



PHILIPPIANS

(For access to all available commentaries and written sermons of Charlie's click [HERE](#))

...though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: Philippians 3:4

The Greek literally reads, "...even though myself having confidence." The English translation gives the correct sense based on his later words, but at the moment, he is placing himself on the same level with the Jews and comparing himself against them. In essence, "You Jews have confidence in the flesh, well so do I!" Again, he really does not, but for the intent of what he will say to them, he is calling to mind that he is not less than them in what could be boasted on.

If he were to boast like others, it would be of his human nature of which he will give a detailed description in the coming verses. And so to bolster his certain ability to boast, he continues with, "If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so..." He is setting up the "mutilation" of verse 2 (meaning those Jews who circumcise the flesh, but not the heart) for a fall. He would not begin an argument unless he was certain he could prevail in it.

Paul's "more so" will be an astonishing resume of lineage and learning which will place him at the very top of Hebrew society. Yay for Paul! But is this what life is about? Instead, he will eventually come around to showing just what those things mean in comparison to having Christ.

Life application: What thing in your life do you think you have a right to boast in? Do you have a nice house? Do you have a lot of money? Are you handsome or beautiful? Do you have a remarkable genealogy that includes kings and zillionaries? What is it that you feel is the most

valuable part of who you are? If you say anything other than “Jesus Christ,” you have your priorities completely out of whack.

...circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; Philippians 3:5

Paul now begins his list of things that could give him “confidence in the flesh.” First on his list is that he was “circumcised the eighth day.” It is the badge of the Jew and the rite goes all the way back to Genesis 17 at the time of Abraham. There the Lord said to Abraham –

“Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹ and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. ¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. ¹³ He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.” Genesis 17:10-13

Being circumcised on the eighth day meant that he was not only in the covenant people, but that he was received into the covenant people, having been circumcised according to this ancient rite on his eighth day of life. No mere proselyte was he, but one with the lineage of Abraham himself.

Next he says that he is “of the stock of Israel.” This is an emphasis concerning what he just noted. Another person could have been born of another nation and circumcised on the eighth day, but he was of the true line of Abraham, through Isaac, and through Jacob who is Israel. He bore in his blood the royalty of the patriarchs.

Thirdly, he says that he was of “the tribe of Benjamin.” He has identified his status within the circumcision, then his status within the national lineage of Israel. Now he further defines the national identity by showing what portion of that group he belongs to, which is “the tribe of Benjamin.” This was a high honor indeed. Israel's first king, Saul, was of the tribe of Benjamin. Further, the tribe was almost annihilated due to a case of disobedience leading to war against them by the other tribes. They were reduced to a mere 600 men (see judges 20). Members of this tribe also sided with David during his pre-ruling years. They actually supported him in opposition to the king who belonged to their own tribe (see 1 Chronicles 12). These, along with other noted accounts, could be considered a point of boasting.

Fourth, he says that he is “a Hebrew of Hebrews.” The term “Hebrew” was first used of Abraham in Genesis 14:13. It signifies one who has “crossed over.” The name is derived from

Abraham's ancestor Eber who was probably the eldest generation of those who "crossed over" the river in a move away from the area of Babel. From there, a spiritual connection was made to the physical move. They eventually "crossed over" from idolatry to worshipping the true God. Thus, they were set apart from the other nations. The term "Hebrew" is used in the Bible to show a distinction between the people groups. There are the Hebrew people, and this group is contrasted to all foreigners. Even though Paul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, he had, like his fathers, retained this identity. They remained apart from those around them in cultural and national identity.

Finally in this verse, he notes, "concerning the law, a Pharisee." Not only was he a Jew who lived under the Law of Moses, he was the epitome of those who held to the law. The Pharisees were known to be the strictest adherents to the faith, and they meticulously lived out every precept as perfectly as they could. They went through intense studies of the law, even from youth, and they had built up a system of life that necessitated their absolute adherence to every fine point of the law and even beyond. Theirs was the leading group of "holy men" to whom everyone else looked to for their certainly notable lives. In Acts 23:6, he notes that he was not only a Pharisee, but he was "the son of a Pharisee." He was of this tradition, and it went back even before himself.

Life application: Paul could surely boast in these things if they were worth boasting in. He possessed the highest connections to the social and religious life of the people from whom Christ came. Surely if anyone could merit God's favor apart from the work of Jesus, it would be this guy. But to Paul, only Christ mattered. Where is your boast? In what are you placing your hopes?

...concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. Philippians 3:6

Paul gives a completion to the list of his points of earthly boasting in this verse. It is not that he is actually boasting in them, but that if he were to boast, it would be in these things. He notes, "...concerning zeal, persecuting the church." There is an irony in this thought. As it says in Galatians 1:23 –

"He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to* destroy."

Paul was definitely zealous towards those things he was passionate about. Before coming to Christ, he lived as a Pharisee. In this position, he felt that the church was the aberrant sect, and that he must do everything possible in order to stamp it out.

In Romans 10:2, he shows how Israel which had not called on Jesus was in the same position –

“For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”

Without understanding the Person and work of Christ, there remained a zeal within the Jewish community for the Law of Moses which established them as a people. It is natural for one to be zealous about such things. However, Christ is the end of the law for all who believe. Therefore, the zeal is misdirected. In this misdirected condition, he was zealous for persecuting the church. He notes this specifically numerous times in his other letters. For example, he says this in 1 Corinthians 15:9 –

“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

He also notes this in Galatians 1:13 & 1:23, and he hints at it in 1 Timothy 1:13. Even more, the book of Acts describes his efforts in detail concerning his persecution of the church. If he were still one who held to the law as necessary, he would be able to boast more than anyone about this matter. But he goes on. He next says, “...concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

This was the righteousness of which Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:23 –

“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

The scribes and the Pharisees were meticulous in how they observed the law, carefully following every precept. They held so fast to the law that they felt they had merited God’s favor because of it, considering themselves blameless. However, this showed that they didn’t really understand the law as well as they may have. Within the law was the mandatory Day of Atonement which they were required to observe. The fact that this was required should have shown them that they still needed mercy. As this is so, their righteousness was still lacking. This is why Jesus said that a person’s righteousness needed to exceed that of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Paul was only righteous before the law insofar as he held to every precept externally, but he needed an internal change to grant him true righteousness. This will be realized in his coming words.

Life application: When someone does something truly harmful in the name of their religion, it is because they really believe it is the right thing to do. What they need is to be shown the truth of Jesus Christ. This is why missionaries go even into Islamic nations. They are willing to put their own lives at risk in order to show these wayward souls that the path they believe is

incorrect. When we can empathize with the viewpoint of others, we can then work to correct their faulty views of what God expects of each of us.