“Be glad” even facing false teachers
(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 3 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 1-2, printed below)

1 So then, my brothers and sisters, be glad in the Lord. It’s no trouble for me to repeat the same things to you because they will help keep you on track. 2 Watch out for the “dogs.” Watch out for people who do evil things. Watch out for those who insist on circumcision, which is really mutilation.

Without their setting, these two verses don’t seem to fit together. “Be glad in the Lord”—that’s Paul, focused on joy. “Watch out for the ‘dogs’”—watch out for people who do evil things”—oops! Where’d the joy go, Paul? But there was tension in the Philippian church, we learned last week (as in any church made up of humans). In verse 2, Paul warned about “those who insist on circumcision.” He knew their “earn your way” approach to faith would rob all Christians of their God-given joy.

- Our culture generally loves dogs. Not so in New Testament times: non-Jews “remained Gentile outsiders, ‘dogs’ as some Jews referred to them. (Dogs in the ancient world were mostly wild and verminous, not often family pets.)” * Paul was ironically turning the insult around. The real “dogs,” he said, were those who called Gentile converts “dogs” if they didn’t keep the full Jewish law. What people have you seen Christians treat as “dogs”? How can you avoid doing that?
- We might think, “Letter of joy?” Easy, happy reading.” Frederick Buechner didn’t expect just that of Paul: “Paul’s mads were madder and his blues bluer, his pride prouder and his humbleness humbler, his strengths stronger and his weaknesses weaker than almost anybody else’s…and the splash he made when he fell for Christ is audible still.” ** As a young man Paul had “insisted on circumcision” (cf. Acts 7:55–8:1) with deadly fervor. What did and didn’t Jesus change in him?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your life offered all of us grace and a place with a God who loves relentlessly. Help me never to distort that message by denying grace to people who aren’t just like me. Amen.

A list of abandoned spiritual “assets”

TUESDAY 9.22.20  Philippians 3:3-7

(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 3 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 3-7, printed below)

3 We are the circumcision. We are the ones who serve by God’s Spirit and who boast in Christ Jesus. We don’t put our confidence in rituals performed on the body, 4 though I have good reason to have this kind of confidence. If anyone else has reason to put their confidence in physical advantages, I have even more:
5 I was circumcised on the eighth day.
I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin.
I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews.
With respect to observing the Law, I’m a Pharisee.
6 With respect to devotion to the faith, I harassed the church.
With respect to righteousness under the Law, I’m blameless.
7 These things were my assets, but I wrote them off as a loss for the sake of Christ.

Paul answered Christian teachers (cf. verse 2) who said circumcision was an act God still required of all Gentile men. They often called themselves “the circumcision.” Paul, raised as a devout Jew, listed his human credentials. He knew circumcision was a physical sign of God’s “enduring” covenant with Abraham (cf. Genesis 17:13). But the apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, had agreed that in Christ’s new covenant of grace and love that was not required of Gentile converts (cf. Acts 15:1-21).

• Christianity’s roots were and are, of course, in Judaism. We value the Hebrew Scriptures, often called the Old Testament, as a part of God’s self-revelation. Because of the fuller picture Jesus gave us of God, we do not apply all Old Testament requirements, including circumcision. In what ways do we commit our bodies as a part of our faith? Are there physical signs of the Christian faith?

• Many professionals keep a current summary of their accomplishments. Doctors, professors, authors, musicians and others often update their CV (Curriculum Vitae — Latin for “course of life”). When Paul’s critics said he wasn’t “holy” enough by their standards, he replied with a first-century version of his CV. If you were writing a CV to your Christian readers, what would you include?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of relationship that doesn’t depend on our successes. Help us to live into the covenant you have made with us based on your unconditional love for your people. Amen.

“The righteousness of God that is based on faith”

WEDNESDAY 9.23.20  Philippians 3:8-11

(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 3 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 8-11, printed below)

8 But even beyond that, I consider everything a loss in comparison with the superior value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have lost everything for him, but what I lost I think of as sewer trash, so that I might gain Christ 9 and be found in him. In Christ I have a righteousness that is not my own and that does not come from the Law but rather from the faithfulness of Christ. It is the righteousness of God that is based on faith.
10 The righteousness that I have comes from knowing Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the participation in his sufferings. It includes being conformed to his death 11 so that I may perhaps reach the goal of the resurrection of the dead.
In the film *The Greatest Showman*, vandals burned down the building that housed Barnum’s circus. In the wreckage, Phillip Carlyle said, “You know, Barnum…when I first met you…I had an inheritance, acclaim, an invitation to every party in town. And now, thanks to you, all that’s gone. All that’s left is friendship, love and work that I adore. You brought joy into my life.” The apostle Paul wrote a remarkably similar message to the Philippians about how making Jesus his Lord had changed his life.

- Paul said he came to see all his human credentials—his top-notch rabbinic education (cf. *Acts 22:3*), his renown as a religious leader, his respectability and status—as “sewer trash” compared to the value of knowing Jesus. Of what achievements, degrees or awards, if any, are you particularly proud? Would you rank knowing Jesus above them? Why or why not?
- “In Christ,” Paul wrote, “I have a righteousness that is not my own and that does not come from the Law but rather from the faithfulness of Christ. It is the righteousness of God that is based on faith.” What basis for confidence and self-worth did Paul claim, rather than relying on his own achievements? Is whatever righteousness you believe you have “your own,” or does your confidence rest fully on God’s gracious gift of divine righteousness through Christ?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, as I read Paul’s description of his life, my prayer is, in the words of the classic hymn, “Live out thy life within me, O Jesus, king of kings.” Dwell in my heart and keep shaping my existence. Amen.

“The goal I pursue”

**THURSDAY 9.24.20 Philippians 3:12-15**

*(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 3 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 12-15, printed below)*

12 It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose. 13 Brothers and sisters, I myself don’t think I’ve reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. 14 The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus. 15 So all of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, and if anyone thinks differently, God will reveal it to him or her.

The apostle Paul testified that his overarching goal was to grow into all God called him to be. As *The Message* rendered these verses, he said, “I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me….I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.” *

- Pastor/writer Frederick Buechner said, “Our mass culture…[says] the only thing that really matters about your work is how much it will get you in the way of salary and status….The world is full of people who seem to have listened to the wrong voice and are now engaged in life-work in which they find no pleasure or purpose….We should go with our lives where we most need to go and where we are most needed.” ** Paul found the goal that gave his life joyous meaning, even in jail, and pursued it with all he had. Have you found the God-given, God-centered goal for your life?
- Scholar William Barclay said Paul’s word for reaching out “is used of a racer going hard for the tape. It describes him with eyes for nothing but the goal. It describes the man who is going flat out for the finish.” *** How can you live your life in such a way that you, too, are going flat out for the goal of living the life
God calls you to? What choices can you make in the weeks and months ahead that will empower you to run God’s race with eyes for nothing but the prize?

**Prayer:** Lord of my life, let me hear and respond to your calling voice above all others. Give me the courage and the hunger to pursue your high calling wherever it leads me. Amen.

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**Live for heavenly things, not earthly**

**FRIDAY 9.25.20 Philippians 3:16-19**

(We encourage you to read all of *Philippians 3* each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 16-19, printed below)

16 Only let’s live in a way that is consistent with whatever level we have reached.
17 Brothers and sisters, become imitators of me and watch those who live this way—you can use us as models. 18 As I have told you many times and now say with deep sadness, many people live as enemies of the cross. 19 Their lives end with destruction. Their god is their stomach, and they take pride in their disgrace because their thoughts focus on earthly things.

Having told the Philippians he was all-in to reach his life’s goal, “the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14), Paul urged his Philonian friends to imitate him and “those who live this way.” Imitate him? He wasn’t a CEO with stock options that let him buy a superb suit and a sleek sports car. He was a prisoner in a Roman cell who wasn’t sure if his future life span was measured in years or just weeks or days (cf. Philippians 1:20-24). Yet he boldly said, “Use us as models.”

- If Paul were able to hold a seminar on “How to Live Successfully” and charged $99 for a 2-hour session, would you pay to attend? (You don’t have to—you have Philippians!) Scholar William Barclay wrote, “Few preachers would dare to make the appeal with which Paul begins this section…Paul was able to invite his friends, not simply to listen to him, but also to imitate him.” * What have you learned so far in studying this letter that you want to imitate in your own life?

- Paul also observed that “many people live as enemies of the cross.” (Note that he wrote that, not with anger or relish, but “with deep sadness.”) He may have meant false Christian teachers—there were “Gnostic” teachers in early Christianity who taught that since all matter was evil, it didn’t matter what immoral or hurtful things a Christian did with their body. How can imitating Paul keep you from a life that “ends with destruction”?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you that Paul loved his friends in Philippi enough to write this letter from which I can learn so much. Make me more eager to imitate Paul than the “influencers” our culture pushes me to imitate. Amen.

Transformed by heavenly citizenship
(We encourage you to read all of Philippians 3 each day this week. As you do today, focus on verses 20-21, printed below)

20 Our citizenship is in heaven. We look forward to a savior that comes from there—the Lord Jesus Christ.
21 He will transform our humble bodies so that they are like his glorious body, by the power that also makes him able to subject all things to himself.

Paul wrote, “Our citizenship is in heaven.” Scholar N. T. Wright helped us see what that meant: “We naturally suppose he means ‘and so we’re waiting until we can go and live in heaven where we belong’. But that’s not what he says, and it’s certainly not what he means. If someone in Philippi said, ‘We are citizens of Rome,’ they certainly wouldn’t mean ‘so we’re looking forward to going to live there.’ Being a colony works the other way round. The last thing the emperors wanted was a whole lot of colonists coming back to Rome. The capital was already overcrowded….No: the task of the Roman citizen in a place like Philippi was to bring Roman culture and rule to northern Greece, to expand Roman influence there….The church is at present a colony of heaven, with the responsibility (as we say in the Lord’s Prayer) for bringing the life and rule of heaven to bear on earth.” *

- Too often Christians think being “citizens of heaven” means that we don’t care what happens to this sad, troubled world we live in. But Jesus didn’t ignore people’s needs, saying “Someday I’ll make it all better” (cf. Matthew 4:23-24). Paul, following Jesus’ example, was in prison because instead of finding a quiet retreat he traveled constantly, calling often-hostile citizens of the Roman Empire to the better life that came with making Jesus, not Caesar, their true Lord. In keeping with the “colony” idea about which he wrote to the Philippians, he told another group of Christians, “We are ambassadors who represent Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). In what ways are you living as an ambassador, a colonist seeking to bring the life and rule of heaven to bear on earth? How can you join others in your congregation to carry out that mission?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you’re not going to be my Lord “someday.” You are Lord of my life today, with work for me to do for your kingdom. Give me your heart for this hurting world. Amen.


Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer Prayers of peace and comfort for:
Kathleen “Kathy” White and family following the death of Fred White (husband), 5/5/2020
Russ Boomer and family following the death of Kathy Palmer (sister), 8/29/2020
Cathy Johnson and family following the death of Wallace “Wally” Johnson (father-in-Law), 8/30/2020
Sherri Espinosa and family following the death of Brian Christopher Losa (brother), 9/1/2020
Pamela Gale and family following the death of Shirley Ramey (mother), 9/3/2020
Jina Lindsay and family following the death of Robert “Bob” Whittlinger (father-in-Law), 9/9/2020
Gremary Colon and family following the death of Miguel Pacheco (brother), 9/11/2020
Russell “Russ” Jones and family following the death of Joy Jones (mother), 9/14/2020
Chris and Kathy Woods and family following the death of Tyler Woods (son), 9/14/2020
Linn Ver Meer and family following the death of Gee Van Roekel (brother), 9/15/2020