

Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Prison Epistles, Session 14, Call to Vigilance, Philippians 3:1-6

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This is Dr. Dan Darko and his lecture series on the Prison Epistles. This is session 14, Call to Vigilance, Philippians 3:1-6.

Welcome back to our Biblical Studies lecture series on prison epistles. We have been looking at Philippians so far, and I hope you are following this lecture closely.

I would just like to pick up from where we left off in our previous lecture. We went on to discuss how to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, with a major title I called Appeal to Shine. You remember that I reminded you about Paul's instruction to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling and how he set that framework building on what he had said earlier on about Christ is an example of obedience so that the church will pick that quality and live that out.

In the course of the instruction, he spells out clear things, asking them to think about their conduct and to conduct themselves in a way that glorifies God. I drew your attention to verse 15, which is a very interesting verse to me personally. It asks the church to try to show themselves as blameless and innocent in this wicked and crooked world. And then, towards the end of the previous lecture, if you would recall, I drew your attention to how Paul picked up two examples that have also shown a sign of obedience for the church to emulate.

I discussed Timothy with you and introduced you to Epaphroditus. On Timothy, I highlighted the fact that something we normally lose sight of in thinking about Paul is Paul's great ability to pick up his colleagues and to spell out with clarity the qualities that are commendable and worthy of mentioning to the people he writes to. Something I am working on personally is to try to make it part of my life to be able to observe and to be able to commend people because the world is too negative.

People like to talk about all negative things. Now let's begin to look more closely at what Paul has to say about the second example apart from Timothy, whom he spells out at the end of chapter 2 by the name Epaphroditus. We ended the last lecture by showing you this chart, which shows that Epaphroditus will be discussed in these three key areas.

Comradeship in service, health of a wounded soldier, and reception of a returning soldier. You may be asking what this soldier's idea is. Well, that is not my idea because Paul himself uses the military language, and you will see even as we go to chapter 3 in the course of this lecture how Paul is interested in picking up the military

language, and athletic language to be able to make his point. Epaphroditus has worked hard.

He has risked his life. He gambled with his life just to do what God is calling him to do. In other words, he did all this in obedience to Christ.

Let's look at comradeship in service. Perhaps before we get into more detail, I should read this passage from verse 25 of chapter 2. I have taught it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed, he was ill near to death but God had mercy on him and not only on him but on me also lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

I am more eager to send him so that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious. So, receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such a man, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. Paul will spell out these qualities of this man who we think will be the bearer of the letter to the church in Philippi.

Paul spelling out this comradeship shows that the man Epaphroditus is a brother. Now, I want to convince you, and I hope you are getting persuaded over the course of this lecture, that kinship language is an important part of how Paul sets the framework of Christian relationships. Calling him a brother does not mean they are blood siblings, but the language is used to show their mutual connectedness as children of God.

If you remember the previous lecture referring to the children of God at the beginning of the lecture on Philippians, God is the father. Paul says Epaphroditus is a brother. He's a dear one to me.

Not only that, he's a co-worker. He labored side by side with me. He worked so closely with me.

Paul wanted the church in Philippi to know Epaphroditus well and who would soon see him with a letter from Paul that this guy had not been lazy when he came to Rome. He labored side by side with Paul. Paul called him. We don't know if much of this experience was before his imprisonment, but Paul calls him a fellow soldier.

Wow, that's interesting of Paul, isn't it? Because these are some of the things Paul liked to do. Paul liked to see his work as a soldier fighting for the cause of Christ. Not in the sense of how we understand crusades, not in the sense of pounding the gospel on people's heads, but if you remember, in Ephesians, for instance, he talks about the battle that is a spiritual battle.

Paul is involved with his friends, delivering the message of Christ against all odds and struggling and striving to make the gospel known. Epaphroditus was a fellow soldier on that battlefield. He was an apostle and messenger.

He was someone the church had sent to help Paul in Rome. Paul is acknowledging that, in fact, he did his job. He did his job by being a faithful religious assistant to him.

He's a comrade. He's a comrade in the fight to make Christ known in the crooked and dark world of Philippi and the rest of the Roman Empire. Epaphroditus, Paul mentions his health, and Paul actually explains his health in the image of a wounded soldier.

Let me draw your attention to a few things here. Paul is distressed about their concern. Epaphroditus himself is actually distressed, and people are so worried about his health.

I'll tell you more about his health situation later. His illness was so severe, Paul says, that he nearly died. If you live in the United States, it may not matter to you to hear this.

You may only think about a fatal disease, but this time in the Roman Empire, this could be some of the basic diseases that can be easily treatable but could still kill him. The guy suffered almost to the point of death and wouldn't give up. He risked his very life to complete the designated task that they wanted him to do with Paul.

He would not quit. He was this person with a single-minded obedience to do what God was calling him to do, even to the point when his own life was at stake. He would not give up.

Do you remember when we talked about the story of Christ as an example? Paul wanted them to know that Epaphroditus was an example as well. Christ was ready to go all the way to the cross. Epaphroditus would not spare his life.

He would go through, even if it means death, to obey what God has called him to do—service with Paul at the front line of ministry. And Paul says God had mercy on him.

Pardon me for sharing a lot of personal stories with you. I grew up in a small village in Ghana. My village was 17 miles.

The closest hospital to my village was 17 miles. Living in Europe and in the United States now, especially in the United States, what you call clinics is equivalent to what I would call hospitals at the time. That is how weak the health system was.

If someone was sick in my village, sometimes if we had a snake bite, the person could die before we reached the hospital. Partly because there was no means of transportation, and at the time, the roads were bad. Thankfully, the roads are now good, and there's light in town.

Christian missionaries and Christian workers suffer a great deal in this forefront. With the occasional opportunity I have to do ministry there, I had to come into contact with people who are in difficult situations, and they have only one choice. To contact the local witch doctor for help, or wait and die.

The second rare option is to wait by the roadside and hope there is transportation coming in the direction to go to the direction where the hospital so that you can go and get treated. Christians in my village believe that if God does not have mercy on the sick as they pray, it could be a mockery to those pagans and witch doctors that God himself is not helpful. Perhaps you are getting a clue about why I'm so passionate about my work with Christ.

Epaphroditus, front line staff. Epaphroditus was sick in Rome in the first century. A famous shrine or a place for health treatment is the shrine of Asclepius.

You may have quack doctors in the system, but it was going to be difficult to have a decent treatment, whatever your health condition is, without compromising it with some form of paganism of some sort. Paul said he risked his life. He served side by side with him.

His illness almost killed him, but this is the praise report. Perhaps until I told you the story I just shared, you may not appreciate how I felt when I read that line, and God had mercy on Epaphroditus. They prayed, and God intervened.

They asked God to intervene in the life of this faithful soldier, and God glorified himself. The church needs to know that not only was this man ready to sacrifice his life in obedience to the cause of Christ, but God was ready to come true to him when it mattered most. God had not left him.

That is not to say Christians will not go through difficult times. That's not what I'm suggesting, but I'm suggesting that what Paul is drawing our attention to is the most difficult situation of Christian missionary work, where the world will have the opportunity to make a mockery of the God we believe. God had mercy on a faithful comrade, Epaphroditus.

Think about that—a work of obedience. Sometimes, a work of obedience may lead to difficult things in life.

Christ never promised us suffering-free Christianity. In fact, it was Paul who said that those who want to be followers of Christ must be prepared to suffer. Suffering is part of our story, but God also intervenes in difficult times as well.

And so, God is not absent. I like Psalm 23 verse 4 for that reason when I think about this subject, which says, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yes, when I'm going through the most treacherous times in my life, I will fear no evil because you are with me. Not that I may not go through difficult times, but in my most difficult times, your presence is with me.

That is comfort. Sometimes, he intervenes miraculously. Paul says God had mercy on him.

Show great divine intervention. And he goes on to say, for this guy, he is going to come to you, and I want you to welcome him with open arms. He's coming to you like a wounded soldier.

He fought all the battles. He fought for the gospel. He fought for his life, all in obedience to Christ.

And he's coming to you. He's coming with a letter from me. Please receive him.

Just imagine you being the bearer of the letter. You know this is said about you. This is the true story about you, but it's also stated about you.

And you are delivering it to a church that knows you very well. Imagine what your attitude and spirit will be. Imagine when the church receives this letter and how they will react and respond to you.

But Paul is not going to take anything for granted. He still wants to appeal to them to welcome this guy. He should be welcomed in the Lord with all joy.

With all joy. Because he deserves to be greeted with honor. He served honorably in the army, which is honorable and is an honorable discharge.

If I would put it in the mouth of Paul, I would say, for this guy Epaphroditus, he's an honorable fellow. He deserves to be greeted with all joy. He's returning.

He's returning as a soldier with scars to show. He's returning as someone who has gambled with his life. In fact, verse 29 says, so receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor.

And honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ. You need to know that he risked his life, Paul writes, verse 30, to complete what was lacking in your

service. So, he will end chapter two this way saying, I call you to unity and I require the mindset that you need to be able to keep this unity intact.

Christ is a model of that mindset. It's a mindset of humility and obedience. He goes on to say, I want you to walk in disobedience, working out your salvation with fear and trembling.

An example of this is the showing a kind of conduct that is befitting those who call on the name of the Lord. Let me show you an example of people who have done just that. He shows you, Timothy.

And at the beginning of this lecture, he shows you Epaphroditus. They walked in obedience and were ready to sacrifice their life, working side by side with Paul. This brings us to chapter three, where Paul is going to actually make some statements that I mentioned to you earlier in the introduction that will raise some questions for scholars.

Chapter three will follow this quickly to say, finally, my brothers rejoice in the Lord to write the same things to you. It's no trouble to me. And it's safe for you.

And it's safe for you. Remember that the verse prior to that he's actually asking them in the first two verses prior to that; he's asking them to receive Epaphroditus with all joy. Now, he says he's asking them to rejoice in the Lord.

And then he goes on verse two to say, look out for the dogs. And then you caution them on some things. And he will say, you know what if we are talking about people who have things to boast in the flesh and cause problems and all that.

Now, I want to give you another example. Another example will be me, Paul, not me, Darko, Paul. Paul will show himself as another example for them to follow.

But let's address some basic issues that are in the beginning of chapter three before we go on with the details. Chapter three begins with a transition statement that is often translated as finally. In that particular case, I shouldn't say a transition statement because some contend that it may not be a transition statement.

The main issue here is the word that is translated; the Greek word literally would translate as the rest, the remaining, or the other. You can actually translate it as finally to mean conclusion. Or you can also translate it henceforth to make it show that we are now; we just pause, and we are about to continue from here.

In my reading, it may be good to actually read that particular phrase. Those two words are there as a transition or a thread that links the end of chapter two to the beginning of chapter one, chapter three. And I will explain to you why. Because those

who say we should translate it finally, not all of them, but some of them are also the ones who argue that Philippians is actually two letters.

That is when Paul finally said he closed the letter in verse one of chapter three. And so chapter three, verse two, begins a whole different letter. I tend to argue to the contrary, as you heard me say in the introduction.

So let me just point out some things to you that, if you have forgotten the introduction to Philippians, I brought up quickly. I drew your attention to the fact that the abrupt transition between verse one of chapter three and verse two of chapter three is often cited as evidence that these are two letters with a partition. And those who make that argument refer to a major church historian, the Bishop of Smyrna, in modern-day Turkey.

By the time Paul, actually a contemporary of John, Polycarp had written that he knew of Paul's letters to Philippi, and he used plural letters. So those who make this argument say, oh, actually, chapter three, verse one is supposed to be translated finally to say it ends, and then three, verse two continues a different letter, and someone pieces them together. Polycarp knows that these are two letters, and that is why Philippians is not one letter.

I think that argument in the past, maybe 10 years or so, in the commentaries I have read on Philippians, scholars are trying to distance themselves from that argument more and more. But I should say there are a few that will still not budge down. I like to quote N.T. Wright liked to say the liberals have stopped thinking.

Some people just want to discredit the Bible, and so even if they don't have arguments, they still want to make their voices heard anyhow. But you want to know that the argument I presented to you in the introduction of Philippians still stands in this context. There is no internal evidence to support that something was brought into this text to make it complete.

There is no actual evidence to support that there are two letters that are running parallel at any time that were brought together at one point. The theory that calls for partition actually contradicts what we know about what we call in our discipline reduction criticism, where we talk about how to observe how an editor edits texts and pieces them together. What is actually happening in this text, if accurate, is that the redactor is supposed to smooth things out and not leave it the way it is.

But that's not what happened. Now we know that there is a rhetorical mechanism in play in the ancient world in which such transitions could be made to make a point. That is why I hold that whether we translate it finally or henceforth to begin chapter 3 verse 1, we should look at chapter 3 verse 1 as a thread linking the end of chapter 2

and the beginning of chapter 3. And when Paul changes, he will come out with a very sharp tone.

Yes, it is different from the beginning of the letter, but it's not uncharacteristic because Paul is going to draw attention with a strong rhetorical force. And let me show you in English, and pardon me again for another Greek side-by-side there, but I want to make sure we see it in English. The word is, you can say, behold, watch out, or look out.

The ESV translated as look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. That is how Paul begins verse 2. After he has had all sense of unity, obedience, and all that, he feels so strongly about the need to issue a strong warning. The Greek, if you read Greek and you see what I have on the board, you see how it rhymes.

You see how the imperatives that translate lookout are put together and how the other words for dogs, for evildoers, and for mutilation appear with the same letter. And it almost rhymes. It's a strong rhetorical force in Greek that he puts forward for the church to rise in this call to vigilance.

In Paul's call for vigilance, he will actually draw the church's attention to these potential threats. These potential threats could be these itinerant Jewish missionaries who are promoting the works of the law, such as circumcision, Sabbath, observance of the entire Mosaic laws, and others, which we know are Paul's biggest problem. Paul describes himself as an apostle to the Gentiles.

He is called to share the gospel with Gentiles. But what is the problem here? The problem is this. Christianity began as a Jewish movement.

Jesus was a Jew. Most of the early followers were Jews. Jesus decided to call all Jewish followers.

They were all circumcised. And if you were a Jew, you also know something. You also know that as you talk about the Messiah and all that, it is also important to remember God's covenant with his people.

This covenant was rectified, as we know, in Genesis 17, very clearly. The circumcision being the mark, a very important mark of the covenant. How could someone come in and say the Messiah has come? And they believe in the Messiah.

And they follow the Messiah. And they don't need to be circumcised. I mean, if you're a Jew, for some Jews, this was a big problem.

That was Paul's own problem in the past. If you remember, he was upset about this whole Jesus movement agenda that actually crossed borders and all that. So, he had that problem, too.

It is possible that the Jewish missionaries were trying to introduce this. There may be false teachers who identify themselves with the wider church. Moses Silva actually thinks that there are false teachers who identify themselves with the wider church.

An opportunity comes; they want to come into the church and try to see what they can do in Philippi because we don't have a strong Jewish base there in the city. What is clear, though, is that Paul is not issuing polemic against Judaism or Jewish legalism, but his main concern is the potential threat against the church. So, let's go to verse 2 and look at Paul's instruction there again.

And I read, look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

Look out for the dogs. Wow. If you have a dog pet, you probably said, oh my dog, I like my dog.

But wait, the way Paul uses dog here is not a compliment. So, think about that. Look out for the evil workers.

Watch out, be vigilant. And as you go on, look out for the mutilation. And you probably will notice that I call it mutilation, even though your Bible says mutilators of the flesh because the Greek word actually is mutilation.

It is for rhetorical play on those who come and emphasize circumcision. And Paul is trying to say, you know what, what they really are is, they chop out people's foreskin off, they mutilate the flesh. They are mutilation.

That language is what he turns, and we turn around to make sense in English and supply the word flesh to try to make sense to the English reader. Because if not, then the following verses will not make sense. But let me just try to explain what this call to vigilance entails, especially given what Paul is trying to say here.

Who are the dogs to watch out for? It is not a term of compliment. It is a term of deprecation. Dogs were treated with disgust, and sometimes perceived as scavengers.

Like dogs, these four stitches are likely to intrude where they are not wanted. The ancient concept of dogs is not our concept of dogs in the world, in the Western world, I should say, I shouldn't say in the world today, because I go to some countries

and dogs are treated the way the ancients treat the dogs. Here, if I go to a grocery shop, I should tell you some of my surprises in America, just as I did here.

One of the big surprises in my early experiences in America is to go to a grocery shop to buy cereal. First, I went to the cereal aisle, and I realized the whole aisle is full of cereal. My biggest problem there was not the lack of cereal but the choice to make.

And then, walking on another aisle, I saw something that looked like cereal packaging. And I saw this huge session, it's all dog food. I thought that was impressive.

Dogs in America are blessed, but they don't know it. Dogs in the ancient world, in some parts of Africa, in some parts of Asia, are treated like the ancients. They are treated; sometimes, they use them just for hunting or for guarding homes, so they train them to scare people away or to try to bite someone who wants to intrude in a house, but they never have that complimentary role.

One of the images associated with dogs is their ability and their desire to intrude into space where you don't want them. They just come. It is very different from how we train dogs in America and how they love us, no matter what.

They greet us with grace all the time. That's a whole different concept. So, think about dogs in reference here in those terms.

Paul says that those who come to bring in this false teaching and bring this Judaizing element are actually dogs. I want you to be on the lookout for them. Be vigilant.

Be watchful. Let me just show you the image of dogs in one particular psalm. I wouldn't give you too many examples.

In Psalm 59, in particular, you get the concept of a dog image there. Each evening they come. This is referring to enemies and evildoers.

They come back, howling like dogs and prowling about the city. Do you get an image of dogs? I'll show you another image in the same psalm—verses 14 and 15.

Each evening, they come back. The same line, howling like dogs, and prowling about the city. They wander about for food and growl if they do not get their fill.

You know, I sneak verse 16 in there because I like that. Because this is how the evildoers come, like dogs. But verse 16 said, but I will sing of your strength.

I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning, for you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of distress. The concept of the dogs coming in when you least expect them.

Beware of those dogs. Paul says, be careful about these dangerous intruders. And then he referred to the evil workers, perhaps suggesting their evil motive.

Or, it could also be a combination of their evil motive and the outcome of this motive when it is put into operation. They are evil, which suggests that these may not be people who are insiders. These are people, Paul. When Paul brands people evil, he actually is in to demonize them big time.

This couldn't be the people he would refer to, part of the people he would refer to as brothers and sisters in the church. Paul said you need to be aware of these outsiders who come in with this teaching to give trouble. Build a firewall against them.

The firewall must be rooted in obedience. Soon, he's going to also pick up a theme he brought up in the Christ test or hymn that we mentioned in chapter two: the sense of humility instead of pride. He said, be careful about them.

Because they are mutilation, you see, they have an agenda. They think circumcision is necessary for people to find their place in Christ.

Paul will criticize them for that and say that it is not the right thing. Their flesh is not what God is looking for. If anything, Paul's message to the Gentiles and the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles speaks to the fact that if circumcision is needed, it will be circumcision of the heart and not circumcision of the flesh.

Paul will go on to make a point. And I read that. Beware from verse three, for we are the circumcision.

They are mutilators of the flesh. We are the true circumcision in effect. Who worship by the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

We are the true circumcision. They are mutilators of the flesh. Do you understand what Paul is doing here? He's playing on rhetorical patterns to indict them in the worst form possible.

You see, true circumcision is worshiping God by the spirit of God. This concept may not mean too much to you until you think about how much the early church had to struggle and wrestle with some of these issues with circumcision. In the book of Acts, chapter 10 and chapter 11, Peter had a vision and went to Cornelius' house.

And Peter himself was reluctant. Peter himself was reluctant about the fact that God would send him to non-Jews, even though God feared to share the message of the gospel. But in return, Peter comes up with this outcome.

You know, God has poured his spirit upon them just like he has done for us. In other words, the presence of the power of the spirit is evident that God is at work among them. We have another situation that will send issues to the Jerusalem council, and I would like to read about it.

And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up on a question of what do we do with these Gentiles? Peter stood up and said to them, brothers, you know that in the early days, God made a choice among you. That by my mouth, the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel. And believe God, who knows the hearts, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.

And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. They will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Just as we did, Peter's point here in Acts, as Luke records it, is the presence of the Holy Spirit here in the book of Acts is actually evidence that God has made his salvation accessible to Gentiles as well. Gentiles are included.

Paul's point is that we, the true circumcision, speaking to the Gentile congregation, mainly based in Philippi, worship the true circumcision they worship by the spirit of God. They also boast not in circumcision, not in obedience to the law, not in anything that the Judaizers are likely to bring out, but they boast in Christ Jesus. And true circumcision, the Greek word is persuaded, which is difficult to express in English.

And so, translators will prefer to use the word confidence. They are not persuaded in by the flesh. They are not persuaded that the flesh is something to actually drive in or boast in because the flesh has some degree of frailty and weakness.

Those who are of true circumcision first worship by the spirit of God. They boast in Jesus Christ and they are not confident in the flesh. Wow.

Look at what Paul is doing here. And I remind you about an important part of Pauline theology, which is that those in whom the spirit of God is at work belong to the community of God. In fact, there is something he will call the fellowship of the spirit when the children of God work together in obedience to God.

And he will contrast that often with the work of the flesh that he indicts you. I give you one of those examples in Galatians, for instance, in which Paul says, but I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh.

For these are opposed to each other. To keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law.

Now, the works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and all things like this. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But look at the contrast here, 22. But the fruit of the spirit, those in whom the spirit is working naturally bear this fruit. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things, there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Coming back to Philippians, Paul says, for we are the circumcision then who worship by the spirit.

Yes. And glory in Christ. Yes.

And put no confidence in the flesh. As Frank Tillman will put it, Paul's point in verse 3 is that this time has arrived and that circumcision of the heart is the critical qualification for entrance into God's people in the new era. Physical circumcision is irrelevant.

Wow. It is in this framework, on this note, that Paul will make some very important statements: the mutilation, the dogs, the glory in their flesh.

But in verse 4, Paul says, though I myself have a reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Ben-Shabbat, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss. Wow.

Paul now says, instead of these dogs and mutilators, instead of these evil workers, the true circumcision have strong relationship with God, and in fact, they boast in Christ Jesus, they worship by the spirit, they don't have any confidence in the flesh, but by the way, just in case someone comes and tells you they have confidence in

the flesh, remind them that Paul has more. And now Paul goes on to give his credentials. Paul was saying he had something to boast about.

In fact, he has received some privileges by birth. There are things he has received that should give him every ground to boast, but he will not boast in the flesh. And there are privileges and things that he has earned by discipline.

He should have every reason to boast in them, but he will not. He said I was circumcised on the eighth day. It is the Jewish custom, and it is the Abrahamic covenant that a Jew should be circumcised on the eighth day.

But at this time, when Jews were dispersed all over, and so many gentile influences and all that, there was no guarantee that a Jew would be circumcised. There will be an attempt to circumcise them, but not necessarily on the eighth day. Paul says, in my case, the parents did it right.

I fulfill the statutes or the stipulations that rectify the covenant with God. I was circumcised on the eighth day. I met that requirement.

I could boast in that. I will not boast in that. I'm a Jew, a Hebrew of Hebrews.

Wow. That expression gives us something to think about. What does Paul mean when he says, I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews? Does it mean, in a context where most Jews will speak Aramaic, that he's suggesting that he speaks Hebrew with a Hebrew accent? Or is he suggesting that he is an authentic Jew by all standards, and in other words, he comes from a class that should stand out to say there is no dispute whatsoever that this guy is a true Jew?

Scholars can turn it the other way, but what is clear is this. When he says, I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews, there is no question. This guy is saying I have every claim of the title and the status, the national identity, and the religious identity as a Hebrew.

And by the way, included in that, I speak Hebrew with a Hebrew accent. I don't know about your experience and where you are following us in these lectures. If you live in England, you understand with me that the Queen's English is the standard.

If somebody speaks cockney, we actually disregard the person as uneducated and uncultured. In a culture where we don't want to admit, but it is, that there is still class system of aristocracy and what gives what access. Speaking English with the Queen's accent is a great thing.

Paul had better than that. He was a true Jew who spoke Hebrew, perhaps with authentic, clear Hebrew accent. He has something to boast about.

You may not appreciate this if nobody has told you that your accent is problematic. By following these lectures, you probably realize that my accent is somewhat problematic. Thank you for drawing my attention to that.

I hope you still follow this lecture anyway. Because I am reminded constantly, even in my own native country, that I have an accent. Well, Paul doesn't have an accent when he speaks Hebrew.

He could boast about that. He said that because of the privileges he has actually received, he comes from the tribe of Benjamin, a very important tribe. This tribe has grounds for someone who comes from this to boast.

If you come from Nigeria and you say, I'm an Igbo, and sometimes you say that with pride, depending upon the other tribal groups you are dealing with. If you come from Ghana, where I come from, and I say my name is Darkon, and if you don't get it, I am an Akan, I am making a clear statement that I come from the clear, polished, most respected tribe, and to appeal to that, say, you have to respect me. By the way, I am the first to tell my friends that if Paul were in our shoes, he would call it rubbish.

But a point I'm making is that in the land of the free and the home of the brave, called America, we don't have these problems. But these are real problems that I will face elsewhere. To appeal to your tribe to actually show where your grounds are as a badge of honor and pride is a common thing even in the world we live in today.

Paul says, if there is someone to boast about his tribal origins, I am from a tribe of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin was important. And, of course, I mentioned the Hebrews of Hebrews and elaborated on that.

But as for his privileges, he said, I'm a Pharisee. Hold on to that thought because I will tell you what this means. Paul said, if somebody comes and says they have the audacity to actually mess with the spread of the true gospel, let them know that their zeal and enthusiasm can never be compared to what I did.

He was, he used the word, a zealous persecutor. Do you know or remember his story on the road to Damascus? I never cease to be amazed about this guy's connections. As a Pharisee, someone who grew up in Tarsus had the opportunity to study under Rabbi Gamaliel, who also calls himself a Pharisee.

Paul could get an international permit to go after Christ's followers as far as Syria. Oh, then he met Christ. Then the zealous persecutor met the one who said, Paul, why do you persecute me? He had the accusation audibly and clear.

His life turned around. Henceforth, he will introduce a new vocabulary in his language, grace. By grace, we are saved.

If anyone came to the Philippian church to cause trouble, remind them, Paul says, if they think there's a badge of honor, something to boast about, let them know, and you should know that I was a zealous persecutor. I was doing more than them. And if they come and say they are righteous under the law, let them know I had a reputation on that, too.

And I could boast about that. Because as far as people knowing me is concerned, they actually knew that as for the righteousness with regard to the law, I was righteous and blameless. Wow.

So, Paul is saying this. When he says he's from the tribe of Benjamin, he says he's coming from the tribe that is very important in the history of Israel, the tribe of the first king of Israel. I like this quote from Vincent dating back to the 1800s, 1897 commentary, and international critical commentary series.

He writes that Benjamin was the son of the beloved son of Jacob. The tribe of Benjamin gave Israel its first king. The tribe was alone faithful to Judah at the separation under Rehoboam.

Another return of exile formed with Judah, the kernel of the new colony of Palestine. The tribe always held the most, sorry, the most, the post of honor in the army. Hence, the battle cry after D. Benjamin.

Of the twelve patriarchs, Benjamin only was born in the land of promise. The great national deliverance commemorated in the feast of Purim was due to Mordecai, a Benjamite. Paul's own name, Saul, was probably from the son of Kish, the Benjamite king.

Still said, Paul is one, sorry, of three Pharisees named in the New Testament. The other two are Nicodemus and Gamaliel. Along with the scribes and the synoptic gospels, writers depict the Pharisees as righteous, fastidious, and at times duplicitous.

Paul will criticize those who come in claiming to be righteous and say, I was a Pharisee, and I had every reason to be that righteous or claim that degree of righteousness. As we draw to the end of this, let me remind you about a famous historian and what he has to say about these Pharisees. Paul says I have that qualification to boast about. Now the Pharisees, Josephus writes, they live meanly and despise delicacies in diet, and they follow the conduct of reason, and what that prescribes to them as good for them they do, and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reasons dictates for practice.

They also pay respect to such people as those who are in years, in other words, older people, nor are they so bold as to contradict them in anything they have introduced. They also believe that souls have an immortal rigor in them, they believe in resurrection, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishment, according as they have lived virtuously and viciously in this life. So now you remember why Paul says he was blameless.

And whatsoever they do about divine worship, praise, and sacrifice, they perform them according to their direction, in so much that the cities give great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in actions of their lives and in their discourses also. So, when Paul says, you know what? I, I was a Pharisee, and I don't boast in this. Let nobody deceive you.

Well, he's drawing attention to the fact that in the call to vigilance, you don't want to pay attention to all these dogs, mutilators of the flesh, and evil workers because we are the true circumcision. And if anyone has confidence in anything to boast about, Paul says, I have more. Let me end the session by reading Paul's words.

Do I myself have a reason for confidence in the flesh also? If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless. When we come back to our next lecture, we will be looking at this more closely when he lays out this claim.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

Paul says gaining Christ, worshipping by the Spirit, and living out a life that is worthy of the gospel should be the desire, the ambition, and the pursuit of the church at Philippi. In the call to vigilance, they dare not blink because the threat is real. But amidst those threats, when they hold on to obedience and denounce all that the flesh imposes or brings, they will live up to glorify God in the end.

Thank you for following our lectures so far. When we come back, we'll continue to see how Paul would develop this. He himself is a model for these believers to follow.

Think about four models he has given so far. He has given Christ as a model for the church. He has given Timothy as a model for the church.

He has given Epaphroditus as a model for the church. And now he says he himself is a model of obedience and readiness to denounce things of the flesh. God bless you, and let's keep enjoying our learning together.

Thank you very much for studying with us.

This is Dr. Dan Darko and his lecture series on the Prison Epistles. This is session 14, Call to Vigilance, Philippians 3:1-6.