

Dr. Matthew S. Harmon, Philippians: Rejoice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

Session 10: Examples of Christlike Mindset, Part 2,

Paul Himself - Philippians 3:1-14

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

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Welcome to session 10 in our study on Philippians, Examples of Christlike Mindset, Part 2, referring to Paul himself. We'll be covering chapter 3:1-14.

Before we read the text, let's recap what we saw in the previous passage. In Philippians chapter 2:19-30, Paul presented two co-workers of his as examples of Christlike Mindset.

So we saw that Paul lays out Timothy in the first section and then talks about Epaphroditus and intentionally describes their lives, their character, their activities in language that is borrowed from the Christ hymn, as well as the earlier description in chapter 2 verses 1 through 4 of what it looks like to have this mindset like Christ. So that was part 1. This is now part 2 because in chapter 3 verses 1 through 14, Paul is going to present himself as an example of a Christlike Mindset. So let's follow along now as we pick up the text in chapter 3 verses 1-14.

Paul writes, Though I myself have 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, 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 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 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or I'm already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. So there's a lot going on in that passage.

Let's try to break it down into a more manageable portion. The macro structure here is that in verses 1 through 6, Paul gives what he refers to really as a negative example. In other words, he's going to draw a contrast between some other people and himself.

And so after an initial call to rejoice and a warning about false teachers, Paul's going to share about his pre-conversion life, what his life was like before he encountered the risen Christ. Then in verses 7 through 14, he's going to get the positive example of what his life is like now to demonstrate this Christ-like mindset. He's going to talk about the surpassing value of knowing Christ as well as his single-minded pursuit of knowing Christ.

So that's the big picture here. Let's dive in. Paul begins with himself here in Philippians 3:1-14.

He is the example to view. But before he gets to himself, he's actually going to make a summons, another call, a command. He's going to give a call to rejoice.

And he's also going to give a warning about some false teachers. So you notice chapter 3 verse 1, he says, Rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

It's as if he's acknowledging, I'm kind of sounding like a broken record when I keep saying rejoice, rejoice. And Paul is saying, I'm not going to apologize for the fact I'm going to keep saying this. So this idea of rejoice is, as we've seen, a major theme here in Philippians.

But I want to focus on the fact that when Paul calls the Philippians to rejoice, it's a command. And that suggests that it's more than a feeling. It's deeper than a feeling.

It's something that rests in a deeper reality than what our surface-level feelings often experience. And so this call to rejoice is presented as a safeguard. That's interesting that he presents this call to rejoice as something that will preserve and protect the Philippians.

That joy is something that can preserve and protect us from danger. And so he issues that particular command. And then he makes this almost kind of abrupt shift here in verse 2 to talk about these false teachers.

At the end of verse 2: Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

Now, there's some alliteration here in Greek. Each of those terms, dogs, evildoers, and those who mutilate, begin with the letter Kappa in Greek. Now, that's hard to bring out in English.

And most of our English translations don't even try. But I figured, why not? Let's give it a shot. So in terms of bringing out that alliteration here, we can bring it out in English as beware of or look out for: the mutts, the malefactors, and the mutilators.

In other words, Paul is warning about these individuals who are a danger or a threat to the Philippians. Now, it doesn't quite seem like they are actively involved or engaged in the

church at Philippi. This comes across as more of a generalized warning of be on the lookout for these people because they could show up and try to cause you trouble.

So, they are referred to as dogs. And again, here's where it's important to understand the broader historical context. Dogs really weren't pets in the ancient world.

We hear dogs, and we could think, Oh, well, I have a dog, and I love my dog. It's a nice pet. Dogs were scavengers in the ancient world.

They were not typically something that would be thought of fondly. The idea of these evildoers and then those who mutilate the flesh. That's not so subtle a way of talking about people who were advocating for circumcision as being necessary to be saved.

And so, he actually refers to that as mutilation. And he's going to flip that and talk about the contrast in the next verse. But Paul uses a little bit of a rhetorical flourish there by using alliteration, hoping that the Philippians might keep in mind the dangers of, as we'll call them in English, these mutts, malefactors, and mutilators.

So, that's the warning, and then he's going to say that's who these false teachers are. By contrast, however, this is what's true of us as believers. We are the circumcision.

Now, you'll notice on the slide I have the word true. Just to be clear, that's not in the text. But, I think that's what Paul is indicating.

In other words, what he is stressing is that we as Christians experience what circumcision was intended. In other words, the circumcision of the heart. If you remember that one of the things that God notes about the Israelites is that despite them being physically circumcised, they didn't have hearts to know them.

And so, the Old Testament expected this day when all of God's people would have this circumcision of the heart, the true intention. That circumcision was never just intended as a physical act. It had a spiritual significance.

And Paul is saying all of us who are united to Christ, regardless of whether we are Jew or Gentile, and regardless of whether we are physically circumcised or not, we are the circumcision. We are the true reality of what God intended that to represent. Then he says that we worship, and that can be translated as either in or by the spirit of God.

And I think that's probably an intentional sort of contrast to the previous claim about the false teachers who were evil-doers, as he calls them, or malefactors as we use this in my lyrical alliteration here. But in contrast to those who do evil things, we worship in the power of the Spirit of God. And the third, we glory in Christ Jesus.

In other words, our delight is in Christ, our hope is in Christ, and along with that, then we put no confidence in the flesh. And it's this last idea here, this confidence in the flesh, that's going to lead Paul to reflect on his pre-conversion life. So we should pause for a minute and think about this idea of what Paul means by putting confidence in the flesh. It has the sense of putting our trust or relying upon either things that we do or things that are true of us as a ground or a basis for being in a right relationship with God.

And so what Paul's going to give us next is what we might think of as his resume that he would have offered before he encountered Christ. These are the things that he would have been inclined to put his confidence in. In other words, to say, how do I know that I'm right with God? Well, let me give you the list of these reasons.

And so as we look at Paul's pre-conversion life, we can start with, as Paul does, that he was circumcised on the eighth day. In other words, he comes from an observant, faithful family because obviously, as a baby, he would have had no control over being circumcised. But this was a requirement under the Mosaic Law that on the eighth day, every male child was to be circumcised.

And so he would say, yep, check that box. My parents were faithful. They followed the Mosaic Law covenant.

Second, he is of the people of Israel. In other words, he was born into the covenant people of God. He was part of the people whom God had made a covenant with.

And as a result of that, he would have seen himself as an heir of the promises, as someone who was a recipient of God's covenant blessings. Third, he was of the tribe of Benjamin. So he's going from Israel down to Benjamin.

And this was noteworthy in that when the kingdom of Israel split between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, the ten tribes of the north split off from the two tribes of the south. And the ten tribes of the north fell into deeper and deeper apostasy. Whereas the two tribes of the south, Judah and Benjamin, also devolved into idolatry, but were in part brought back after their exile.

And some of Paul's own descendants would have been among those who came back and helped to reestablish their presence in the land after exile. And so Paul is saying essentially, I wasn't one of those ten northern tribes. I was part of the tribe of Benjamin.

Fourth, he describes himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews. And there's a lot of discussion as to what this means. It could refer to someone suggesting that it refers to him as a native Hebrew speaker.

Or it could simply refer to him as being as Hebrew as it gets. It could just be a sort of expression to emphasize, yeah, not only was I a member of the tribe, a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin, but even as some of my relatives and such have gone off more into Greek culture and that sort of thing, I am a Hebrew of Hebrews. Fifth, he says, as to the law of the Pharisees, as to the law of the Pharisees.

Now, this is where knowing a little bit of the historical background helps us. The Pharisees were known for their very strict adherence, not just to the Mosaic law, but to the additional set of laws and regulations that they put on top of that in order to act as a sort of fence to stay away from the possibility of violating the Mosaic law. And so the Pharisees created and had this longstanding set of oral traditions that went back for many years, and they treated that as the same equivalent to the actual Mosaic law requirements.

And so when Paul says, as to the law of the Pharisees, he is saying, I was scrupulous in my efforts to maintain and obey my status within the covenant as one who was faithful. Next, he says in verse four here- sorry, verse five - he says, sorry, verse six, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church. You might think, that's an interesting thing to put on your resume, but why would Paul mention that? Well, he would mention that because his motivation as a Pharisee was to preserve the purity of God's people.

And from his perspective as a Pharisee, he saw the early Christians doing and saying things that threatened the purity of God's people. And so he was so committed that he was willing to go out and persecute the early Christians in order to preserve the purity of the Jewish people. And one last one that's not mentioned here on the slide, but it's here in the text, verse six, Paul writes that, as to the righteousness under the law, blameless.

So what does Paul mean there? As to righteousness under the law, blameless. I don't think that Paul is saying he thought he was sinless or perfect. I don't think of the means within the Mosaic law covenant for atonement.

And so he's saying, look, by every observable outside measure, I was in good standing. I wanted to put my confidence in all of these things. And so why does he list these? It's as if he's saying these people want to put their confidence in the flesh.

And he's like, okay, I can play that game, and I can beat any of them in that game. I have far more reason to put confidence in the flesh than any of them. And we know from other places in Scripture that Paul's background, his pedigree, was spectacular within the context of the Jewish culture of his day.

He studied under one of the leading rabbis of his day, Gamaliel. And so he had the perfect pedigree. He would have been clearly understood as one of these rising stars within Jewish culture of his day.

And Paul's saying, if I want to put my confidence in the flesh, my resume could beat anybody's. And then he's going to make this glorious transition here in verse 7, when he says in verse 7, but whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, Jesus, my heart.

So the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. Paul uses accounting language here. And so for those of you who are into numbers and accounting, this is your passage right here.

You've got one column with gain and one column with loss. And what Paul says is that everything that used to be in the gain column, he has moved it over to the loss column in order to know Christ. It cost him, in one sense, everything: the loss of all things.

And here's where I think it's helpful for us to reflect from that. Because Paul is talking about things that in and of themselves are not bad. They're actually good things.

And from a biblical perspective, they can be understood, except for the persecution of the church. That's an obvious one. But the idea of being a Hebrew of Hebrews, being from the tribe of Benjamin, being circumcised on the eighth day, all those things are represented in Scripture as good things in and of themselves.

Now, they can be twisted, and they can be warped, of course. But Paul is not saying, yeah, I live this awful, ungodly, sort of reckless life where I was indulging in all sorts of obvious immorality. And I counted that as loss in order to gain Christ.

He's saying, these are basically good things on the whole. And yet I found something far greater. But the idea here is that Christ, knowing him, is so superior to even the good things that Paul could be thankful for in other places, that by comparison, those things were counted as loss.

In fact, he goes on, he says something that is stunning, if we're not just sort of numb to it. He says, for his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish. Now, that's more a British word for us here, right? Garbage.

The stuff that comes out is destined for the sewer. That's what he has in view here. Even the good things.

Now, this is similar to when Jesus says things in the gospels like, if you don't hate your father and your mother, you can't be my disciple. It's a way of speaking. It's a figure of speech that draws this contrast where Paul is saying, by comparison, knowing Christ is so much greater than even these good things that the gap between them is so large that it's as if this stuff that is good in and of itself is actually garbage compared to the greatness of knowing Christ.

And so he's saying, these false teachers, they want to come around, and they want to glory in these things that, by comparison to knowing Christ, are like the stuff that flows in the streets and heads towards the sewer. So why would she want to be attracted to that? That's his point. And as part of knowing Christ, notice that he says there in verse 9, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

You see, for Paul as a Pharisee, part of what he understood of his relationship with God was that his righteousness depended in some way on keeping the law. And when he encountered the risen Christ, what he realized was that the righteousness he needed was a gift from God. It's not something he produces; it's something that he receives by faith in Christ.

It's a gift. And so he has concluded that knowing Christ is worth more than anything else in this life. And it's not even close in terms of a comparison.

So now Paul is going to unpack what it is he means by knowing Christ. He's going to expand on that idea a little bit. So he wants to not just know Christ in some relational sense, which is true, of course, but that involves knowing the power of Christ's resurrection.

It is a stunning thing to contemplate that the power of Christ's resurrection, the power that raised Christ from the dead, is something that we can experience in our lives. The power that brought life from death. Paul says, I want to know that.

Not just in some conceptual sense, but I want to see that resurrection power at work in my life, taking away the things that lead me away from Christ and drawing me closer to him. I want to experience that resurrection power. That sounds good and great.

And we're like, yes, that's what I want. I want resurrection power. That sounds great.

And he says, but I also want to share in his sufferings. And just as we saw back in chapter 1, verse 29 and 30, suffering is a gift. It's not always the gift we want, but it's a gift.

And Paul says that part of knowing Christ is sharing in his sufferings. Now, these are not the sufferings that forgive our sins or earn us favor with God. These are sharing in the sufferings that come from being identified with Christ.

And so Paul says, I want to know Christ. And part of knowing Christ, if you want to know him in his fullness, is sharing in his sufferings. And then lastly, Paul says he wants to know, he wants to attain the resurrection from the dead.

So it's interesting. He's talked about, I want to experience the resurrection power of Christ in my life. And yet he says, my goal is to attain the resurrection from the dead.

And you're like, well, what's Paul saying here? He's acknowledging that there's an already and a not yet dynamic to our experience of knowing Christ. But the end goal is eventually us attaining the resurrection from the dead, where our bodies are raised to new life. And then we will be together with the Lord in a new creation, free from any stain of sin, curse or death or anything like that.

He said, that's the goal that I'm working towards. And I'm persevering. I'm pressing on in order to attain that.

In fact, that's where he transitions to, then in verses 12-14, where he begins to talk about this single-minded pursuit. So, Philippians 3:12-14, he said back to verse 11, he wants to attain the resurrection from the dead. And he says, but not that I've already obtained it or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And so he is pressing on towards the resurrection from the dead. That's the goal. And he recognizes, look, obviously I'm not there yet.

And that's something that we should be embracing and saying, look, we realize we still have a ways to go. What's his motivation? That Christ has laid hold of him. That Christ has laid hold of Paul.

And that's what motivates him to cling to Christ in the hopes of, in the confident hope that he will one day be raised from the dead. I want to linger a little bit on this last thing here that Paul talks about when he says there in verse 13, he says, one thing I do. It's like he's boiling it down and saying, look, if you just get this, you are on the right path.

And that one thing is forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, pressing on toward the goal. So I want to think a little bit about this idea of forgetting the past and pressing towards the goal. There can be a tendency for people to think that their past is something that determines who they are.

I want to be clear about what I'm saying. Our past certainly shapes who we are. There's no denying that.

Absolutely. But it does not automatically determine who we are. So when Paul has mentioned in chapter three, verses two through six, his spiritual resume, his pre-conversion resume, he's saying, look, regardless of whether our past is, and these are very broad categories, right? Good or bad, it can be a hindrance to moving forward in our relationship with Christ.

But here's what I mean. If it's bad, we can be wrapped in guilt over experiences or decisions or choices that we made that grieve us to this day. And we can become almost paralyzed by those.

Even if they happened decades ago, we can find ourselves held hostage by the past, by the bad things that we did or happened to us. But we can also be held hostage by the good of our past, that we begin to rely upon our pedigree, our heritage, our past accomplishments, or things like that. And we begin to put confidence in them.

And what Paul is saying here is that we need to forget those things. Now, I don't think that Paul is saying, have no memory of them. He's just mentioned some of them back at the beginning of chapter three.

So it's not forgetting in the sense of pretending like it never happened. No, I don't even know what you're talking about. That's not what he has at view.

What he means is no longer allowing those things to be determinative in our life and in our thinking. We tend to let our past define who we are. And I want to emphasize, it is influential.

It does shape, but it is not determinative. So what's the goal that Paul presses on towards? He calls it the prize of the upward call. So in the context, it points to conformity to Christ, culminating in the resurrection from the dead.

And notice the imagery of Ruddy. Athletics were different in the ancient world than they are today, but Paul uses a decent bit of athletic imagery in his writings. And here he's using the imagery of Ruddy.

And so here's an illustration from my own experience that I think can be helpful here. When I was a much younger man, I was in high school; for example, I ran cross country, longer distances, five days. And one of the things that our coach would tell us as a little trick of the trade is that if you would lock your eyes on a runner in front of you, maybe 10 yards in front or 15 yards in front, and keep your eyes locked on that runner, over time, your body would generally start to increase its pace in order to catch up to that person.

But there was something about locking your gaze on something in front of you that would cause your body to naturally and gradually pick up the pace in order to catch that person. And one of the worst things that you could do as a runner is constantly be doing this, looking back. That's a recipe for one of two things happening.

You're either going to run into something, or you're going to trip on something that you're not looking for. And so I think Paul is using this imagery to say, as we run the Christian race, we are to be looking forward to Christ and keeping our gaze fixed on him so that over time, we are more and more closely drawn towards him. So that's a picture of what I think Paul is talking about here.

So that brings us to our big idea for the passage. And I'm framing it in the form of a question. What does the mindset of Christ look like from this passage? I think this works well for the negative-positive contrast here.

Negatively, Paul says, here's what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean confidence in the flesh, because confidence in the flesh devalues what God has done for us in Christ. And confidence in the flesh expresses itself in many ways.

For Paul, it expressed itself in his confidence, in his pedigree, in his heritage, etc., in his spiritual accomplishments. So it can show up in our confidence in our pedigree, as well as in our performance. And before we too quickly move on from that, we as Christians can do similar things.

We can put confidence in our pedigree. Oh, well, my dad was a pastor. My parents were missionaries.

Those are good things. That's great. What a blessing.

But if you put confidence in that before God and say, well, that's going to cut me a little break since my parents were so spiritual. That's not going to cut it. Or confidence in our performance.

Well, I mean, when I was younger, I was really doing spiritual things. At the end of the day, confidence in the flesh is not the path to a Christ-like mindset. So what does it mean? A single-minded pursuit of Christ.

Counting everything as rubbish or garbage in comparison to knowing Christ and pressing towards our final hope. That's what it looks like. A single-minded pursuit of Christ.

Now, let's conclude with some application here. What does God want us to think? Well, one thing would be that knowing Christ is worth more than anything else. We live in a time and a place where we are constantly bombarded with things clamoring for our attention.

Look at this. Pursue this. This is what you really want.

This is what you really need. This is what's going to make you happy. This is going to fix your problem.

And we are bombarded by those messages, and we need to have this resolute conclusion in our mind that knowing Christ is worth more than anything else. Believe. We need to believe that putting confidence in the flesh profits nothing.

It is so tempting for us to think that our ongoing relationship with God, that God's love for us on a given day, is based on how we're doing spiritually. Well, man, this last week, I'm having my quiet times. I'm reading my Bible.

I'm praying. I'm sharing the gospel. I'm being really kind to people.

I'm crushing it. And so God must really love me a lot this week. And then the next week comes along, and we're like, yeah, I haven't been reading my Bible.

I haven't been praying. I haven't been doing any of those things. God must not love me as much this week.

At the end of the day, that's putting confidence in the flesh. And so we need to understand that that doesn't profit us anything. Third, desire.

Long to press on in our pursuit of Christ. One of the things that the Lord, I think, has been impressing upon me of late is to pay more attention to seasoned saints, believers who have lived a Christian life longer than me, and to observe how it is that they are continuing to pursue Christ, even after decades of knowing Him. How are they keeping that relationship with Christ fresh and enjoyable and something that they still delight in? That starts with the desire.

We need to long to pursue Christ. And then do. Identify the things that you are tempted to put your confidence in rather than Christ.

Maybe even take some time to list those out and to confess before the Lord your tendency to want to put confidence in those realities rather than Christ. So that's Paul as an example of himself as a Christ-like mindset. What we will see in the next passage is that Paul is going to, based on that, call the Philippians to be imitators of him and those who walk like him.

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