

**Please turn with me in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 3. We will be focusing our attention this morning on verses 4 through 7. Last time we were together we saw Paul's rebuttal against the false teachers who had crept into the Church at Philippi. He argued in verse 3, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." This morning our text will continue this thought, focusing out attention of the Christian's confidence. Hear now the Word of the Lord from Philippians chapter 3 beginning at verse 4.**

**\*Read Philippians 3:4-7\***

**\*Pray\***

**All of us have a problem. Some of have a more difficult time with this problem than others, but I promise every person on earth has this same problem. We all have indwelling sin remaining within our hearts. Many in the world have nothing but sin within their hearts, while those who are in Christ have had the reign of sin destroyed but there remains the fallen nature, a remnant of the old sinful man. That remnant, that remaining indwelling sin in the heart of the believers, leads us all to believe and embrace all sorts of falsehoods. That's what made the false teachers in Philippi so dangerous; those who were Christians within the Church might be persuaded by them and convinced by their sinful hearts to follow the false practices of the Judaizers. We aren't any different. It baffles me sometimes how people can get suckered into false teachings and heresies and cults, and then I am reminded that sin is deceptive and the heart can easily deceive. And this happens to each and every one of us. We may never, Lord willing, be deceived by such a great false teaching as the Judaizers of Philippi or the papists and federal visionists of today, but we are all prone at times to be deceived by our own hearts to believe falsehoods and to embrace an errant view of the faith. There's a famous quote by John Calvin that says, "The human heart is a perpetual idol factory." This is so true. How hearts are so prone to invent and embrace idols of all different sorts. Paul addresses here one of the idols of the Judaizers, something that was**

**foundational to their false teaching, and something which we are all prone to as well. He addresses the issue of where these false teachers find their confidence and where the Christian is to find his. The exhortation to you this morning is to let your confidence be found only in Christ. We will consider this exhortation under three headings: first, vain confidence in pedigree; next, vain confidence in self-righteousness; and finally, true confidence in Christ.**

**So let us first consider Paul's teaching regarding vain confidence in pedigree. Look with me at verse 4 and the beginning of verse 5, "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews." Paul continues his rebuttal of the false teachers here by showing the vanity of their claims, namely the necessity of Old Covenant ceremonial observance for the New Covenant believer. He begins his address against their confidence in the flesh by highlighting that if pedigree were of importance he would be the most prominent. He was circumcised the eighth day. The meaning is, that he was circumcised in the proper manner, and according to the appointment of the law. This customary circumcision was reckoned by the Jews to be of superior value as well as a token of the race to which he belonged. He was not some foreigner who had received circumcision as a proselyte either as a young boy or a grown man. No, Paul was a Jew from the start, and even the earliest moments of his life were wrapped up in being a Jew. He says he is of the stock of Israel. He could trace his lineage all the way back to that great patriarch, something which would have earned him respect within the Jewish community. There was no intermingling of blood in his lineage; no one in his family tree has defiled themselves by intermarrying with the Gentiles.**

**He goes on to say that he is of the tribe of Benjamin, of the lineage of that favored son, the last born of Jacob and Rachel. He was of the tribe out of which Israel's first king had come, very likely where his given name came from. This is also one of the tribes which**

had made up the southern kingdom of Judah during the time of the divided kingdom, which stayed more faithful to Jehovah than those of the northern kingdom. And lastly, he says he is an Hebrew of the Hebrews. There is no one who can claim a more pure pedigree than Paul. Everything about his life and his family and his lineage speaks to the purity of his blood and his fidelity to the race. These Judaizers were teaching that in order to become a Christian, in order to be justified, one had to be a Jew outwardly as well. Paul is saying that if being a Jew were what it took to be justified in the sight of the Lord then no one could even come close to his resume. And yet this is understood to vanity. He bring up his own pedigree to show the foolishness of finding one's confidence in such a trivial thing.

But you may be sitting there thinking that this would be absurd for someone today to do. No one puts their confidence in their pedigree. I would say that if we are talking about explicitly then you are true. But what about implicitly? What about internally? Are you tempted to put your confidence in the fact that, by God's grace, you were raised in a Christian home and protected from the rabid wickedness of the world? How easy it is to begin to think you are better than someone else because you had it easier in life, because you were in church growing up while they were gang-banging on the streets. Or perhaps another example which may hit closer to home, especially to the children among us. Are you tempted to think that because you were baptized as an infant, like Paul was circumcised on the eighth day, puts you in a place of superiority over those who came to faith later in life and received believer's baptism? Or are you tempted to think because you are what's called a blue-blood, that you come from a long line of Reformed Presbyterians, that this somehow makes you better? Friends, let it never be so. Children, please listen to me carefully. Do not think just because you have been baptized, raised in a Christian home, or raised in the RP Church that you have confidence before God. When you stand before the judgement seat of Jehovah your pedigree will mean nothing. You must look at those things, recognizing the great blessings they are, but also recognizing that they are but vanity if

**you have not been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb and will be used as testimony against you in that last great day.**

**But it is not only one's pedigree which Paul addresses here in our passage, but also the vain confidence in self-righteousness. Continue with me in our passage, "As touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Paul brings up the fact that not only does he have as pure a lineage as possible, not only has he been a Jew from birth, not only is he an Hebrew of the Hebrews, but he voluntarily took it a step further and became a Pharisee. The Pharisees were those who were overcome with a zeal for the law and sought to obey every one of the 613 laws of the Old Covenant in the strictest way possible. Their study of the Torah far exceeded anything the average Jew would have done. Paul himself received his instruction under the famed Gamaliel. He was one of those who would have joined in the rebuke of Christ for healing on the Sabbath or gleaning grain on the Sabbath. If these Judaizers were boasting in their keeping of the law then Paul put them to shame with his. His zeal for the law was unmatched, so much so that he was willing to persecute even the Church for their supposed breaking of it. This was a man who ordered, supported, and witnessed the systematic execution of those first Christians. Calvin writes, "It was, indeed, a very heinous sin on the part of Paul to persecute the Church, but as he had to dispute with unprincipled persons, who, by mixing up Christ with Moses, pretended zeal for the law, he mentions, on the other hand, that he was so keen a zealot of the law, that on that ground he persecuted the Church."**

**This zeal, this pretended zeal, was the driving factor in everything Paul did prior to his conversion. And according to the standards of the Pharisees, he was blameless. As far as the Pharisees' exposition of the law went, and as to the mere letter of the law and outward observance of it, he could acquit himself from the breach of it and could not be accused by any. Charles Simeon writes, "His zeal also, though not according to knowledge, was particularly**

earnest; insomuch that, touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless; and he opposed the Gospel to the uttermost, because he thought it subverted the law of Moses.”The righteousness Paul speaks of here is not the righteousness of Christ which is imputed unto believers, but a false righteousness, a self-righteousness, which comes when one divorces the law from the lawgiver and seeks simply to obey the letter of it. This form of righteousness was what the false teachers were advocating for, and Paul had exceeded all expectations regarding it. All this was enough to have made a proud Jew confident, and was sufficient to set up with for his justification. And yet it too was vanity. He knows that one’s own self-righteousness could never merit anything but eternal hellfire. He knew what the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 64:6, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” He understood the words of Christ in Matthew 5:20, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

So what about you? Are you tempted to find your confidence in your self-righteousness, in your knowledge of the Word, in your study of doctrine, in your purity of practice? I will admit to you that this is where my heart is tempted the most, to make these things idols, and to place my confidence in them. We ought to be increasing in our knowledge of the Word. We ought to love studying the doctrines that God has revealed unto us and seek to understand them better. We ought to be reforming our practice, both personally and corporately, seeking to cast off those things which are not founded upon the precepts of the Lord and uphold a purity in practice. But friends, those things will not be what brings you into the kingdom of God. You can be more knowledgable than any Biblical scholar out there and yet still find yourself cast in the lake of fire. You can be able to articulate sound Reformed doctrine greater than Calvin or Knox or Turretin and yet still hear the Savior say, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” You

can have the most pure practice, seeking to obey the law as strictly as possible; you can have the most pure doctrine, undefiled by the teachings of men; you can have the most pure worship, untainted by the traditions and innovations of man; and yet you can still find yourself in utter darkness. If your confidence before the Lord is found in your self-righteousness then you are no better than the Pharisees who cried out to see Christ Jesus crucified. There is no hope found in mere observance of the law. It is but vanity.

So where can hope be found? Where may the believer find his confidence? The Christian can only ever have true confidence in Christ. Look with me at verse 7, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” Those things which the Jews held so dear, those things which brought him a state of prominence in the community, those things which the Judaizers would have been envious to possess, Paul counts them all as loss. This is the power of the Gospel. The most precious things of this world become worthless when compared to the everlasting treasure which is found in Christ. He counted them loss; not only insufficient to enrich him, but what would certainly impoverish and ruin him, if he trusted to them, in opposition to Christ. He was not telling the saints at Philippi to do anything he had not already done, namely forsake everything for the sake of the Gospel. The things of this world, the things of man’s religion, the things of tradition, one’s own pedigree, even one’s own self-righteousness can never be counted at gain because they gain nothing but everlasting death. Those things which Paul once took pride in as marks of his right standing before Jehovah he now understands were hinderances in the way of his coming to Christ. Those things had to be shed off, stripped away, his confidence in them removed, if he were to have a right relationship with Christ.

And so on the road to Damascus Christ Jesus removed that confidence in the flesh from him. The Spirit worked in this man, a Pharisee, and murderer of Christians, and took out his heart of stone and gave him a heart of flesh. When the scales fell away from his eyes he was given the gift of new sight. No longer did he see his

pedigree as something to boast in but as something which the Lord used to lay the foundation for the work he was to do in spreading the Gospel throughout the world. No longer did he see his self-righteousness as a means of justification before the Father but instead as filthy rags that were defiled and unholy. No longer did he see Christ Jesus as a blasphemer and a traitor, one seeking to draw away faithful Jews unto some new fringe false religion, but instead as the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Messiah spoken of old who delivers His people out of the house of bondage. He saw Christ not merely as a Prophet, a Priest, or a King, but as that very Teacher who had opened his eyes; that very Lamb that had taken away his sins; that very Head, to whom he himself was vitally united, and from whom he derived all his supplies of grace and strength. Oh, what a glorious transformation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has on even the most vile of sinners! No longer did Paul have a vain confidence in the flesh, but he now had a true confidence in Christ.

So let me ask you, where is your confidence found? Is it in the things of the world, the possessions that you take so much pride in, the heritage and pedigree of your family name, the self-righteousness of your own works which without Christ are as filthy rags; or is your confidence found in the Lord Jesus Christ, maker of heaven and earth, the only begotten of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, the savior and redeemer of mankind? If you are here today and your confidence is not in Christ Jesus then you are in grave danger. The day will come when you will stand before the Father in heaven and give an account for your life. Your pedigree will be laughed at when brought as a defense. Your self-righteousness will be mocked when appealed to before the throne of judgement. Jesus Christ is the only one with a perfect pedigree for He is the Son of God; He is the only one whose righteousness is worthy of being accepted by the Father for it is a perfect righteousness. Unless you are in Him, unless you have been made a child of God and co-heirs with Christ, unless your filthy rags have been stripped off and you have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ, then you have no hope; you have no confidence. Come unto

**Christ this day, repent and believe the Gospel, turn from your sins and turn unto Christ, forsake your vain confidence in the flesh and receive true confidence in Him. Do not let this moment pass you. And if you are in Him and yet you find your idol factory tempting you to find confidence in yourself, cry out to the Lord to strengthen you and to fight this indwelling sin which seeks to wreak havoc in your heart. He is a gracious Father; He will provide you through the Spirit who dwells within you everything you need to find full confidence in Christ.**

**All of us possess something which we account gain. Some are more elevated by birth or fortune, others by education and learning: some value themselves on their moral qualities; others on their religious attainments: let us freely acknowledge the gain which may be found in these things: but let us never forget that there is one thing of infinitely greater value than all those together, and for which our gain must be accounted loss. To have a distinct experimental knowledge of Christ, to be able to say, "He has loved me, and given himself for me," is of more value than ten thousand worlds: it is that, and that alone, which can ever comfort, sanctify, or save the soul. Let us then seek to know Christ and him crucified, and to "grow in the knowledge of him," till we "see him as we are seen, and know him as we are known." Brothers and sisters, forsake all and let your confidence be found only in Christ.**