

## *Rubbish and Christ*

In Philippians 3 Paul warns the believers against people who insist that circumcision is necessary to belong to God (3:2). This is an issue that he dealt with at length elsewhere (see Gal. 5:2–12). Now he insists, ironically, that it is those who trust in Christ who have become “the circumcision”—that is, the true people of God (Phil. 3:3). To drive the point home, Paul turns to autobiography, contrasting his identification with God as an exemplary (blameless!) Jew and the identification with God that he now enjoys through knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord (3:4–7). He does not mean to disparage the former, but he does allow that, as wonderful as his Jewish legacy might be, it is mere rubbish (literally, “dung”) compared to what is available through Christ (3:8). In a few verses, Paul sketches what has been called the essence of his theology: through faith in Jesus Christ, one may be justified (3:9), sanctified (3:10), and glorified (3:11). His words in these verses ring with the dialectic of what is “already” and what is “not yet”—a hallmark of his theological position. His advice to the Philippians emerges from that dialectic: “hold fast to what we have attained” (3:16) and “press on toward the goal” that lies ahead (3:14).