.”

Verse 6 provides us three more steps... **Worry about nothing. Pray about everything.** In short, *turn your cares to prayers.* And **be thankful for anything.** There you have it - five steps for knowing the peace of God: *Rejoice in one thing, be satisfied with few things, worry about nothing, pray about everything, be thankful for anything* – AND look what happens... “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ.”

Verse 8, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.” A *new you* should think *new thoughts*. The human mind is like a computer... It’s garbage in, garbage out. Feed your mind good stuff, godly stuff, thoughts and influences that’ll help you grow in Christ.

Paul says in verse 9, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” To me this is one of the most incredible statements in all the Scripture. Think of what Paul is saying... *At 6:00 in the morning while I’m still groggy... when the alarm doesn’t go off and I’m late for work... when I’m stuck in traffic... when my boss hands me an hour of work and there’s only 15 minutes left in the day...* Can I honestly say in those moments, do as I do, and the God of peace will be with you? *Come on...*

If the Holy Spirit had not put Paul’s comment in the pages of inspired Scripture you would think he was being arrogant. *We all need to be this kind of example!* Paul is saying, “Don’t just do as I say, but do as I do!”

“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.” The Philippians supported Paul financially, but the pipeline shut off for a time. Paul was so excited to see Epaphroditus arrive with new resources from Philippi.

And he explains his excitement. “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” In other words, I don’t let my circumstances determine my joy and contentment. Paul learned to draw from Jesus in every situation. In prosperity or in poverty his approach was the same. Paul lived from the inside out. He refused to let his *physical situation* dictate his *spiritual condition*. I love this poem by Ella Wilcox, “One ship drives east and another drives west with the selfsame winds that blow. ‘Tis the set of the sails and not the gales which tells us the way to go. Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate, as we voyage along through life: ‘tis the set of the soul that decides the goal, and not the calm or the strife.” *What’s the set of your sails?*

Paul writes in verse 13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Paul’s *pain never caused him to doubt God*, and his *prosperity never caused him to forget God*. He was confident that the strength of Christ would sustain him in any and every situation. The Christian cannot lose. He can handle anything that comes his way through the inner power of Jesus.

In High School I carried a pocket NT, and in it I had this verse underlined. Before Tim Tebow wore it under his eyes I had this verse put to memory in my mind. I read it before every football game, and interpreted it in terms of winning the game, and scoring the touchdown, and triumphing over the other team. But when got to a level where I was no longer successful, and I had to give up the sport I really loved, I

realized that again this verse applied. Life wasn't over. Christ strengthened me to play, but He also strengthened me to move on to other pursuits.

If it's Christ's will for you to succeed in your job, He'll strengthen you. If He wants you to change careers, He'll strengthen you through the transition. When babies are born Christ will strengthen you to care for them. When they leave home as adults, He'll help you to let them go. *In Christ we can do all things!*

Verse 14, "Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress." Technically Paul didn't need their help – if God had not supplied his need through them, He would've done so through someone else. But he appreciated their willingness to be used. He recounts their long history of ministering to his needs... "Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God." Their generosity to Paul was a sweet-smelling sacrifice that brought pleasure to God.

Whenever a pastor talks about money he risks folks judging his motive. *Why discuss it if you don't need it?* But Paul taught the Philippians that a financial offering – a donation to a church or a missionary – is actually a spiritual investment in that ministry. This is why its important to make good investments. Treat your charitable giving like your financial investments. Always put your money where you think you'll get the best return. Invest in ministries that are accomplishing something vital for the Kingdom of God.

Verse 19, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." What a promise! Give to God's work, and God in turn will supply our needs – and He will do so abundantly! "Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household." Remember, where Paul is located. He's in Caesar's palace – not the Las Vegas hotel, but the royal dungeon located in the ancient city of Rome. And recall the purpose he attached to his imprisonment. In chapter one Paul told us that he had been locked up for "the furtherance of the Gospel." God had him in prison to share his faith.

*And guess what?* God was at work! During Paul's time in jail he had the opportunity to lead members of the royal court to Jesus. Amazingly, a few of the new believers in Caesar's household are here sending their greetings to the Philippians. Paul concludes his letter to Philippi, verse 23, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."