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Pastor Brian Bluett

Philippians - The Blueprint for Joy #10

Welcome to OIC. We are glad you have come. We are continuing our study in the letter that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. Paul had a fond place in his heart for this church. After all, he had started the church and now from prison in Rome he writes an encouraging letter. He has recounted his memories of them and told them his reason for joy in spite of incredibly awful circumstances was because of his relationship with Jesus. As he begins what we call chapter 3, he sends a really severe warning to the church about those who are trying to bring division to the group. He continues his theme of joy and reminds us that joy is dependent on our perspective, not our circumstances. The Christian can always rejoice because our God is not limited by our circumstances but is always at work in the midst of them. Never let circumstances rob you of joy. Today's passage tells us to have joy in the Lord, not in the flesh. Our support text is Philippians 3:1-3.

Philippians 3:1-3

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;
³ for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

The heart of what the apostle Paul is saying can be understood in this way. He is helping us to see the true child of God. In these 3 verses, there is a very distinct contrast between 2 groups of people. Group #1 in verse 2 – the dogs, evil workers, false circumcision and group #2 – those who worship in the spirit of God, glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Paul draws a line of distinction between those who are “religious” and those who are “righteous”. It is a distinction between those who have an outward mark that supposedly identified them with God and those who have an inward change. Basically this is what has happened. A group of converted Jews are now saying salvation is not complete without circumcision. This group is called the Judaizers. They were religious in terms of external ceremony but they were not necessarily righteous. Religious on the outside but not spiritual on the inside. Within the Jewish culture circumcision is the external symbol depicting the need for a deep total cleansing from sin. But over the course of years Israel had reduced the significance of this to the point where it had no spiritual significance at all. Paul warns the Philippians to understand the difference. My understanding of this: a person is a Christian who trusts completely and only in Jesus. You don't earn it, it is by grace that we are able to receive salvation by faith. WE don't add to it. Now let's dissect these 3 verses and see why Paul wrote them to the church at Philippi and also for our instruction. The first verse really serves as a reminder.

#1 A reminder

Philippians 3:1

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

Rejoice in the Lord is another way of saying I am a Christian. It serves as a summary of true Christianity. It means the Lord Jesus Christ is everything to me. Paul calls upon the church at Philippi and us also at OIC to have a joyful heart and rejoice in the Lord. He goes on to say that if he repeats himself it's no trouble for him. He really just wants to reinforce what he is saying. And this goes back

to what he was saying in chapter 1, verse 28 about not being alarmed by the fact of having opponents.

Philippians 1:28

²⁸ in no way alarmed by *your* opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God.

We can't be exactly sure what he is speaking about but it is definitely about Christian living and the confidence we have in Christ alone. He wants us to keep what he is saying firm in our memory. Probably just his emphasis on staying in a joyful spirit. If you notice, I often repeat myself. For example you often hear me say "we must not just be AT church, we must BE church". So often I use reminders in my life to bring me back to the focus where my life should be and to get stirred up to live accordingly and this does include warnings. So beginning in verse 2, Paul begins to get specific about the warnings.

#2 A warning

Philippians 3:2 NIV

Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.

Within verse 2 of our text, Paul gives warnings about 3 specific groups. Paul says "watch out" for the dogs. Interestingly, it's the same term the Jews used to describe people who were not following the Jewish tradition. These dogs are the Judaizers. They came and tried to undo what Paul had done. He calls them "mutilators". Why? The fact that they promoted circumcision as a means to salvation with no real spiritual significance. Within the new covenant, it is Christ ONLY for salvation.

Acts 20:29

²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

Paul also gives warnings about evil workers. Those who suggest that works can bring righteousness and that Mosaic law must be followed, including circumcision. And that is the third group that Paul identifies.

In the old covenant, it was seen as a mark of "possession". To be circumcised meant you belonged to God.

Genesis 17:10, 11

¹⁰ This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.

¹¹ And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Why is circumcision such a big deal? The very act of procreation is what God wanted the people to consider and how God's people were expected to keep the covenant He had made with them. Now we have the seal of the Holy Spirit which guarantees our permanence in Christ.

Ephesians 1:13

¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

#3 A true circumcision

Philippians 3:3

for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Paul reinforces the truth of God's Word. We are the circumcised but in a different way. What is different about us? We have had the hardness of heart removed.

Colossians 2:11

¹¹ and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

Also, our propensity to sin has been removed. Christ has performed a spiritual circumcision.

Romans 6:6

knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;

When we truly take Christ by faith, we don't have to put any confidence in the flesh.

Romans 4:5

⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

Conclusion

Why do so many people ignore such strong warnings? I'll tell you why. Satan is forever trying to tell us that you are not really saved. Don't listen to him. He is the father of lies. He is probably telling you things like this: you don't act like a Christian all the time and you can't really be a Christian if you don't look like one all the time. But guess what. We are all human. We all make mistakes. That's why we have an Advocate in heaven called Jesus. This is a rather gripping passage of Scripture - a stern warning to us all. If we are trying to add something to the work Jesus has already done for us, we've got it all wrong. When we are trying to be saved by our own strength, our conduct can even make us appear as Christians. I remember in my life, before I became a Christian, I would often give people the false impression that I was in Christ by saying and doing the right things. True spiritual repentance deals with the actual condition of my heart and that will reflect the conduct that God expects. Let's pray.