

Philippians: Rejoice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ - Study Guide

Examples of Christlike Mindset, Part 2: Paul Himself - Philippians 3:1-14

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Abstract:

In this teaching session, Dr. Matthew S. Harmon examines **Philippians 3:1-14**, focusing on **the Apostle Paul** as a model for a **Christlike mindset**. The source explains how Paul rejects his impressive **Jewish pedigree** and religious achievements, categorizing his former "confidence in the flesh" as **worthless rubbish** compared to the **surpassing value** of knowing Christ. Harmon highlights Paul's transition from a performance-based identity to a **righteousness received through faith**, which fuels a **single-minded pursuit** of spiritual growth. By analyzing the contrast between **false teachers** and true believers, the text underscores the importance of **forgetting the past** and straining toward the **resurrection goal**. Ultimately, the session encourages believers to find their **total security in Christ** rather than their own merits or heritage.

Briefing Document:

The Christlike Mindset: Paul as the Living Exemplar (Philippians 3:1-14)

Executive Summary

In Philippians 3:1-14, Paul presents himself as a primary case study for the "Christlike mindset." This transition from his pre-conversion life to his singular pursuit of Jesus Christ serves as a model for moving from "confidence in the flesh" to a reliance on divine righteousness. Paul's argument is structured as a contrast: he deconstructs his own "spectacular" religious pedigree to demonstrate that even the highest human achievements are "rubbish" compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

The core of this mindset is a radical reorientation of values—using accounting imagery to move previous "gains" into the "loss" column—and a disciplined, athletic pursuit of spiritual maturity. The ultimate goal is not merely a conceptual understanding of God, but a lived experience of resurrection power and a participation in Christ's sufferings, culminating in the final resurrection from the dead.

I. The Mandate to Rejoice and the Warning Against Falsehood

Paul begins his self-disclosure with a dual emphasis on internal disposition and external vigilance.

The Safeguard of Joy

Paul commands the Philippians to "Rejoice in the Lord" (3:1). He frames this not as a fleeting emotion but as a disciplined command.

- **Depth of Joy:** Joy rests in a reality deeper than surface-level feelings.
- **A Protective Measure:** Paul explicitly identifies the act of rejoicing as a "safeguard" that preserves and protects the believer from spiritual danger.

The Tripartite Warning

Paul issues a sharp warning against false teachers, employing alliteration (in the original Greek and English equivalent) to characterize those advocating for legalistic requirements like circumcision:

- **The Mutts (Dogs):** In the ancient world, dogs were not pets but scavengers. This term denotes the low character of the false teachers.
- **The Malefactors (Evildoers):** Those whose actions, despite religious pretensions, are inherently harmful.
- **The Mutilators:** A derisive term for those who insist on physical circumcision as a prerequisite for salvation, which Paul views as mere physical mutilation without spiritual value.

II. The Deconstruction of "Confidence in the Flesh"

Paul defines "confidence in the flesh" as putting trust in human heritage or performance as the basis for a right relationship with God. To prove the futility of this approach, Paul presents his own pre-conversion "spiritual resume."

Paul's Heritage and Performance Resume

Category	Detail	Significance
Ritual	Circumcised on the eighth day	Born into an observant family; followed Mosaic Law from birth.
Ethnicity	Of the people of Israel	An heir of the covenant promises and blessings.
Lineage	Of the tribe of Benjamin	Part of a tribe that remained faithful during the kingdom split.

Culture	A Hebrew of Hebrews	Fully immersed in Hebrew language and culture; no Hellenistic compromise.
Adherence	As to the law, a Pharisee	Followed the strictest oral traditions and scrupulous regulations.
Zeal	A persecutor of the church	So committed to Jewish purity that he sought to eliminate the church.
Legal Standing	Under the law, blameless	Maintained perfect standing by all observable outside measures.

Paul's argument is that if anyone had a right to rely on their pedigree or performance, it was him. He possessed the "perfect pedigree" and was a "rising star" within his culture.

III. The Radical Revaluation: From Gain to Loss

Upon encountering the risen Christ, Paul underwent a total "accounting" shift. He utilizes commercial language to describe his transformation.

- **The Accounting Shift:** Paul identifies everything once in his "gain" column (his heritage, status, and achievements) and moves it to the "loss" column for the sake of Christ.
- **The Definition of "Rubbish":** Paul describes his former assets as *skubala* (translated as rubbish or garbage). This term refers to street filth or sewage, indicating that even good things become repulsive if they are used as a substitute for Christ.
- **Righteousness by Faith:** Paul concludes that the righteousness he needs is not something he produces through law-keeping, but a gift from God received through faith.

IV. The Components of Knowing Christ

Paul identifies three specific facets of what it means to "know Christ" in a lived, experiential sense (3:10-11):

1. **Resurrection Power:** Experiencing the same power that brought life from death to take away things leading away from Christ and drawing the believer closer to Him.
2. **Sharing in Sufferings:** Participating in the trials that come from being identified with Christ. This is viewed as a "gift" (cf. Phil 1:29) and a necessary part of intimacy with Him.
3. **Attaining the Resurrection:** Moving toward the "not yet" goal of the final resurrection from the dead, where the body is raised to new life in a new creation.

V. The Single-Minded Pursuit

Paul rejects the idea that he has already achieved perfection. Instead, he describes the Christian life using the imagery of a long-distance runner.

The Mechanics of the "One Thing"

Paul boils down the Christlike mindset to a single, focused action: **"forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead"** (3:13).

- **Forgetting the Past:** This does not mean a loss of memory, but a refusal to let the past—whether good or bad—be "determinative."
 - *The Bad:* People can be paralyzed by guilt over past decisions.
 - *The Good:* People can be held hostage by past accomplishments or pedigree, putting confidence in them rather than Christ.
- **The Runner's Gaze:** Drawing from cross-country imagery, Paul emphasizes locking one's eyes on the goal (Christ). Looking back causes a runner to trip or slow down; looking forward naturally increases the pace.
- **The Motivation:** Paul "presses on" to make the prize his own specifically because "Christ Jesus has made me his own." His effort is a response to being "laid hold of" by Christ.

VI. Final Applications and Thematic Conclusions

The document outlines four primary responses necessary to adopt the mindset demonstrated by Paul:

- **Intellectual Conviction:** Recognizing that knowing Christ is worth more than anything else in existence.
- **Theological Belief:** Accepting that confidence in the flesh—whether based on pedigree (who your parents are) or performance (what you have done lately)—profits nothing.
- **Spiritual Desire:** Cultivating a longing to pursue Christ that remains fresh even after decades of faith.
- **Practical Action:** Identifying and confessing specific areas where one is tempted to put confidence in the flesh (e.g., spiritual "crushing it" during a good week) rather than in the grace of Christ.

Study Guide:

Philippians Session 10 Study Guide: Examples of Christlike Mindset, Part 2 – Paul Himself
(Philippians 3:1-14)

This study guide provides a comprehensive review of Dr. Matthew S. Harmon's analysis of Philippians 3:1-14. In this session, the focus shifts from Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Apostle Paul as the primary example of a Christlike mindset. The passage is divided into two main sections: Paul's negative example (his pre-conversion life) and his positive example (his single-minded pursuit of Christ).

Study Quiz: Short-Answer Questions

1. Why does Paul present the command to "rejoice in the Lord" as a "safeguard" for the Philippians? Paul indicates that joy is more than a fleeting feeling; it is a deep reality that preserves and protects believers from spiritual danger. By grounding their identity in the Lord rather than surface-level emotions or false teachings, believers are shielded from the influence of those who might lead them astray.

2. How does Paul use alliteration in Greek to describe the false teachers in Philippians 3:2? In the original Greek, Paul uses three words beginning with the letter *Kappa* to warn against "dogs," "evildoers," and "those who mutilate the flesh." Dr. Harmon suggests an English equivalent—"mutts, malefactors, and mutilators"—to capture this rhetorical flourish and emphasize the threat these individuals posed to the church.

3. What is the spiritual significance of being "the true circumcision" as described by Paul? Paul argues that believers are the "true circumcision" because they experience the spiritual reality that the physical act was intended to represent: circumcision of the heart. This identity is defined by worshipping by the Spirit of God and glorying in Christ Jesus rather than relying on physical rituals or external requirements.

4. Why was being of the "tribe of Benjamin" a significant point in Paul's pre-conversion resume? When the kingdom of Israel split, the ten northern tribes fell into apostasy, while the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained somewhat more faithful and eventually returned from exile to reestablish the land. By identifying as a Benjamite, Paul highlights his elite heritage as part of a tribe that maintained a more consistent connection to the covenant and the land.

5. How does Paul's former status as a Pharisee inform his description of himself as "blameless" under the law? The Pharisees followed strict oral traditions designed to act as a "fence" around the Mosaic law to prevent even the possibility of violation. When Paul calls himself

"blameless," he is not claiming sinless perfection but asserting that by every observable measure and requirement of the covenant, he was in good standing.

6. What "accounting language" does Paul employ to describe his transition to following

Christ? Paul uses the imagery of a ledger with two columns: "gain" and "loss." He explains that all the religious and social advantages he once placed in the "gain" column have been moved to the "loss" column for the sake of knowing Christ, illustrating that his previous assets are now seen as liabilities.

7. What is the meaning and intensity of the word Paul uses to describe his former advantages

as "rubbish"? The word translated as "rubbish" refers to garbage, excrement, or the waste that flows through streets toward the sewer. Paul uses this graphic term to show that, by comparison, the greatness of knowing Christ makes even his "good" previous accomplishments seem repulsive and worthless.

8. According to the text, what is the source of the righteousness Paul now possesses?

Paul rejects a "righteousness of my own" that comes from personal law-keeping and instead relies on the "righteousness from God." This righteousness is a gift received through faith in Christ, depending entirely on what God has done rather than human performance.

9. What does it mean for Paul to "share in the sufferings" of Christ?

Sharing in Christ's sufferings refers to the hardships that come from being publically identified with Jesus, rather than sufferings that earn favor or atone for sin. Paul views this suffering as a gift and a necessary component of knowing Christ in his fullness.

10. How does Paul distinguish between the "already" and "not yet" aspects of the

resurrection? Paul acknowledges an "already" dynamic where he experiences Christ's resurrection power in his current life to overcome sin. However, he also recognizes a "not yet" reality, noting that he has not yet attained the final resurrection from the dead or reached perfection, which remains his future goal.

Essay Questions

1. **The Rhetoric of Warning:** Analyze Paul's shift from the command to "rejoice" to the harsh warnings against "dogs" and "mutilators." How does the concept of joy function as a protective measure against the specific theological errors Paul describes?
2. **The Anatomy of a Resume:** Examine the seven specific points of Paul's "confidence in the flesh." How do these points build a case for him being a "rising star" in Jewish culture, and why must he systematically devalue them to model a Christlike mindset?

3. **The Accounting of Grace:** Discuss Paul's use of "gain" and "loss" imagery. How does this metaphor challenge the idea that a relationship with God is built on a cumulative list of good deeds or spiritual heritage?
4. **The Power of the Forward Gaze:** Using the athletic imagery of a runner, explain Paul's concept of "forgetting what lies behind." How can both "good" and "bad" pasts become hindrances to spiritual progress, and what does it mean to be "strained forward"?
5. **Righteousness and Performance:** Compare and contrast the "confidence in the flesh" that Paul rejected with modern ways Christians might be tempted to rely on their own "spiritual performance" or "pedigree." How does the text suggest these tendencies should be corrected?

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Accounting Language	Metaphorical terms (gain/loss) used to describe the re-evaluation of one's life assets in light of the value of Christ.
Blameless	In the context of the law, being in good standing according to observable covenant requirements and atonement rituals.
Confidence in the Flesh	Relying on human heritage, rituals, or performance as a basis for being in a right relationship with God.
Dogs	A derogatory term in the ancient world used for scavengers; here, it refers to false teachers threatening the church.
Hebrew of Hebrews	An expression used to emphasize Paul's total immersion in Hebrew culture, language, and tradition.
Mutilators of the Flesh	A disparaging term Paul uses for those who insisted that physical circumcision was a requirement for salvation.
Pharisees	A Jewish sect known for scrupulous adherence to the Mosaic law and additional oral traditions.
Resurrection Power	The life-from-death power that raised Christ, which Paul desires to experience in his daily struggle against sin.
Rubbish (<i>Skubala</i>)	Extremely strong language for garbage, refuse, or human waste; used to describe the worthlessness of self-righteousness.

The Upward Call The prize and goal toward which the Christian presses, culminating in conformity to Christ and the final resurrection.

True Circumcision The spiritual reality of a heart dedicated to God, realized through union with Christ rather than physical ritual.

Zeal Intense commitment; in Paul's pre-conversion life, this was evidenced by his active persecution of the church to preserve Jewish purity.
