

## **Intro: Recap.**

Over the last few weeks we've seen Paul's appeal and prayer for the Philippians to:

- **Abounding in love and growing in their knowledge and depth of insight** of Christ Jesus
- **Having a big picture perspective on their sufferings**
- **Remaining courageous and undeterred in the face of opposition**
- **Emulating Jesus' humble and selfless ministry** to one another as we guard the unity of the faith.

Now he summarizes his point in the examples of two men...

## **The Example of Timothy and Epaphroditus**

Two shining examples of humble Christlike character. These men embodied:

- **Teachability/coachability.** They were leader material because they were great followers.
- **They were sacrificial service.** Timothy was distinguished in his apostolic care for Paul's churches. Epaphroditus nearly sacrificed his life to bring Paul the Philippian gift.

Summary: If you want to know what I've been talking about—in terms of growing in your love, your knowledge and your depth of insight into Jesus Christ, if you want to see what an absolute commitment to joy in spite of suffering, unity of the faith, and humility in service looks like—here it is with skin on. **Timothy and Epaphroditus.**

**I have my own Timothy and Epaphroditus. Nathan Harris and Heather Evans.** Of all the people and staffers I've worked with over the years—when I think of humble service, courageous leadership, creative problem solvers—people who've given up much to serve Jesus as team players—I think these two former staffers. They are the gold standard for me.

And Tim and Epaph are Paul's

Question: Could Paul say this of us? Would he have used you and I as his sermon illustrations for his principles here?

**Today's Big Idea: Be on guard against any “gospel” that lures you away from loving Jesus and becoming an agent of God's grace to others.**

Paul goes now into a lengthy summary statement for them.

**1. Keep your distance from false gospels (3:2-4).** These two verses are difficult to translate into English because Paul's uses Greek rhetoric to make the statement memorable. Each of these words "dog" "evil doers" and "mutilators" are alliterated in the Greek language. We could translate it something like this.

**Beware of the mongrels**—a street dog that scavenged and ate anything to stay alive. Street dogs were symbols of ritual uncleanness equivalent to pigs.

**Beware of the malevolent**—these malicious and evil false teachers who show up to your church meetings as your well-dressed, friendly neighborhood rabbi. Who encourages you to stay faithful to Christ as Savior—so long as you add to your faith the works of Torah.

**Beware of the mutilators**—**the centerpiece of their heresy is returning to the covenant of circumcision as the sign or the marker of identity**—men who desire to impose the covenant of circumcision on you in order to complete what is lacking in Christ's atonement.

#### **Exhibit A (of a false gospel): The Judaizers.**

He is referring to a group—a pseudo-Christian faction who broke off from the church in Jerusalem known as the "Judaizers." The Judaizers wanted to add three things to the Gentiles salvation.

**Jewish dietary laws**

**Jewish Festivals and Sabbath Observance**

**Circumcision**

God had revealed early on—both to Peter and to the early Jewish church in Jerusalem that salvation was by grace through faith alone and neither the Gentiles nor the Jews were any longer held to Mosaic requirements. But a faction broke away and apparently (we can piece this together from Galatians and 1 Corinthians as well as here) were following Paul and attempting to undo his work of grace in the life of the Gentiles.

Paul makes it clear—*when your atonement system is Jesus plus anything else—you've got the wrong Gospel.* The Philippians are to be on guard against a false Gospel that adds works of the flesh to the message of salvation by grace.

He states in no uncertain terms in v. 3 "for it is *we* who are the circumcision, who worship in God's Spirit, and boast in Christ Jesus—with *no confidence in the flesh.*"

**Stay clear, he says, of the false gospel of Jesus plus anything else.**

## 2. Realize the futility of perfectionism (3:4-6).

### The Counter Example—Paul the Super-Hebrew

**Paul the Super-Hebrew (3:4-6):** Paul lost his confidence in the flesh: meaning “any human credentials”. Paul was a Hebrew **thoroughbred**—a **racehorse** compared to these **mewling ponies** who are trying to re-judaize his churches. Paul’s street cred on this issue trumps the Judaizers. None of them have achieved what Paul did in the flesh. Paul’s compares their fastidious obsession with the law and his own pursuit of it.

### He mentions in this list (btw this is Paul’s *cursus honorum*)...

- **His Jewish pedigree**—a Jew of Jews, not a proselyte or convert.
- **His tribal inheritance**—Benjamin was known as a warrior tribe, first King of Israel (Saul), and Revelation mentions the tribe of Benjamin as the greatest evangelists winning multitudes that no man can count.
- **His rabbinic accomplishments**—a Pharisee—a rising star in the rabbinic order. Very difficult to become one. And very respected even among Jewish rival groups.
  - He was a Pharisee
  - He was a zealous persecutor of the church
- **His legalistic perfection**—as to the law, blameless. His fastidious and painstaking compliance with the Old Testament was a badge of honor among a sect with exacting standards.
- **His zeal for the Law**—This term comes with some cultural baggage—it is taken from Mattathias’ “Zeal for the Law” which caused him to lead a revolution against the Greeks a century before Paul. A passionate and revolutionary spirit for the Torah of God.

### Summary Statements (3:7-11)

- **They are losses**—a term ripped from the financial sector. The entire investment of my life in this pride of religious pedigree is one total loss.
- **They are rubbish**—They are a loss because they are like refuse—like street filth. This statement brings his argument full circle—it circles back to his statement about the Judaizers being “**mutant street dogs.**” Ancient people reviled these animals because they would eat anything, including animal and human excrement in the ditches and sewers. And so Paul’s conclusion is that that entire pedigree that he trusted in—that he excelled in—that the Judaizers—*these hacks* are now peddling among his churches—it’s refuse compared to the surpassing privilege and glory of knowing Jesus through faith.

**Illus. Years ago I planted a church in Minnesota with a friend**—and the way it goes with church plants is you tend to attract (like David in the wilderness) the “disgruntled and the disenfranchised” to your new ministry. Some of the people you attract have their own agendas and they’ll stay around to dance long enough until you refuse to play their song. One of those individuals was a guy by the name of Dale. Dale drove us crazy. Our motto: “**Heartland Church: A Grace Place**”—and Dale was anything but interested in grace. He nitpicked us to death with his excessively high standards, fixation with non-essential issues, and his attitude of judgmentalism over our character and integrity

(which was just bogus). Turns out that Dale, the super-religious guy, was having an affair with a coworker and hiding it from his wife. When it all blew up—their lives circled the drain and fled to Montana to get away from it all.

Sometimes I've found that the very people who are the most religious—Buttoned up Bible thumping super saints—are usually covering up some habituated sin and darkness that they are nursing secretly. People who have been infected by the sin of religiosity tend to show very little grace to others who disagree with them about the Bible, about how a church ought to be run, and about how ministries should be executed. But's a sham. A cover up. For something deep and dark they are harboring in their souls and refusing to confess.

Paul uses his own supremely excellent Jewish résumé as an illustration of the futility of works based righteousness. **The best of you, in that old system, is still as lost as a man can be.** And no amount of religious fussiness is going to cover the fact that you're a sinner needing salvation by grace just like the rest of wretches who aren't good enough for you.

“No confidence in the flesh...”

- That we were **born into a good Christian family.**
- No confidence that have merely prayed **a sinner's prayer or attended Sunday School** or gone to church regularly.
- No confidence **in our relative goodness**—because no matter how good we could be we are never good enough for God.

**So let's get specific...**

- Any Gospel that promises that you can have everything and Jesus too, is a false gospel. We are acutely aware that the very example Paul gives in this text is that he has lost everything in this life for the exceeding joy of finding Jesus.
- Any Gospel that tries to re-judaize the Christian faith is also false. Now you and I are free to eat a Kosher diet (if you want to keep your girlish figure or for health reasons). We are free to circumcise our boys. We are free to observe the Jewish festival calendar, the Sabbath which includes the Passover—but we are not **obligated to do this**. And any doctrine that says that we are now **duty-bound to obey the mosaic ritual law in addition to being saved by grace through faith—is a false gospel. It is a permutation of the true Word of the Lord.**

We are confident in our salvation by Christ's atoning work alone—When Jesus hung on that cross and screamed his last breath into heaven saying, “IT IS FINISHED” **WE BELIEVE THAT!** We are energized about that. We boast in *that! Alone.*

**When the boy finds the new bike under the Christmas tree—the toy trucks in the sandbox are history (Gordon Fee).**

We have found—the Philippians found—the Gospel of Salvation through Christ Jesus and his finished work of atonement—alone! And do not turn back to good respectable American religion.

I don't want more good old fashioned, respectable religion. I want more of Jesus.

I don't want the ineptitude of empty piety—I want the power of the resurrection of Jesus.

I don't want to fit in to the culture—I want the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings—taking on the attitude that he had in his death.

We need to inoculate ourselves against the false gospel of religion. The false gospel of Jesus plus anything else.

Innovation in the church is a well-needed thing when it comes to innovating our methods—but not when it comes to the message. Not when we innovate Jesus out of a job—to save us for eternity.

**3. Replace perfectionism with perseverance (3:12-21).** So Paul exhorts them to disavow and keep their distance from false gospels. He shows them the pointlessness of a life of religious perfectionism. **And now he gives them the real goal to shoot for. Perseverance in our pursuit of the presence and knowledge of Jesus.**

**Our takeaways are embedded in point 3 this week. Here they are...**

- **Acknowledge that you haven't arrived yet (3:12a-13a).** If you happen to meet anyone who has the air—that certain super-snappy-pro style as if they have already arrived, then it's a safe bet to assume that they have not.
- **Forget the past and forge ahead (3:13b).**
  - Forget your past successes.
  - Forget your past failures.
- **Fix your eyes on the goal of the Christian life (3:14)**—final resurrection with Christ. **This means I'll parent better with a view of eternity.** I'll be a better husband to my wife. A better pastor and co-laborer. We are called heavenward to be in the presence of Christ forever. And right now we colonize the world with the life of heaven.
- **Hold fast to your faith (3:16).**
  - **Illus.** Young man trapped in the wheel well of the plane. Nearly frozen to death, they asked him “Did you ever think of letting go.” “Yes. But I just considered the alternative.” When you don't have evidence that your situation is going to change—you hold on for dear life for faith, hope, and a good conscience.

**This is Paul's example and model. This was his aim in life...**

- His belief in his heavenly citizenship (3:20a).
- His longing for Christ's return (3:20b).
- His longing for resurrection (3:21).

This is what Paul says he is striving, straining, lurching for—the prize—to know Jesus fully, the participate in the power of his resurrection—and to be a full fledged member of the fellowship of the sufferings becoming Like Jesus in his death.

**Illus/Conclusion:** In a thrilling contest—the women’s 400M final for the gold, Bahamian Shaunae Miller just barely beat the favorite—USA’s Allysson Felix to capture the Gold in a last second dive—throwing her body over the finish line

**(Picture here)**



**Here’s another one of that same moment with Alysson.**



**You can see both Miller and Felix stretching and straining every sinew in order to cross first.**

**And this is Paul’s metaphor of striving—leaning—straining forward to cross the finish line.**