

No confidence in the flesh

Philippians 3:1-11
Romans 8:3-4; Galatians 5:16-17
Ephesians 1:3-6; 2:1-9

Today we will look into the reasons why we should have no confidence in our own strength, or, as it is mentioned here, in the flesh.

Paul is very clear in this and uses even his own life prior to being a disciple of Christ as an example why we cannot depend on our own strength for our salvation.

So let's go to our verses for today.

Philippians 3:1-2

- Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.
- Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!
- Verder, mijn broeders, verblijd u in de Heere. Dezelfde dingen aan u te schrijven is mij niet onaangenaam en het geeft u zekerheid.
- Let op de honden, let op de slechte arbeiders, let op de versnijdenis.

After all the things he has been teaching he now is going to address several practical things in the last two chapters.

And he asks the disciples in Philippi to rejoice in the Lord for these things as he is writing them with the purpose of building them up even further.

The next thing he warns them about are people who will not do that, but who will try to hinder them in their walk with God. And quite often they will try to do that while pointing toward their obedience to specific interpretations of the commandments of God, which all too often resulted in man-made commandments and rules.

In the next verses Paul will explain why that is not the right way to obtain true righteousness.

Philippians 3:3-4

- For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:
- Want wij zijn de besnijdenis, wij die God in de Geest dienen en in Christus Jezus roemen en niet op het vlees vertrouwen. Hoewel ik reden heb om ook op het vlees te vertrouwen; als iemand anders denkt te kunnen vertrouwen op het vlees, ik nog meer:

First Paul explains why we have true righteousness, which also means we cannot have confidence in the flesh.

And he continues to show why that is so, claiming that, if anybody could have had confidence in the flesh it would have been he himself. And he continues to explain why that would have been so.

Philippians 3:5-7

- circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.
- besneden op de achtste dag, uit het geslacht van Israël, van de stam Benjamin, een Hebreeër uit de Hebreeën, wat de wet betreft een Farizeeër, wat ijver betreft een vervolger van de gemeente, wat de rechtvaardigheid betreft die in de wet is, onberispelijk.

This is quite an impressive list, isn't it?

He took things quite serious as a member of the Jewish people, the chosen people of God. He tried the best he could to live a life that would grant him salvation based on his efforts.

Just think about this: what does that impressive list also express? Doesn't it talk about pride, about boasting about ourselves.

Let's see how Paul changed his mind about all this.

Philippians 3:5-7

- But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.
- Maar wat voor mij winst was, dat heb ik om Christus' wil als schade beschouwd.

In the end Paul realized that pursuing all those things for the purpose of being saved by keeping them actually hindered him coming to Christ, to the true solution of God for our problem.

Paul explains this even further in the next verses.

Philippians 3:8-11

- Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul concluded that salvation was only possible by grace through faith, as he also wrote in Ephesians 2:8.

It is only in this way that we truly can come to know Christ and can learn to understand why the Gospel is indeed the power of God for salvation, as we see in Romans 1:16.

Let's look at some verses that also teach us why trying to obey the law cannot be a possible way to salvation.

Romans 8:3-4

- For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

In order to be saved by obedience to the law we should live a life of perfect obedience to the law during our whole life.

Due to our sinful nature, which we inherited from Adam, we are not able to do that.

As a matter of fact, due to our sinful nature we already deserve to be condemned by God as it means we will not live our life out of faith in Him. And what is not out of faith in God is sin, as we see in Romans 14:23.

In Galatians 5:16-17 Paul also explains clearly why we cannot depend on the flesh for living a life that is glorifying God and pleasing to God. We see that on the next sheet.

Galatians 5:16-17

- I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
- For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.
- Maar ik zeg: Wandel door de Geest en u zult zeker de begeerte van het vlees niet volbrengen.
- Want het vlees begeert tegen de Geest in, en de Geest tegen het vlees in; en die staan tegenover elkaar, zodat u niet doet wat u zou willen.

This is a very clear statement, isn't it?

As the flesh opposes the things of the Spirit how then could we fulfill the things of the Spirit while walking in the flesh!

This is the reason why the flesh weakens the Law, so that nobody can be saved by the works of the Law.

And therefore God came with His own solution for our problem, and that even from before the creation of the world.

We see that on the following sheet.

Ephesians 1:3-6

- Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

This is one of the verses that show us, that there has never been a possibility of salvation by works!

For if there would have been a possibility of salvation by works than it could not have been in the way as described over here.

It is not by accident that Abraham is considered to be the spiritual father of all those who believe God (Galatians 3:29 and Hebrews 2:16) as Genesis 15:6 tells us the following:

And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Let's look at some more verses from the letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:1-3

- And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Here Paul describes our condition before we are saved by God, before God gave us indeed new life.

What the outcome of the grace of God is we see in the next verses from Ephesians 2:

Ephesians 2:4-9

- But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Can you imagine that? Even now, while we are still walking on the earth we are already seated in the heavenly places in Christ. And what we experience of the grace and goodness of God in this life here on earth is nothing compared to what is in store for us for the future.

And nothing of that is the result of works! It is all by the grace of God. Therefore we see that last statement telling us that no one should boast.

We are not saved because we chose God but we are saved because God chose us.

Let's go to the last sheet.

John 15:4-5

- “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
- “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.
- Blijf in Mij, en Ik in u. Zoals de rank geen vrucht kan dragen uit zichzelf, als zij niet in de wijnstok blijft, zo ook u niet, als u niet in Mij blijft.
- Ik ben de Wijnstok, u de ranken; wie in Mij blijft, en Ik in hem, die draagt veel vrucht, want zonder Mij kunt u niets doen.

Again we see this statement, that we can do nothing of ourselves that is acceptable to God.

**It is only by abiding in Christ that we can grow spiritually.
It is only by abiding in Christ that we can bear fruit.**

Therefore we cannot have any confidence in our flesh, not for our salvation nor for our spiritual growth!

Shall we pray?