

Philippians 3:1-16

Opening..... In the beginning of chapter 3 Paul speaks about “the flesh.” Here and often in Galatians and Romans, “the flesh” is the pride of *physical descent* cherished by the Jews. As this passage makes clear, he knew all about it from the inside. This had been his pride too. Ancestry and all that went with it was very important in the ancient world, as it is in many societies in our day. Jews of the first century, who could trace their ancestry back from 2,000 years to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and who knew which of Jacob’s twelve sons they were descended from—such people were understandably and justifiably proud. But their natural human pleasure at the thought of such a remarkable family history had become, from Paul’s point of view, the dangerous boast that because of all this they were superior, automatically and for ever, to all those who didn’t share it.

Can you think of a time that someone expressed that they were superior to you? How did you respond?

Read Philippians 3:1-6

Paul gives warning here to three types of people. Each warning begins with the ironic words, “Look out!”

1. “The dogs”
2. “The evildoers”
3. “The mutilation” people

Then Paul describes true Christians as _____.

Paul has much to celebrate (vs. 5 and 6), but what does he celebrate the most? What are you celebrating in today?

Philippians 3:7-11

There are many methods of creative accounting, but normally balanced books is a matter of putting together a certain number of items on the credit side, a large number of items on the debit side, and calculating them to see how close they come. Paul’s accounts, though, balance in a very odd way. He has just declared that, in terms of status as a member of God’s people, he had nothing on the debit side at all! Every way you looked at it, he was in the clear. Certainly not! He strikes a line through all the items that looked as if they formed a credit balance, and places the whole lot on the other side of the page instead. They are now part of the debit column, rather than the credit one. Paul has discovered something to put on the credit side in comparison with which everything else he can imagine can only be a debit: Jesus.

| Paul’s debits | Paul’s credits |
|---------------|----------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |

| Your debits | Your credits |
|-------------|--------------|
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[Read Philippians 3:12-16](#)

Paul is clear to say that he has not arrived. He is also quick to say that all Christians have not arrived. True spiritual maturity, he insists, actually means knowing that you haven't arrived, and that you must still keep pressing on forwards towards the goal. The seasoned athlete knows that the race isn't won and lost until the end has been reached. To imagine that because you find yourself out in front of the pack you can slack off and take it easy, having 'arrived', would be disastrous.

What are the dangers of living our spiritual lives as if we have arrived?

"Straining forward" means living in the present in light of our future.

What keeps us from living in the present moment today?

[Closing](#)