

Paul's Resumé
Philippians 3:1–7
April 14, 2019

It's possible my son had the most qualified T-ball coach in Germantown, Tennessee history.

Let me give you what I know of his resumé. To begin, you might ask: did he understand baseball? That seems important. Well, the Florida Marlins thought so, drafting him to pitch in their organization back in 2008.

But does merely being able to play baseball mean one is a good coach? Not necessarily. Could he run a practice, organizing the chaos of five-year-old synergy? He could, in fact. After graduating from West Point, and being drafted by the Marlins, he was called to active duty. In Afghanistan, he did a tour of duty serving as a tank commander. So, as you might imagine, he could lead people. Our T-ball practices were clinics in organization.

But, Matt, some knowledgeable and organized coaches are mean and impatient and have no clue how to handle a kid. While there's not a metric like the Marlins or West Point to answer this question with, you could ask the dozen or so parents on that team. Not only did he know baseball and know how to lead, he was a natural with kids.

Ok, this guy sounds pretty good, I guess. But does he have character? Don't you care about that, Rev? The only reason I knew about him being drafted by the Marlins and temporarily putting that aside to serve our country was because other parents who knew him told me. Though he coached our son for two full years, and we had a number of conversations, he never "worked it in" to a single one of them. He was skilled both on the field and in life. And humble about both.

This is a guy coaching five-year-olds ten minutes from here. I just gave you his resumé. And I'd put it up against any other T-Ball coach in Germantown, Tennessee.

Some people are just more qualified than others. All resumé's are not created equal. In our text, Paul's going to make that assertion. And he'll do so about himself.

And yet, . . . note first:

1. Paul does not place confidence in self.

Verse 1: *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.*

We called this series, "United in Joy," in part because Paul uses the word for joy or rejoice in this brief letter 14 times. And considering Paul writes these words from prison, we ought to keep on the big screen of our minds that he's not referring to a superficial cheerfulness unaware of challenging circumstances.¹ He rejoices when rival preachers envy him (1:18). He rejoices even when considering his potential martyrdom (2:17). In the context of circumstances threatening to rob the Philippians of their Christ-centered joy, facing more dire difficulties himself, Paul keeps saying, "rejoice." I won't speak for you, but no one's ever told me to do that and I've not needed to hear it.

Further, Paul wasn't against repeating himself. He continues in verse 1, *To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.* Many believe he's referring to the instruction to come in verses 2–11.² When he was with the Philippian church 10 years prior, He'd most likely said many of these same things. What's significant is that 10 years later, he didn't have something new or novel to tell them.

¹ Peter O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 349.

² O'Brien, 352; Joseph Hellerman, *Philippians*, EGGNT, 169.

The best pastors and teachers and Christian parents are those that spend their time, not necessarily coming up with innovative or fresh nuances to instruct others in, but in merely reminding.³ We repeat ourselves without reservation when we know that particular instruction is best for those listening to us. “Look both ways when crossing that street.” “Don’t spend everything you earn.”

That’s precisely why Paul’s repeating himself, though his aims are more concerned with the truths of Christ and salvation. But he writes, *to write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you*. So, as we look at what’s to come in the next few verses, we should hear it as coming from one attempting to protect us from danger.⁴ These truths are “safeguards.”⁵

What’s Paul—as something of their spiritual father—worried about? Verse 2: *Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh*. Some translations use the word “beware.”⁶ Whatever word makes you think, “Watch out! Danger!” is probably the best word. Because this isn’t “make sure and use the right fork” teaching; this is “Don’t text while you’re driving” kind of instruction.⁷ To fail to listen might end disastrously. Watch out.

Watch out for *what*? Paul will list three descriptors, each one concerning the same group of people.⁸ It’s not the rival, envious preachers of Philippians 1. They actually preached an orthodox gospel, even if from impure motives. It’s not the Roman authorities or pagan neighbors described as *enemies* at the end of Philippians 1, either, most likely. These dogs, evildoers, and mutilators of the flesh are the Judaizers you likely know from the book of Galatians. According to Joseph Hellerman, the Judaizers were “an aggressive Jewish Christian missionary group stressing circumcision (and therefore the law) for Gentile converts to Christianity, in order to be justified in God’s sight.”⁹ According to them, the believing Gentiles—of which the Philippian church was largely comprised—had to obey aspects of the law, in particular circumcision, if they were to be saved. That was their message.

Paul had strong words for this group in the book of Galatians; he’s not changed his mind here. First, he tells the Philippians to *look out for the dogs*. Now, Paul’s not talking about your purebred labradoodle that curls up next to you while you read, man or woman’s best friend. In this era, dog would’ve been a pejorative term, in part because these animals would feed on filth and garbage. And because of that diet, they were considered unclean. And because Gentiles were also considered unclean, some Jewish people, in particular the Judaizers, would’ve called Gentiles “dogs.”¹⁰ So, in an amazing reversal,¹¹ Paul makes plain, to both Jew and Gentile, what group actually fit that description. Who’s outside of the people of God? The Gentile Philippians weren’t the “dogs”; Paul says the name-callers were.

Then he describes them as *evildoers*. I mentioned a moment ago that these Judaizers were an aggressive missionary group. The NASB goes deeper than calling them *evildoers*; they were *evilworkers*.¹² Calvin comments, “They are busy people who would be better idle.”¹³ It was more than

³ See Jeffrey Arthurs, *Preaching as Reminding*

⁴ Protection, HCSB.

⁵ NASB.

⁶ NASB.

⁷ Some would say this is as contemptuous a line as anything Paul ever wrote. See N. T. Wright, “Paul and the Faithfulness of God,” 362.

⁸ O’Brien, 353.

⁹ Hellerman, 172.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹² It’s likely that they called themselves, “workers.” See O’Brien, 355.

¹³ Quoted in Gerald Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC, 125.

their deeds alone that were evil; they were evil workers themselves. Their aggressive message and motives actually bound people.

The third descriptor is to *look out for those who mutilate the flesh*. What's this referring to? Is this the pagan cutting practices of the Old Testament? No, but that's precisely what Paul calls their flawed practice of circumcision. He has enough respect for Old Covenant circumcision that he won't defile that term in describing this group. Instead, he uses a word found nowhere else in ancient Christian literature.¹⁴ Regardless of what the Judaizers thought, what they did wasn't God-ordained Old Testament circumcision; no, instead Paul derides it as mutilation of the flesh. Further, what they did and proclaimed to others with the aim of being made right with God ended up being a sure sign they were not.¹⁵

Paul makes clear in verse 3 that whatever the true circumcision was,¹⁶ the Judaizers were not, v.3, *For we are the circumcision*. Then he continues, *For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh*.

When Paul says "*we are the circumcision*," he means to include himself and the Philippians, at least.¹⁷ What characterized them as the people of God? He and the Philippians worshipped *by the Spirit of God*. One might assume Paul refers merely to their corporate worship service, as in, when we sing and read Scripture together we do so *by the Spirit of God*. And while Paul won't exclude that, this term for worship is broader.¹⁸ The worship referred to in this phrase concerns the whole of one's life marked by and affected by serving God.¹⁹ And if they do that, that is, serve or worship Him, it's not because of something intrinsic to them or because they've made a good decision. They *worship by the Spirit of God*. The Spirit Himself invaded and changed—one might say "cut"—their hearts. The Spirit did this, not them. That's the true circumcision.

Also, they *glory in Christ Jesus*. Again, Paul looks outside self. Within this term for *glory* are connotations of trust or confidence.²⁰ The true people of God trust in, are confident in, and glory in Someone outside themselves, the person of Christ Jesus.

The last clause is a restatement of *glory in Christ Jesus*, only in negative terms: the true circumcision *put no confidence in the flesh*. The word *flesh* doesn't mean the same thing in every occurrence in the Scriptures, nor even in this letter. Back in chapter 1, Paul used the term to mean his actual physical existence (1:24). We know elsewhere Paul refers to the *works of the flesh* (Gal. 5:17). We have to be careful, however, not to conclude that what is physical is therefore sinful. 1 John would warn against that Gnostic notion.

It seems as if Paul chooses this word because it's the best word to combine two emphases. First, it seems he's hinting back at the "mutilation" of the Judaizers. As one example of their multiple attempts to accrue a pseudo-righteousness, the cutting of the flesh advanced their spiritual standing, so they thought and taught. He's implying here that their practice put undue confidence in the flesh. But more broadly, they taught that to be right with God, there were things *you* must do. Confidence in the flesh points to what their trust is in, at least in part, namely, self.²¹

And if that's not clear enough, Paul explains exactly what he means by confidence in the flesh in our next point. Though he doesn't have confidence in it *now*, he used to. And he did so for good reason.

¹⁴ O'Brien, 356.

¹⁵ Ibid., 357

¹⁶ See Romans 2, for example.

¹⁷ And he means to *exclude* the Judaizers.

¹⁸ Worship is "quite misleading," according to Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 300.

¹⁹ Hellerman, 174.

²⁰ Fee, 301.

²¹ "as a comprehensive expression to denote all that in which human beings place their trust." O'Brien, 364.

2. Even though he has more reason for confidence than others.

It's going to sound like Paul's boasting here. And it should. In fact, he wants it to for verses four through six.

What follows would've been a familiar form to these believers in Philippi. We've mentioned multiple times how in this Roman honor culture, many competed for acclaim.²² They obsessed over rank and titles, as "prizes to be competitively sought."²³ The victors of those ranks and titles displayed them, "on inscriptions erected throughout the colony."²⁴ They hung their pedigree and degrees—one might say their resumé—for all to see, often chiseled in the town square.²⁵

The Philippian Christians were used to this. Roman culture retweeted themselves, liked their own posts, occasionally separated their shoulder patting themselves on the back. Some of the Philippians had likely done it too, at least in their hearts. So, Paul meets them where they are culturally, but for different purposes, namely, to make a point. You like honors? You like bragging about your accomplishments? Watch this.

Verse 4: *though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.* Now, he's *easing* into this, asserting that if the Judaizers can have confidence in their works, or in the flesh, he can too. But then he actually takes it further, v. 4b, *If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.*

All resumé's are not created equal. Though I grew up playing a good bit of baseball, I'd never compare my credentials to that of my son's T-ball coach. We're not even in the same ballpark.²⁶ F. F. Bruce captures what Paul's about to do, "If orthodox pedigree and upbringing, followed by high personal attainment in the religious moral realm, ensured a good standing in the presence of God . . . , Paul need fear no competition."²⁷ Paul's resumé is second to none.²⁸

We've mentioned before that in their Philippian or Roman honors race, they'd begin their inscriptions with inherited honors and follow those with personal accomplishments. Paul does the same. So, here's what he might chisel in Philippi, if he were as vain as the Romans.

A. Inherited Reasons for Confidence

Verse 5: *circumcised on the eighth day.* Some of these items will overlap a bit in significance, but if Paul's attempting to lay out reasons why he could be confident in his Jewish heritage, he'd need to start at the beginning. Therefore, while there are layers of meaning to this phrase, he intends to make clear that he was born to Israelite parents. He went directly from the labor and delivery floor to the church nursery, as it were.

This past week a woman from Julie's and my small town,²⁹ Sparta, TN, was announced as the new head coach for the Lady Vols in Knoxville. Some of you might turn your nose up at that, but for our town of 5000 or so, that's a fairly big deal. And one of the stories about this on the Nashville or Knoxville news had a picture of Kellie as a baby—no more than a month old—holding a tiny little basketball, as if the trajectory of her life were set. Her dad played college ball. Her

²² Hellerman, 47

²³ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ Archeologists have found many of these. See Hellerman, 107.

²⁶ :)

²⁷ Quoted in O'Brien, 366.

²⁸ And he's challenging everyone on Philippi's LinkedIn.

²⁹ And our fellow White County Warrior and South Woodsian: John Jones.

brother went to high school with me and was Mr. Basketball for the state of Tennessee. The die was cast. She was born into a basketball family.

While that's not a one-to-one comparison, in essence Paul's saying, "I was born into this." By at least the eighth day, which assumes the previous seven, his parents were serious about their faith. If you're going to compose a resumé, and you've got something for day number eight, that's a decent start.

There's a Christian version of this too, that can be both helpful and harmful. "I was born into it."

Paul grabs the chisel to make his next point, v. 5, *of the people of Israel*. For the Judaizers, purity—even genealogical purity, mattered. Many of the Jewish people took their privilege and made it ethnocentric, as if God chose them because of something particularly good about them.³⁰ *So what* if your parents circumcised you on the eighth day. Even those lesser Gentiles of Tarsus could decide later in life they wanted to join our people, and we'd let them in with a bit of chagrin. Paul, were your parents of the right stock? This is what *of the people of Israel* means. "People" concerned racial descent,³¹ or genealogical purity.³² It wasn't just that His parents made this decision later. They were purebred Israelites.

Paul grabs the chisel, v. 5, *of the tribe of Benjamin*. Interestingly, Paul—the apostle formerly known as Saul—³³ came from the same tribe as the first King of Israel, too named Saul. We know that Israel had tribes, but so did the Romans. If you were to look at one of the chiseled pillars full of honors in Philippi, they'd often list the tribe they belonged to. It was an inherited honor, but one that marked them with even more certainty as a Roman citizen.³⁴ It was to their advantage to know their genealogy with that kind of specificity.

If I wanted to make the case that I'm as Memphis as it comes, I might tell you that my mom can trace our Tennessee lineage to 9 generations. Or that my fifth great-grandfather, Cornelius Patrick, came to Shelby County in 1835. In essence, I didn't choose 901; it chose me.

But that's a significantly lesser argument than Paul's. Some of you in this room can likely beat it. He traces his back a good bit more than 184 years.³⁵ So, once again, in a form familiar to the quasi-Roman audience, he's asserting that he's a true Israelite. He can trace his descent through a particular, and highly regarded, tribe.³⁶

All of these statements are terse, pointed, and staccato-like. This isn't because Paul couldn't write a long sentence. We know better.³⁷ When you're chiseling nouns into stone, anyone can learn brevity. Paul has one more inherited honor in v. 5, *a Hebrew of Hebrews*. Though Paul was born in Tarsus,³⁸ based on Acts 22 we learn that his parents likely made it possible for him to spend his boyhood years in Jerusalem before entering the school of the famed Pharisee Gamaliel as a teenager. His parents, and he himself, labored to avoid assimilation into the Gentile culture of Tarsus.³⁹ Even when in the minority, even when it was awkward, they'd been faithfully Jewish.⁴⁰ This phrase most

³⁰ Contra Deuteronomy 7.

³¹ O'Brien, 370.

³² Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar Commentary, 223.

³³ It's also likely that Saul was his Hebrew name and Paul his Greek name. See

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/no-saul-the-persecutor-did-not-become-paul-the-apostle/>

³⁴ Hellerman, 177.

³⁵ Don't check that.

³⁶ O'Brien, 371.

³⁷ Ephesians 1, for example.

³⁸ In modern-day Turkey.

³⁹ O'Brien, 372; Hellerman, 178.

⁴⁰ Dan Wallace, Greek scholar, notes that this might signify, "the most Hebrew person of all." *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 298; Hellerman pushes against this interpretation a bit.

likely would also include Paul's family as one that spoke Hebrew, in distinction from those Israelites that merely spoke Greek.⁴¹ In essence, Paul was culturally Hebrew, counterculturally so.

He inherited all these Jewish honors. At eight days old, it was who he was. Before he'd arrived, his parents were ethnically Jewish. And even before his parents, he could trace his lineage. Finally, throughout his young life, he'd been protected from the influences of the pagan Greek world. These were inherited reasons for confidence, were the goal to be Jewish.

But Paul had also done something with those privileges. Note his achievements as reasons to be confident.

B. Achieved Reasons for Confidence

Paul's going to list three outward reasons—when combined with the four inherited honors—that sum up his case as to why he could be more confident than even the best of Judaizers. First, at the end of verse 5, *as to the law, a Pharisee*. This is the only place, outside the Gospels and Acts, where we see the Pharisees mentioned.⁴² But we spent a good bit of time with these guys in the Gospel of Luke. These 6000 or so men carried significant—if not the most—influence within Palestinian Judaism in this era.⁴³ They didn't merely adhere to the law of Moses, they also endeavored—and most often succeeded—in observing their own interpretations of that law, to the tune of a thousand or more extra commandments.⁴⁴

What's all that matter? Well, if there were a works-righteousness to achieve, these were the most likely of all people to achieve it. Furthermore, Paul had been taught personally by the Pharisee of Pharisees himself, Gamaliel. If you're trying to convince someone of your preaching resumé in 19th century Britain, you might note that you studied with Charles Spurgeon. In essence, Paul studied the law with the chief Pharisee—and he doesn't mean that negatively here—and he's observed it as no other. He's saying, "Look at my calendar. Video my life." *As to the law, a Pharisee*.

He continues, chiseling away in v. 6, *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church*. We might hear this negatively—and we should—but those who thought Christians taught falsehood wouldn't. In fact, Paul's eagerness to pursue and chase down the gathered believers would be something to boast about among the most zealous of Jewish people.⁴⁵ For many, this is key to the resumé.

The third achievement chiseled probably functions as the culmination, or the Hebrew high-point, of these achievements. Verse 6b, *as to righteousness under the law, blameless*. The essence of this resumé has to do with righteousness. What is it that makes one righteous? In verse 6, he speaks to a righteousness by the law.

Does this mean Paul thought himself to be sinless? No, but neither did the Pharisees. Their claim was that they scrupulously kept the written and oral Torah.⁴⁶ Peter O'Brien writes, "In his observance of the Old Testament law, *as interpreted along Pharisaic lines*, he had become blameless."⁴⁷

This largely has to do with others, meaning, first, that others—including other Pharisees—would look at his life and would not be able to cast blame, in particular concerning his *outward* adherence to the Law. We saw in Luke that this is what mattered most to this crowd: outward

⁴¹ Hellerman, 177.

⁴² O'Brien, 373.

⁴³ Hellerman, 178.

⁴⁴ O'Brien, 374.

⁴⁵ Psalm 106:30–31 would even be a legitimate text to appeal to, insofar as it applauds Phinehas' zeal in Numbers 25. Of course, that's not a one-to-one comparison to today, but some Jewish men or women likely would've interpreted Paul's zeal in those terms. See Hellerman, 179.

⁴⁶ Hellerman, 180.

⁴⁷ O'Brien, 379; emphasis mine.

appearance.⁴⁸ So, first, he was blameless to others' perception. But, also, keep in mind verse four when Paul said, *If anyone thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.* Paul also has in mind, in his pre-converted state, his righteousness as compared to others. He's thinking horizontally righteous more than vertically righteous. He could look at others and could confidently state, "My resumé of righteousness is unsurpassed."

We noted first that Paul didn't place confidence in self. We just saw—in clear detail—that he didn't do so *even though* he had more reason for confidence than others, both inherently and in achievement.

So why didn't he place confidence in self?

3. Because it'd be a false confidence.

Verse 7: *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

We all need to put on our accounting cap here. Both the terms for "gain" and "loss" are accounting terms, picturing something of a balance sheet for "assets" and "liabilities." An asset would be something of future economic benefit and a liability something of future obligation. Those might be described as something that you already own and something that you will one day owe.

Paul doesn't mince words; at one point he had gain. Real assets. He'd added them one by one to his portfolio. In career terms, he was piling up degrees and experience for the most impressive of resumé. And these gains weren't merely advantages with humanity; for Paul they were gains with God Himself.⁴⁹

We noted those gains in verses 4–6. But suddenly one day, we can safely assume on a road to Damascus, the bottom line looked different. Drastically so. Verse 7, *But whatever gain I had, I counted. . .* The tense of this verb for counted is something unique to the Greek language.⁵⁰ They had a tense of verb that wouldn't be merely past tense nor merely present tense. Instead it's a past tense verb that includes present results. It continues into the present.⁵¹

So, what Paul might say here is this, *But whatever gain I had, I counted and continue to count . . . as loss.* The stocks crashed. Paul had the most impressive resumé of all his contemporaries, or the most profitable portfolio in the land. He received some of it by nature. Much of it he spent his life accruing. And now he calls it loss. Liability.

You might imagine someone with ten years of seminary confidently handing their resumé to a Wall Street tycoon in the hopes of becoming a successful investment banker. It's folly. Everything he or she worked for and gained on that resumé would be in vain.

That's bad. But Paul's actually saying something worse. The gains didn't just keep him from a goal. They were actually serving as a disadvantage, damaging him. Those gains were, O'Brien notes, "not simply indifferent or unimportant, but as positively harmful. . . liabilities that were working to destroy him."⁵²

When I lived in Sparta, I served at a church for a few years. One of the deacons there owned a tractor company in town. And he was almost universally respected as winsome, faithful, and a hard worker. We knew each other pretty well, camping together a few times.

I'd been gone about 10 years when I heard that he'd been arrested. He'd convinced more than 50 people—mostly in our small town—to invest millions of dollars in a Ponzi scheme. He had

⁴⁸ See this sermon: <http://www.southwoodsbc.org/sermons/jesus-talks-religion-at-dinner/>

⁴⁹ O'Brien, 384.

⁵⁰ The Greek Perfect Tense.

⁵¹ "The perfect should be given it's full force." Hellerman, 181.

⁵² O'Brien, 383; 385.

so much respect in the community as a businessman that people trusted his pitch, over and over again. He ended up losing over 10 million of that small town's dollars. 70-year-old men I'd prayed with in the hospital lost much of their retirement. I could tell you a few other stories of the fallout, but let's just say it's about as bad as you could imagine.

Now, how do you think those men and women—even this former deacon—now think of those momentary gains? The way Paul describes it here: works righteousness is a scam. You might think you're gaining, keeping up appearances. You might get more and more confident in the returns. But, in the end, it's a house of cards. It's a false confidence.

Paul uses "gain" here in the plural and "loss" in the singular. All those momentary gains he listed in verses four through six—one after another after another—added up to one great loss. Jesus might say it this way, *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?* (Mark 8:36).

Now you can see why Paul said, "Look out for, beware of, the dogs, the evildoers, those who would tell you to trust in and depend upon self." If you saw that former deacon knocking on your parent's door, you'd run him off. You love them and know that any short-term gain would be long-term harm. Paul became convinced that when the day of reckoning came, our resumé or portfolio wouldn't do. His was significantly better than all of ours. And it didn't come close.

Ultimately, why did Paul consider these gains as loss? Because the righteousness the Judaizers proclaimed was the kind of righteousness that keeps your eyes on self. And when eyes are on self, you miss the Christ. Verse 7: *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

Let's state the matter plainly: If you have confidence in the flesh, you've not met Jesus. Maybe you're confident because you've compared yourself to others? Or maybe you're valuing momentary gain? Either way, you've not seen Him for who He is. What you're depending on will fail you; it's a false confidence.

We'll start with this verse next week, but we must conclude at least reading verse 8. Because it's not merely his Jewish resumé Paul counts as loss. Verse 8: *Indeed, I count everything as loss.* Why? Because there's something better, Someone worth placing confidence in: v. 8, *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*