

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

PHILIPPIANS 3-4

The Salvadoran Civil War raged from 1980-1992.

During the bloody war a group of Salvadorans fled their village, and crossed the Lempa River to seek refuge in southern Honduras. It was a costly crossing.

Many of the people were cut 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 in English, "*the committee of joy.*"

This was the group who planned the celebrations.

Its interesting that on their list of necessities for survival - *right there with digging latrines, and erecting roofs, and teaching their kids to read* - the Salvadorans saw the value of dancing - of joy and celebration!

As we learned last week, the book of Philippians is about joy at half-mast. *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 first, Paul is the typical preacher. He says, *“finally,”* and he’s only half-way through his letter. Never get too excited when the 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 its second nature.

And some biblical truths bear repeating - you need to revisit them over and over. As you survey the Gospels you’ll notice that Jesus often repeated Himself. Our Lord also knew that **repetition is a great 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 is actually a warning for the teams remaining on **the 2019 Georgia Bulldogs’ football schedule: Florida, Auburn, Georgia Tech.** They need to *“beware of them dawgs!”* In the Greek its *“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 gained a right standing with God through faith in the work of Christ - *plus, a whole smorgasbord of rigid rules, and religious rituals, and self-righteous deeds.*

The Judaizers taught a “**tag team salvation**” - that Jesus **and** the Jewish Law gained one’s salvation.

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 rules and custom. And chief on their list was circumcision.

Paul says, *“beware of the mutilation”* - how does clipping a fold of flesh add any virtue or value 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 God*, not as a reward for *feats of 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.

In verse 3 Paul says, *“have no confidence in the flesh...”* When we hear *“flesh”* we usually think *“lustful.”* The word *“Fleeshh”* just sounds sketchy and sinful.

But the *“flesh”* actually means *“what we are apart from God.”* *“Flesh”* isn't always synonymous with evil.

At times Paul's flesh dressed in its Sunday best and went to church - it got religious - it behaved itself according to the strictest of religious decorum. The *“flesh”* can also refer to man's loftiest and noblest efforts - but the problem is the flesh is 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 through 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 pedigree. Paul was a *pure-blooded* Hebrew.

“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 followers of Jesus 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’d added up His righteousness, put it on a scale, and balanced it with what God required.

It reminds of the drill sergeant who was in charge of the new troops. Their first inspection was a disaster.

The soldiers appeared sloppy and disheveled. The sergeant was so angry, he shouted at one of his men, “You, step out here and take a good look at yourself!”

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 had lived for had come close to the joy, blessing, and righteousness he had in Christ.*

In fact, Paul’s religious ambitions had gotten 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 and 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 looked so cute. We had little sailor suits we'd put on Zach and Natalie. They were adorable.

But you'd get up close, and smell. Wooo! Atrocious. They'd 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 isn't man-made. The only way to be right with God is *by faith*. Trust Christ and you inherit God's righteousness. In light of the merits of Jesus, Paul now viewed all his good works and righteous deeds as *“rubbish.”*

The term means *“dung or manure.”*

When Paul tried to earn a right standing with God it was all about what he could do. It was “do do do...” but all it amounted to was *do-do*. It’s when He stopped *trying* and *trusted*, then He received Christ’s goodness.

Corrie Ten Boon use to say, “Nestle don't wrestle.” Our best efforts are *manure*, it’s by faith we *mature*.

And here’s why righteousness is so vital. You have no access to God - *you don’t really know Him* - unless you’re in a right standing with Him. Sin has to be forgiven, and His favor bestowed, if you want to know God. This was Paul’s goal. He states in verse 10, “*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...*”

Everybody needs a passion - an ambition in life.

I like the poster of the teenage soccer player. He’s on the ground – he’s dirty, exhausted - his face wears a painful expression. 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 need a goal, and I know of nothing more fulfilling than to know God! A relationship with the God who created you is 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 - exciting to know the power of His resurrection...

But Paul doesn’t stop 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 celebrating and fun to be around... but the moment a problem arose they split?

That’s a fair-weather friend with not much loyalty.

It’s just the opposite with our kids. You want to help your kids through their heartbreaks and tough times. If you love someone you care about them not just in the happy days, *but especially in the times when they hurt.*

What pains me most, is to see a child suffering on the inside, yet throw up a facade... “Oh, I’m okay dad. It’s no big deal. Everything’s cool...” when it isn’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 children. Not only sharing in His victories and joys, but also in 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.* It was his utmost desire. He gave it a *full court press...*

If you’ve played basketball you know when the coach “presses” it ratchets up the intensity. Suddenly, you cover

your opponent everywhere on the floor. You're in their face from sideline to sideline. It is mayhem.

And this is the intensity Paul put into knowing Jesus!

Righteousness is gained not by *trying*, but by *trusting*, yet building up my faith demands effort.

Faith is not passive - it's active and aggressive.

Paul *presses on* - applying ever ounce of his energy and attention to 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 30 years. He'd come a long way, but he had a long way to go. None of us arrive in this life.

We're all pressing on! Never stop growing spiritually. It's been said, "The largest room in the world is the room for improvement." Never stop pressing forward.

Paul continues, "but one thing I do..." And 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!

Realize, it's hard for an Olympic athlete to be world class in more than one event. I use to wonder why the winner of the 100 meter dash didn't win in the 200 and 400 and 800 meter races - *I'm thinking fast is fast.*

But at that level the nuances of each race demands specialization. You can't be world class in more than one or two events at a time. **The same is true in life!**

You can't be world class in everything. You choose whether it's sports, or stocks, or woodworking, etc...

What is it in life that you want to be world class? Paul wanted to know Christ. It was His *“one thing!”*

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.

But what God forgives He forgets. *What's been covered by the blood of Jesus has been forgotten in the mind of God.* And we need to follow suit. Let's move on, and *“forget those things which are behind.”*

I've heard it said, *“There are two things you can't do backwards - drive a car and live your life.”*

Certainly, we need to deal with unresolved issues. If an apology or restitution is owed; it needs to be paid.

But I don't believe in dredging up distant memories.

If it's in the past: then leave it there. I don't see the value of a wild goose chase down memory lane. 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...” He’s speaking of the Judaizers. By adding to simple faith in Christ, they cheapen His work on the cross. **Jesus is enough.**

If I could do anything to make myself right with God; then Jesus would’ve never had to die in our 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.

Some folks are 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!"*

Likewise Paul and the Judaizers were going 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."** Their real motive was selfish gain.

"And whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things." They were earthbound in their thinking. They lacked the mind and heart of heaven.

"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. This is not our home. We're just passing through. Heaven is the goal. Soon Jesus will split the skies, and take us to be with Him! Our 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 a settler pinned down by warring Indians, and know the cavalry is just over the hill, that's where your eyes will 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.**

And news of their tiff 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.

But note how Paul settles the rift. He doesn't rebuke them, or instruct them. He simply encourages the girls 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 shouldn't 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 these warring women.

Certain disputes will require some outside help.

So 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.”

Recall, **peace with God** is what happens when we come to Christ and are reconciled, but *peace with God* is not **the peace of God**... The **peace of God** is a piece of God’s peace - it’s a slice of His composure, a sense of His invincibility, a sprinkling of His love.

Here, in verses 4-7 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...

And here's step one, verse 4, **rejoice in one thing** - "*in the Lord.*" I can't always rejoice in circumstances, but I can 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." In short, "travel light." If I get enamored with earthly possessions and ambitions I set myself up for a major letdown. It's been 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*.

Feed your mind godly stuff - *what's noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous* - and you'll grow in Christ. **But feed it what's ungodly - and it's garbage in, garbage out.**

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... 5 minutes after I wake up, while I’m stuck in traffic, when I have to work late...

In every situation can I honestly say, “*do as I do, and the God of peace will be with you?*” Come on, man...

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, “Not 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 had supported Paul financially, but the pipeline shut off for a time. Paul was 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 or she can handle anything thrown at them through the power of Jesus.

In High School I carried a pocket NT, and in it I had this verse underlined. I read it prior to every football game, and interpreted it in terms of winning the game, scoring the TD, and triumphing over the opponent.

But when I gave up playing football (*and reluctantly so*), I realized that again this verse applied. Christ strengthened me to play, and to move on from playing.

He’ll strengthen you for success on the job or for a transition to another career... He’ll give you strength to start work or strength to retire... Strength to raise your toddlers or strength to let go of your adult children...

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 the Philippians support. If God had not supplied his need through them, it would’ve come through others. But Paul appreciated their willingness to be used.

He recounts their long history together... “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.

Notice, Paul taught that *charitable giving* is actually a *spiritual investment*. He instructed the Philippians that when you give “*fruit abounds to your account.*”

This is why it’s important to make wise investments. **Treat your charitable giving like a financial investment.** Put your money where you it’ll get the best return.

Invest in the pastors, churches, and ministries that are accomplishing something vital for God’s Kingdom.

Verse 19, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Give to God’s work and He’ll *abundantly* supply your needs!

“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.” Recall, Paul is in Caesar's palace - *not a Las Vegas hotel*, but the royal dungeon.

Chapter 1 told us Paul was in jail for “*the furtherance of the Gospel.*” From a Roman prison God gave Paul the opportunity to lead members of the royal household to Jesus. *And they'd taken heed.* Now the new believers in Caesar's court send their greetings to the church. I'm certain that victory brought Paul great joy...

And so Prisoner Paul, *always dancing in the midst of danger*, concludes his letter in verse 23, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”