

# PHILIPPIANS

## Righteousness In Christ (3:1-9)

Notes: Week Five

### Philippians 3:1-9 (NIV)

#### No Confidence in the Flesh

**3** Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup> Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

<sup>7</sup> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in<sup>[a]</sup> Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

#### Footnotes:

- a. [Philippians 3:9](#) Or *through the faithfulness of*

### Philippians 3:1-9 (HCSB)

#### Knowing Christ

**3** Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write to you again about this is no trouble for me and is a protection for you.

<sup>2</sup> Watch out for “dogs,”<sup>[a]</sup> watch out for evil workers, watch out for those who mutilate the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup> although I once also had confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

<sup>7</sup> But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ<sup>[b]</sup>—the righteousness from God based on faith.

#### Footnotes:

- a. [Philippians 3:2](#) An expression of contempt for the unclean, those outside the people of God
- b. [Philippians 3:9](#) Or *through the faithfulness of Christ*

## Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>1</sup>

### *Philippians 3:1-9*

**3:2** The Jews hated **dogs**. This word was often used of Gentiles, but in this context it refers to overly zealous Jewish teachers who were ravenous like scavengers. These **evil workers** attempted to gain salvation by keeping the law. **Mutilate the flesh** refers to their "circumcision." Paul used a play on the Greek words for "circumcision" and "mutilation." These "circumcisers" were actually "mutilators" who offered no spiritual benefits.

**3:3** Those of **the circumcision**—"true Jews" or Christians—have three characteristics. First, they **serve by the Spirit of God**, not the works of the flesh ([Gal 5:16-18](#)). Second, they **boast in Christ Jesus**. "Boast" ("take pride in") means their highest treasure is Jesus. Third, they **do not put confidence in the flesh**. "The flesh" describes the values and activities of humanity unaided by the Holy Spirit.

**3:4-6** Paul's fleshly confidence included heredity and accomplishments. On the issue of his heredity, **circumcised the eighth day** (lit "an eighth-day one") placed him in a special group whose parents scrupulously kept the law. A **Hebrew born of Hebrews** means he had impeccable credentials. This countered those who may have assumed otherwise because Paul was from Tarsus. Regarding achievement, he spoke of zeal and the law. **Pharisee** comes from a word meaning "separation," e.g., to honor the OT law. **Zeal**, evidenced by **persecuting the church**, was unnecessary even for Pharisees. **Righteousness that is in the law** means that Paul achieved all the law could promise. He had not failed by Jewish standards.

**3:7-8** Paul evaluated his former life ([vv. 7-8](#)) and expressed his current aspirations ([vv. 9-11](#)). **Considered** occurs three times in these verses (cp. [2:5-11](#)). The first ([3:7](#)) is a Greek perfect tense (past completed action with continuing results). The others ([v. 8](#)) are present, indicating a continuing reaffirmation of the attitude. The word **loss** and a synonym **filth** (lit "garbage" or "dung") are compared with **gain** three times. Paul's loss was for the sake of Christ ([v. 7](#)), for the surpassing value of knowing Christ ([v. 8](#)), and for gaining Christ ([v. 8](#)).

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1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Phillippians 3".

## English Standard Version - *Study Bible*<sup>2</sup>

*Philippians 3:1-9*

**3:1-21** *Opponents of the Gospel: Where Does Righteousness Come From?* Paul begins this section by calling the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord ([v. 1](#)) but then warns them about the Judaizing opponents of the gospel ([vv. 2-3](#)). In contrast, Paul has renounced his spiritual and ethnic privileges for the sake of knowing Christ ([vv. 4-11](#)); his righteousness comes through Christ, not the law ([vv. 12-16](#)). He then calls the Philippians to follow his example of commitment to Jesus as Lord ([vv. 17-21](#)). Some interpreters suppose that the abrupt transition after [v. 1](#) indicates that [ch. 3](#) is a later interpolation into the letter. But there is no need for such a theory. The vocabulary of [ch. 3](#) is reflected in the rest of the letter, and its themes of “progress” and “example” are central to Paul’s overarching purposes. While the Judaizers (people who insisted that Christians had to obey all the OT ceremonial laws) hold out a promise of spiritual progress through adherence to the rules of the old covenant, Paul holds himself out as an example of someone who knows that real progress consists only in being increasingly conformed to the image of Christ’s death and resurrection. Paul’s conflicts with the Judaizers can be seen in greater detail in Acts and Galatians (e.g., [Acts 15:1-19](#); [Gal. 2:15-21](#); [3:6-4:31](#)), as well as in the rest of his letters. Their teaching that Gentiles must first become Jews and obey all the OT laws in order to be saved was abhorrent to Paul. Not only did it show a lack of welcome (in complete contrast to God’s own attitude) but it also sought in effect to divert Gentiles away from Christ into a covenant that could never save them. While the law might be “holy and righteous and good” ([Rom. 7:12](#)), the old covenant pertained to the age before the giving of the Spirit, and thus inevitably brought curse rather than blessing since human beings were unable to keep it. The “righteousness” it offered could only be an incomplete, superficial righteousness, in contrast to the perfect righteousness given as a gift to believers by virtue of the life and death of Christ. The fury of Paul’s response in these verses was fueled by his thankfulness for his own deliverance from this system.

**3:1** *Initial Call to Rejoice in the Lord.* Paul will pick up the theme of joy again in [ch. 4](#), but first he must deal with the Judaizers.

**3:2-3** *Contrast between the Opponents of the Gospel and the True People of God.* Paul critiques the Judaizers and explains the contrasting characteristics of the true church.

**3:2** **Dogs** was not only a general term of derision in the ancient world, it was particularly a word used by some Jews in reference to Gentiles, who were considered ritually unclean. With biting irony, Paul says that the Judaizers, not the Gentiles, deserve that label. Paul’s irony continues as he labels those who extol good works of the law as **evildoers** and **those who mutilate the flesh**. This last phrase (Gk. *tēn katatomēn*) is a play on words with circumcision (Gk. *peritomē*). The Judaizers’ supposed badge of pride turns out to be the sign of their destruction. On Jewish views of circumcision, see note on [Acts 15:1](#).

**3:3** In contrast to those promoting physical circumcision ([v. 2](#)), the true people of God (**the circumcision**) are those who **worship by the Spirit of God** (cf. [John 4:23-24](#)). They **glory in Christ Jesus** (cf. [Phil. 1:26](#)) and **put no confidence in the flesh** (that is, as Calvin put it, in “everything that is outside of Christ”). This verse mentions all three members of the Trinity: “God” (the Father), “Christ Jesus” (the Son), and “the Spirit of God” (the Holy Spirit).

**3:4-11** *Paul’s Renunciation of Spiritual and Ethnic Privileges for the Sake of Knowing Christ.* Paul regards his prior privileges and achievements as spiritual rubbish in comparison to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, and being justified ([v. 9](#)), sanctified ([v. 10](#)), and glorified ([v. 11](#)) in him.

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2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Philippians 3".

**3:4-6** Paul's opposition to the Judaizers was not because he himself in any way lacked a Jewish "pedigree." When it came to the things of the **flesh**—the whole system of life that held sway before the coming of Christ and the giving of the Spirit—Paul had perfect credentials. He was **circumcised on the eighth day** in accord with OT law ([Lev. 12:3](#)). He was an ethnic Israelite and knew the tribe from which he came. **Hebrew of Hebrews** probably indicates his descent from Jewish ancestors, and many think it also means that he spoke Aramaic (the national language of Israel in his day), even though he came from Greek-speaking Tarsus. He was from the strictest religious sect—the Pharisees ([Acts 26:5](#)). His **zeal** was such that he had even been a **persecutor of the church**. He probably had thought of himself as following in the footsteps of Phinehas ([Num. 25:11](#)) and Elijah ([1 Kings 19:10, 14](#)) in his zeal. If anyone could be said to be **blameless** in following the law, it was Paul. But before God it was no righteousness at all, for though Paul thought he was pleasing God, in persecuting the church he had shown himself to be the "foremost" of sinners ([1 Tim. 1:15](#)).

**3:7-8 gain... loss.** Paul's accounting, however, has now changed completely: what formerly went into the *gain* column—his power, prestige, and "obedience"—now goes into the *loss* column. Likewise, the crucified Messiah, whom he had assumed must be a "loss," is now seen as the ultimate "gain." The language of loss and gain probably alludes to Jesus' teaching (see [Matt. 16:25-26](#)).

**3:9 Found in him** means being spiritually united to Christ and therefore found not guilty before God as divine judge. Paul had trusted in a **righteousness of my own** based on obedience to the law rather than the right standing before God that **comes through faith in Christ**. God "imputes" Christ's lifelong record of perfect obedience to the person who trusts in him for salvation; that is, he thinks of Christ's obedience as belonging to that person, and therefore that person stands before God not as "guilty" but as "righteous." This is the basis on which justification by faith alone is considered "fair" in God's sight. As explained in [Rom. 10:1-8](#), righteousness cannot come by the law because all human beings sin, and therefore right standing before God as the divine judge is possible only through faith in Jesus Christ, who *is* the believer's righteousness before God. See note on [Gal. 2:16](#).

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

### *Philippians 3:1-9*

**3:1** As a safeguard, Paul reviewed the basics with these believers. The Bible is our safeguard both morally and theologically. When we read it individually and publicly in church, it alerts us to corrections we need to make in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

**3:2, 3** These "dogs" and "mutilators" were very likely Judaizers—Jewish Christians who wrongly believed that it was essential for Gentiles to follow all the Old Testament Jewish laws, especially submission to the rite of circumcision, in order to receive salvation. Many Judaizers were motivated by spiritual pride. Because they had invested so much time and effort in keeping their laws, they couldn't accept the fact that all their efforts couldn't bring them a step closer to salvation.

Paul criticized the Judaizers because they looked at Christianity backward—thinking that what they *did* (circumcision—cutting or mutilating the flesh) made them believers rather than the free gift of grace given by Christ. What believers do is a *result* of faith, not a *prerequisite* to faith. This had been confirmed by the early church leaders at the Jerusalem council 11 years earlier ([Acts 15](#)). Who are the Judaizers of our day? They are those who say that people must add something else to simple faith. No person should add anything to Christ's offer of salvation by grace through faith.

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3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 2019-2020.

**3:2, 3** It is easy to place more emphasis on human effort than on internal faith, but God values the attitude of our heart above all else. Don't judge people's spirituality by their fulfillment of duties or by their level of human activity. And don't think that you will satisfy God by feverishly doing his work. God notices all you do for him and will reward you for it, but only if it comes as a loving response to his free gift of salvation.

**3:4-6** At first glance, it looks like Paul is boasting about his achievements. But he is actually doing the opposite, showing that human achievements, no matter how impressive, cannot earn a person salvation and eternal life with God. Paul had impressive credentials: upbringing, nationality, family background, inheritance, orthodoxy, activity, and morality (see [2 Corinthians 11](#); [Galatians 1:13-24](#), for more of his credentials). However, his conversion to faith in Christ ([Acts 9](#)) wasn't based on what he had done but on God's grace. Paul did not depend on his deeds to please God, because even the most impressive credentials fall short of God's holy standards. Are you depending on Christian parents, church affiliation, or just being good to make you right with God? Credentials, accomplishments, or reputation cannot earn salvation. Salvation comes only through faith in Christ.

**3:5** Paul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, a heritage greatly esteemed among the Jews. From this tribe had come Israel's first king, Saul ([1 Samuel 10:20-24](#)). The tribes of Benjamin and Judah were the only two tribes to return to Israel after the Exile ([Ezra 4:1](#)). Paul was also a Pharisee, a member of a very devout Jewish sect that scrupulously kept its own numerous rules in addition to the laws of Moses. Paul explains for these mostly Gentile believers that his Jewish credentials were impeccable.

**3:6** Why had Paul, a devout Jewish leader, persecuted the church? Agreeing with the leaders of the religious establishment, Paul had thought that Christianity was heretical and blasphemous. Because Jesus did not meet his expectations of what the Messiah would be like, Paul had assumed that Jesus' claims were false—and therefore wicked. In addition, he had seen Christianity as a political menace because it threatened to disrupt the fragile harmony between the Jews and the Roman government.

**3:7** When Paul spoke of "these things," he was referring to his credentials, credits, and successes. After showing that he could beat the Judaizers at their own game (being proud of who they were and what they had done), Paul showed that it was the wrong game. Be careful of considering past achievements so important that they get in the way of your relationship with Christ.

**3:8** After Paul considered everything he had accomplished in his life, he decided to write it all off as "worthless" when compared with the greatness of knowing Christ. We should value our relationship with Christ as more important than anything else. To know Christ should be our ultimate goal. Yet how do we know him better? (1) Study the life of Christ in the Gospels. See how Christ lived and responded to people ([Matthew 11:29](#)). (2) Study all the New Testament references to Christ ([Colossians 1:15-2:15](#)). (3) As you worship and pray, let the Holy Spirit remind you of Christ's words ([John 14:26](#)). (4) Take up Christ's mission to preach the gospel and learn from his sufferings ([Matthew 28:19](#); [Philippians 3:10](#)).

To do these things, however, may mean that you must make major changes in your thinking and in your lifestyle. Are you willing to change your values in order to know Christ better? Will you fix or rearrange your crowded schedule in order to set aside a few minutes each day for prayer and Bible study? Will you change some of your plans, goals, and desires in order to conform with what you learn about Christ? Whatever you must change or give up, having Christ and becoming one with him will be more than worth the sacrifice.

**3:9** No amount of law keeping, self-improvement, discipline, or religious effort can make us right with God. Righteousness comes only from God, and we are made righteous (receive right standing with him) by trusting in Christ. He exchanges our sin and shortcomings for his complete righteousness. See [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) for more on Christ's gift of righteousness.

**3:9, 10** Paul gave up everything—family, friendship, and freedom—in order to know Christ and his resurrection power. We, too, have access to this knowledge and this power, but we may have to make sacrifices to enjoy it fully. What are you willing to give up in order to know Christ? A crowded schedule in order to set aside a few minutes each day for prayer and Bible study? Your friend's approval? Some of your plans or pleasures? Whatever it is, knowing Christ is more than worth the sacrifice.

## Life Essentials Study Bible<sup>4</sup>

A Principle to Live By  
Philippians #9: Made Righteous by Faith

*from Philippians 3:1-9*

**To be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must never compromise the biblical teaching that we are made righteous by faith and faith alone.**

Paul often encountered Jewish teachers who taught that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be acceptable to God. Though this did not yet seem to be a serious problem in the church at Philippi, Paul anticipated it could happen. In many respects, Paul's confrontational tone in this section of his letter sounds much like his intense communication in Galatians ([Gl 1:6-9](#)). He had no tolerance for this false teaching that literally destroyed "households" ([Tit 1:10-13](#)).

Because of Paul's own experience, he understood the mind-set of those Judaizers who were tearing churches apart like vicious dogs. At one time, he too was "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man" ([1Tm 1:13-15](#)). Consequently, he was being proactive with the Philippians and warning them about these divisive and hypocritical religious leaders.

### Reflection and Response

*Though Paul at times took a very confrontational approach when dealing with false teachers, how did he encourage Timothy to initially extend grace and gentleness?*

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4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1644.