The Distinctive Qualities of the True Christian, Part 2
Philippians 3:1-3
50-28

In our ongoing study of Paul's epistle to the Philippians, we find ourselves in chapter 3. May I invite you now to open your Bible and turn with me to chapter 3? We'll read the first three verses as the setting for our continued study of this great section...Philippians chapter 3 verse 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. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the mutilation 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."

I have entitled these three verses, "The Distinctive Qualities of the True Christian...The Distinctive Qualities of the True Christian." They are found really in verse 3. He gives us these three qualities of a true Christian, "Who worship in the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh."

A number of years ago I decided that that verse might be my favorite description of a Christian. What is a Christian? We could say he's a believer. What is a Christian? We could say he's a child of God. What is a Christian? We could say he's a disciple. We could say he's a follower. He is one who loves God. But how could we say it better than to say a Christian is one who worships in the Spirit of God, glories in Christ Jesus and puts no confidence in the flesh? What a surpassing definition of the true Christian.

And the distinctive qualities of the true Christian are indeed found in that third verse. But before we get to the third verse, Paul has a contrast in mind in the first two verses after his brief introduction. And by virtue of that contrast we see in more bold relief the reality of the distinctive qualities of the true Christian. For the true Christian, as defined in verse 3, is compared to the false religionists of verse 2 who are called dogs, evil workers and are even called rather than the false circumcision, the actual word is the mutilation. This characterizes those who are not true Christians.

Now as you well know this matter of comparing those with false association with God alongside with the true is a repeated theme in Scripture and thus a repeated theme in our study here through the years. We have often discussed the matter of who is a true Christian and what are the characteristics of genuine believers. And we will discuss that again because Paul is concerned with it right here. It has always been the ploy of Satan to infiltrate the true church with the false, to sow the tares among the wheat. It has always been the ploy of Satan to allow perverse men to rise up within the congregation to lead it astray. It has always been the ploy of Satan to allow and energize grievous wolves to attack the flock and tear it to shreds with false doctrine. It has always been the call of God on the life of the minister to be nourished up in the words of the faith, that is the Scripture, and sound doctrine in order to refute the heretics, in order to warn the congregation of intrusion of error. So this matter of true and false simply draws the battle lines where they have been drawn through the ages

as the people of God endeavor to stand against the people of Satan who usually are disguised as angels of light, wanting to infiltrate the church.

So, what we see with the Apostle Paul here is really a warning, a warning for the purpose as he uses the term in verse 1 of safeguard, a warning about false religionists who will endeavor to confuse, who will endeavor to debilitate to destroy the work of the gospel. The counterfeit, always around, always on Satan's agenda, always a threat.

Sometimes a profound spiritual truth can be illustrated by a simple analogy. And when thinking about this matter of the counterfeit and the true, I was reminded of our trip last year to Asia and particularly Hong Kong which has to be the world's greatest shopping center. And as we arrived in Hong Kong we were informed about a few of the rules when you go shopping. Everything appears to be very inexpensive and in fact in most cases is, but the people who live there tell you that there basically is no control over labeling so just because it has a designer label doesn't mean that it is actually a designer garment, just because it says Seiko or Rolex doesn't mean it is. In fact if it says that there's probably a good chance it isn't. And that you have to be very careful that you don't pay a lot of money for a very useless thing or a very cheap article. So with that warning under our belts, we pursued the enterprise of shopping in Hong Kong.

It just so happened that my son, Mark, had been using my watch and broke it. I don't hold him totally responsible for that, I think he went in the water somewhere and it fell apart, which will tell you the quality of the watch. And so I needed to buy a watch and so as I was going along through Hong Kong I came across this watch. It is a gold piece, ringed with a gold case and stamped on the band it said "genuine lizard skin." I thought, "That's probably out of my league." I said, "How much is it?" He said, "Twelve dollars." I said, "I'll take it." I want you to know, ladies and gentlemen, it is still running and the green wrist is of small consequence because soap can take care of that about three times a day. There are always those counterfeits out there and we all get exposed to them, don't we?

A watchmaker would have no problem telling that I didn't get a bargain, although now I'm beginning to wonder because it still keeps perfect time. But we need the trained eye and we need some kind of criteria to evaluate what is real and what is not real.

I remember also in Hong Kong that we bought some shirts. They were marked "Polo, Ralph Lauren," and they had that little guy on the horse. And we brought them home. And after one washing they were this big.... You could put them on a Chihuahua.

It is important to know what you get, not to be fooled by the counterfeit. Those simple illustrations can become analogous to a very profound issue and that is the matter of who is a true believer, who is a real Christian. So many people in our world claim to know God, don't they? So many people claim religion. They claim to be the followers of God, if not the representatives of God. How do we know?

Well this is of great concern not only to us but to God and that is why it is so oft repeated in Scripture. The Word of God lays out for us many many times this matter of objective evidence regarding God's regenerating work in the life of an individual. The Bible has not left us without a standard by which we can measure the true believer. And here, in fact, in verse 3 are three great qualitative characteristics of a true believer. They worship by the Spirit of God, they glory in Christ

Jesus and they put no confidence in the flesh. What a marvelous set of objective criteria to designate a true believer. But then on the other hand, there are those dogs and those evil workers and those called the mutilation who really do attack the church with their false premise of salvation and their false criteria of salvation. And we must be warned against them. And so, before we can look at these distinctive qualities of a true Christian, we must come face to face with the fact that we need to be able to discern the false.

This passage is very important for we must be continually laying the life of an individual alongside the objective standard in order that we may affirm their spiritual condition. There was a book written by Gardner Spring many centuries ago. He titled it, Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character. It's a very helpful book. It has been reprinted in recent years and in the reprinting the foreword says this, "It is our prayer that God may use this book in the following ways: one, to confirm the faith of such as are the true children of God but who lack assurance based upon biblical principles; two, to strip away the false hopes of such as are diluted and whose delusion has been confirmed by the erroneous teaching on the subject of assurance which is so prevalent in our day; three, to clarify these issues to those who stand in that awesome place of being expositors and teachers of God's holy Word so that they may find fuel for the fires of their own hears and for their public ministry of the Scriptures," end quote.

Wonderfully said. To understand biblical objective criteria for evaluating true salvation will help the true children of God be assured, secondly, it will help explode and strip away the delusion of the false children of God and thirdly, it will equip the teachers and preachers to do both. And thus this kind of passage is vital for us as it has been for all the church. It is vital.

Now let's pick up where we left off last time. Paul says, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." We noted that that finally would better be translated "furthermore," or "so then," or "now then." It is a transition, not a note that distinguishes the end, as 44 remaining verses might indicate to you. And he throws in this which is the basic theme of the epistle that comes through in every chapter, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." He is simply punctuating here this theme of joy. He lays down this very simple principle that our rejoicing is connected to a relationship. Rejoice in the Lord. And as I said, that is a familiar theme. It's in chapter 1 verse 4, chapter 2 verse 2, chapter 2 verses 17 and 18, verses 28 and 29, you'll find it here in chapter 3 and again in chapter 4, you'll find it in verses 4 and 10. So he is reminding them about joy. But here he adds for the first time the little phrase "in the Lord...in the Lord." It is the sphere in which our joy exists. Only in Him is true joy found...nowhere else.

And let me just speak to that issue, if I might, for a moment. Paul is not talking about happiness when he talks about joy and rejoicing. Happiness is from hap...hap is a circumstance, happenstance, happenings, happiness, all the same word group. That is to say happiness is an emotion or an exhilaration associated with certain events. It is not an emotion or an exhilaration associated with a relationship. It has to do with an event, a thing, a happening. So the kind of joy that Paul is talking about and calling for, and this by the way is a command, and the command implies the capability of obedience on the part of a believer which in itself is no doubt a test of true salvation. But he says...rejoice in the Lord...commanding us to joy. But it is not the kind of emotional outburst, good feeling, exhilaration that is associated with an event. It is the kind that is associated with a relationship. It doesn't even say, "Rejoice because of what the Lord has given you...rejoice because of what the Lord will give you...rejoice because of what the Lord is giving you." It doesn't say, "Rejoice because of what the Lord has done for the people that you care about." It says, "Rejoice in

the Lord."

It is the exhilaration in the relationship, perhaps the simplest human analogy to it would be the joy of a parent in a newborn baby. The baby gives nothing, in effect, the baby provides no stimulating events. In fact, most of the events connected with the baby are anything but stimulating. The baby provides no exciting gifts, makes no charitable contribution, does no particularly beneficial service but there is something about the relationship that literally exhilarates the soul. It is the same kind of emotion only in much greater and deeper proportion as that of falling in love. And it isn't so much that your emotion and your exhilaration and your exuberance and that overwhelming sense of silly peace that you enjoy is related to what the one you love does for you as it is just the thought of the one you love. And extrapolating out of those irrepressible human joys that come out of relationship, we can magnify that concept in to what we ought to feel and ever rejoice in that we enjoy with the Lord Himself.

Now let me take it a step further. This kind of joy is not an emotion from a human level, it is produced by the Holy Spirit therefore it is a supernatural emotion. It is a supernatural emotion. You say, "Well what does it do? What does it feel like, this joy that we're to have?" Well it produces a deep confidence in the future, built on trust. The relationship says my life is in God's hands, my life is in Christ's control, all is well. The hymn writer said, "It is well with my soul," and it is so well with my soul that no matter what is going on around me, I have joy. It is the kind of joy that brings a silent sleep, a deep sleep, a quietness of life because it trusts, because it knows the sovereign God and the faithful Christ will accomplish all their good promise. It is a supernatural emotion that also could be described as the absence of any ultimate fear because what is there to fear when all is bound up in the relationship and the relationship is eternal. It is the kind of emotion that puts a melody in the heart that no matter how bad it is in the world, it's almost as if we ride across the top of the bumps. It's the kind of emotion that puts a song on the lips, a lightness to the step. It's the kind of emotion that produces easy thanks for little things...small pleasures.

It's very different from happiness. It's different from the happiness, for example, of good health because true joy persists in weakness, pain, illness and death. It is different from the fun of a party with its laughing friends and music because it persists in the dark when someone is all alone. It is different from the delight of a new house or a new car or a new dress or a new anything because it persists through the loss of everything. Why? Because it is the joy in the relationship and the relationship with Jesus Christ that we enjoy never changes...never changes. He is always present. He is ever close. He is ever loving. He is ever securing. He is ever strengthening. He is ever providing. And we trust Him. Rejoice in the Lord. Very different than happiness.

But, you see, most people's happiness and joy is based on what is given to them, is based on what good things happen to them. Most people's happiness is based on what they succeed at doing at a given point in time, or what they acquire. Few people understand the exhilarating sheer joy of relationship, but we do in the Spirit. And so I submit to you that before we look at the explicit qualities of a true Christian, one of the implicit ones is that there is a surpassing joy in the relationship that is unrelated to the circumstances of life. F.B. Meyer(?) wrote, "The joy of the Lord arises from leaving all our burdens at His feet, from believing that He has forgiven the past as absolutely as the tide obliterates children's writing in the sand, that nothing can come which He does not appoint or permit, that He is doing all things as wisely and kindly as possible, that in Him we have been lifted out of the realm of sin, sorrow and death in to a realm of divine light and love, that we have already commenced the eternal life and that before us forever there is a fellowship with Him so rapturous and

exalting that human language can only describe it as unspeakable."

So, Paul says keep on rejoicing in the Lord, that's a command and a characteristic of a true believer. And having punctuated his major theme he then moves in to what's on his heart in this new subject. And he begins with an introduction in verse 1, he says, "To write the same things again is no trouble to me and it is a safeguard for you." That's an interesting statement. He is assuming that they're going to be a bit surprised that he's going to bring up a subject he's already brought up. So he says to write the same things again doesn't really bother me because I understand that it's going to protect you.

What does he mean to write the same things again? Well, he's either referring back to what he just said or forward to what he's about to say. It is my conviction that he's speaking now forward of what he's about to say for the simple reason that saying "rejoice in the Lord" doesn't seem to be a safeguard but what he does say in verse 2 is definitely a safeguard, "Beware...beware...beware." So the context would lead us to the conclusion that he is about to say something he's already at least made reference to but he doesn't mind saying it again because it's a protection. So he says to write the same things again...well, when had he written them before? Well maybe many times in the past epistles, but I think he probably has in mind chapter 1 verse 27 because he does say "to write the same things is no trouble to me and a safeguard for you" in a sort of generic way. It could mean that he's written this in other epistles. But I think we could safely say that he must also have in mind chapter 1 verse 27. Here he says in verse 27, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel," he's calling them to godly life and behavior as a church. Then in verse 28 he introduces this factor, "In no way alarmed by your opponents which is a sign of destruction for them but of salvation for you." Now what he is saying to them is you can expect some opposition, you can expect some opponents, you can expect some conflict, you can expect some attacks, some persecutions. Verse 29 says why, "Because it's been granted for Christ's sake not only to believe in Him but to suffer for His sake and you will further experience the very same conflict which you saw in me and now hear to be in me." And where was Paul when he wrote? Prisoner and he was having conflict as he always did from both the Jewish people who hated his message and the Gentiles who rejected him.

So, Paul says to them...Look, stay true, walk worthy, stay together in one mind striving for the faith of the gospel, don't cave in to the opposition because Christ has called you to suffer for His sake and experience the same kind of conflict you see me going through...that's part of it. The implication then of that first chapter text is that they were already going to be under attack, maybe they had already begun to experience it. And he had warned them there about it and how to react to it. So now when you come to verse 1 of chapter 3 he says, "To write the same things again is no trouble to me," he may well have in mind an allusion to that first chapter section. "I want to warn you again only this time I'm going to be more specific." There he said don't be alarmed by your opponents, here he says here's how to recognize them.

He says in that little phrase "to write the same things again is no trouble to me," he uses an interesting word, okneros(?), it means to cause fear or reluctance. He's saying I'm not reluctant and I'm not afraid to do this, it's no bother to me at all, I am excited to do this, I am anxious to do this. Why? Because it is a safeguard for you. I want to protect you. I want to protect the church from false religionists, from false teachers. And that's what he has in mind here when he uses the word safeguard, a very interesting word. The Greek verb means to trip, to cause to fall, to overthrow. You add to what the Greek language...in the Greek language we call the alpha privative, it negates it. So he is saying I want to provide this for you so you won't trip, you won't fall, you won't be overthrown.

This will be your protection, your dependable safeguard.

This is part of Paul's duty, isn't it? Paul is no dumb dog, as it mentions in Isaiah 56:10, he's no irresponsible watchman as we would see in Ezekiel. Paul is a faithful man to warn his people. In fact, in Acts 20 he says, "I have not ceased to warn you at Ephesus night and day with tears for the space of three years, I've warned you about perverse men rising up from within, I've warned you about grievous wolves from without," a warning ministry was a part of his life. He says I have no trouble in warning you again because it will protect you.

Now who is he warning about? Who is he talking about? Well let's find out in verse 2. He uses the word blepoin the Greek, beware, three times. All three times in the imperative...beware..beware..beware. You could translate it "be on the constant lookout for...be on the constant lookout for dogs, evil workers," and here's the key..."the mutilation." Who is he talking about? Well if you take that mutilation at the end of verse 2 which is translated in the NAS the false circumcision, and then you compare it with verse 3, the true circumcision, we know who he's talking about. Last week we did a rather detailed study of circumcision, didn't we? May I remind you that the Jews believed that circumcision was the sign of God's favor, right? That if they had that physical operation that was the external identification that they were the seed of Abraham and thus they were to be blessed. They somehow missed the point that the outward circumcision was only to be a symbol of the circumcision on the inside. But the Jews had long departed from the reality of circumcision's symbolism and left themselves committed only to the symbol.

Now let me tell you what happened. You have a Jewish community who believe in circumcision as the mark that is necessary for God's people. They also believe in the Old Testament economy, they believe in the Mosaic ceremonies, they believe in the Mosaic rituals and laws and they feel that they are bound to keep them. So here comes the Apostle Paul, right? He comes in to the Gentile world and he preaches salvation by grace plus or minus nothing. No works at all. There's nothing you can do, nothing you must do, you're saved by grace period. God's marvelous grace. In an act of faith you simply receive the gift of grace, the work has all been done. So Paul goes through the Gentile world, people come to the knowledge of the grace of the gospel, they are saved, churches begin. There are even Jews who believe the gospel. They believe Jesus is the Messiah. They believe that Jesus died on the cross. They may believe that He was raised from the dead. But they also believe that in order to be pleasing to God and to have God accept you, you have to be circumcised and keep all the ceremonies of Moses. So when Paul goes along and says the old covenant has been set aside, circumcision is unnecessary, Mosaic ceremony is unnecessary, you cannot do any externals to please God or gain your salvation, they are very upset, these Jews. And so no sooner does Paul leave town after establishing a church then they rise up and say to that church...You must be circumcised and we'll show you why...and they point to the Old Testament. You must keep the ceremonies of Moses, I'll show you why...they point to the Old Testament. And because some of the younger Christians are undiscerning about the old economy and the new, they are confused by these commands that are in the Bible, they do not understand that they have been set aside in the new covenant. And so these Jewish people are then leading Christians to believe that in order to be saved they must be circumcised, in order to be saved they must do certain ceremonial things and perform certain good works. And this is being propagated not only to the church but to those who are around the church showing interest in it. And it is a gospel that convolutes the true gospel because it says Christ yes, circumcision yes and works yes. And these became know as...what?...these teachers were called what? Judaizers because they were Judaizing. In other words, they were saying you can't come in to Christianity unless you go through the foyer of Judaism. You can't be a

Gentile and just come to Christ, you've got to be circumcised and you've got to follow Mosaic economy and subscribe to that.

This was a big issue in the early church. To show you the proportions of it, turn for a moment to the fifteenth chapter of Acts...Acts chapter 15 verse 1, this sums it up, "Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren," here's what they taught, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." That's right, that's it. "And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them because they denied that." You didn't need to be circumcised to be saved. So the debate. "Well the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning the issue," and thus the first church council was held, the council at Jerusalem. And the whole issue was about circumcision and Mosaic ceremony. And verse 5 says, "A certain one of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed," so here's a guy who had believed. I mean he believed in the facts of the gospel. He stands up in the middle of the council says, "It is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the law of Moses." And that's what they were trying to say. So everybody got together...Apostles, elders, to look into it.

After much debate, Peter brings resolution. Verse 7, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe...listen to this...and God who knows the heart." He knows whether their faith was real, He knows whether it was true, "Bore witness to them...what?..to what?...to the validity of their faith by giving them...what does it say?...the Holy Spirit." Now if God gave them the Holy Spirit, then they were...what?...saved. And they weren't circumcised. And verse 9, "He made no distinction between us and them, He cleansed their hearts by faith without circumcision." Verse 10, "Now therefore, why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" Why are you going to try to bind them to a law that we couldn't even keep? "To earn something which God gives freely."

This was a major issue. And they resolved it at the Jerusalem Council. In Galatians we find it is also an issue. Paul even calls it "another gospel," and he says anybody preaching it should be accursed in Galatians 1:9. In Galatians 5 he says in verse 2, "If you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you." What a statement. Listen to what he's saying. If you think in order to be saved you've got to be circumcised, then Christ won't do you any good because you are believing in salvation by...what?...by works. Forget that. If you are going to receive circumcision, verse 3, then you're under obligation to keep the whole law and you've been severed from Christ and you are seeking to be justified by law and you have fallen away from the principle of salvation by grace. That's exactly what was happening.

Into Philippi came these Judaizers just like they had come to Jerusalem, just like they had come to Galatia and when they came to Galatia there were a lot of cities they went to. Galatia is a region, not a city. Philippi is a city. So they were pretty widespread in their effect. Paul says at the end of Galatians that they really were interested in making a big show in the flesh, compelling you to be circumcised so they could sort of put notches on their belt like they...they converted you to circumcision. And here they were a threat to the Philippian church. So Paul says to them, "Beware...beware of these false teachers."

Now he calls them by three names, most fascinating. Briefly listen carefully to what I say. "Beware of the dogs." Boy, you just didn't call people dogs in that world. Two words in the New Testament for

dogs, both from the same root. One is kunarion, that means a little dog, a little pet dog. It's a diminutive term, it's used in Matthew 15:26 and 27, and Mark chapter 7 around verse 27. It means a little diminutive pet dog. The word here is kuon, that word does not mean a pet dog. That word is used of dogs that were not pets and most of the dogs in that culture were not pets. They were scavengers. And there are many many histories that you can read about that day and you can look it up in a biblical encyclopedia and find it. Dogs roamed the streets. Dogs were scrounges, they were scavengers. They roamed in packs. They hunted the garbage of the city. They were often rabid. They snarled. They were wild. Would literally prowl the ancient streets without an owner and without home, they would feed on the garbage, on the filth. They would fight one another. They would attack people. In some cases people would lose their lives because the dogs were diseased.

To show you something of the character of these kinds of dogs, do you remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? And you remember in that story that part of the torture of Lazarus was that he was sick and in his poverty he was lying in the street and it says the dogs were...what?...licking his sores, the filthy vile scroungy scavenger dogs of the street, unimaginably licking the sores of this poor beggar.

In the book of Revelation when it wants to identify the people who are not allowed into the gate of the holy city, in Revelation 22:15 it says, "Outside are the dogs." They are not the warm and fuzzy little diminutives that we have as pets. These dogs were very very different. They were the lowest of the low, the scavengers, the scoundrels, the useless filthy curs that moved in the streets and were a threat to people and children.

And because they were so base and such filthy animals, the Jews had come to use the term "dog" as a title for Gentiles. In fact, the Talmud says the nations of the world are like dogs. The Gentiles were dogs, Gentile dogs, unclean, filthy, scrounging scavengers who savagedly attacked the truth and were dangerous.

And so, the Jews would see the Gentiles as dogs. The Judaizers trying to protect the Jewishness that was so precious to them would see even the Gentile Christians as dogs until they went through a circumcision. Jews called Gentiles dogs.

What is startling here is that Paul, a Jew, calls Jews dogs. That's turning the table. That is a serious statement. You wonder sometimes why Paul was not popular. That statement would not make him popular...not popular. He is saying, in effect, beware of those people who self-righteously call other dogs but they're the dogs. They accuse others of shamelessly attacking the truth and they are shamelessly attacking the truth. Are dogs unclean and filthy? So are they. Are dogs snarling and howling and vicious? So are they. Are dogs dangerous and able to wound and even kill? So are they. Stay away from them. Stay away from those dangerous filthy snarling howling wild attacking false teachers who parade themselves as if they are the virtuous ones, but they are deadly, they are dangerous, they are dirty. And he's talking about people who are religious. He's talking about people who say we must obey the law of God.

Listen, anybody who comes along in this time and day and says you have to baptized in water to be saved is a dangerous dog. Anybody who comes along in this day and says in order to be saved you've got to go through some certain kind of ceremony, you've got to say some certain kinds of prayers, you've got to go through some kind of a ritual is a dog, an unclean thing, a dangerous beast. Anyone who comes along to you and says it's fine if you believe in Jesus but if you don't acquiesce

to a certain code of ethics and do your best to live by that code of ethics and perform those deeds which will please God you will never be saved is a dog. Beware.

Beloved, salvation is by grace and grace alone. And anything else that comes down the pike is nothing but a filthy unclean beast. Secondly, he says they are evil workers. They are evil workers. You see, the thing is they pride themselves on being workers of righteousness. That's how he turns the table on them this time. Typically those who are involved in those kinds of external religions of works see themselves as the workers of what is good, that they please God, they're earning His favor, they're earning salvation. They're the noble upholders of the ceremonies and the rituals of their religion. They deserve God's please, they have lit their candles and bowed their knee and genuflected to the east. And they've gone through the water and they've gone through the ritual and they've run down the beads and they've done the good deeds and they've filled up all their agenda with those required things. And they've done all that good. And the fact of the matter is they are not good workers, they are...what?...they're evil workers.

Well, you say, "Why so?" Because it is the wickedness of all wickedness to think that you can earn anything with God. Why is that wicked? Because it is pride at its apex and pride is a...what?...sin. Unregenerate people, even religious people can't do really what is good.

Let me put it to you simply. Wicked people can do bad bad. Remember our discussion of that? Bad bad. You say, "What's that?" They do bad things for bad reasons. You say, "What's a bad thing?" Any kind of sin. They can do wicked things. And they do them with bad reasons, bad motives. They're motivated by their wicked selfish self-centered nature. Now listen to this, unregenerate people can also do bad good. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well it's good in the sense that they can help the poor, they can relieve the widows, they can visit the prisoners, they can adopt orphans, they can do good. But it's bad good because it's motivated by pride rather than the glory of God. The best that the unregenerate can do is bad good. They can do bad bad or bad good. But only the redeemed can do good good...a good deed motivated to the glory of God.

So what is it when these religionists do all of their ceremonies and all of their activities and by their own works try to attain the favor of God? It is bad good. It may appear good on the outside, it is bad on the inside because it is nothing but the expulsion of pride which believes that you can please God on your own. They are merit-mongers.

The Judaizers were among them. Evil workers trying to earn God's favor. It doesn't mean that they were doing evil deeds, they were working to please God but they were evil because it was all motivated by the false belief that they could be pleasing to God. What a deception of pride.

So Paul flips the table and says you're evil workers, everything you do is wicked, everything you do is bad. Why? Because they did it out of the allusion of pride and pride is the driving sin of unregenerate man.

Then finally he literally scorches them with the blowtorch of terms. He says, "Beware of the mutilation." This is unbelievable. You talk about offensive, that is offensive. You see, they prided themselves on circumcision. The word for circumcision in the Greek is <u>peritome</u>, it means to cut around. Paul says you're not the circumcision, you're the <u>katatome</u>, you're the mutilation, you're the castration, that's what you are. Boy! You think you're circumcised? You think you fit God's design in

the symbolism of circumcision? Forget it, there's nothing spiritual about it. All it was was physical mutilation. In Galatians 5:12 he says, "You say you're circumcised? I would that you were castrated," Galatians 5:12. Very strong. You see, we can't just say to these people who add works to salvation, "Well, they're close. Boy, they're certainly lovely people. They certainly are nice. And they're religious. And, you know, they're trying their best to get to God." They are dogs. Beware of them. They're filthy. They're unclean. They're vicious. They are not workers of good. They are doing at best bad good, motivated by their own pride. And they go through their religious ceremonies and they are useless, they have nothing to do with their heart and their life and their relation to God. They're simply external. It is merely a process of mutilation with no spiritual value, no inner cleansing, no spiritual change. Why? Because that's all of grace and nothing more, right? Nothing more. And as soon as you stick anything else in there, all is lost.

In fact, these people called the mutilation who thought they could come to God through circumcision had to be told that their circumcision was of no more value than the gashings of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. You remember them? Up there with Elijah, cutting themselves, gashing and mutilating themselves, trying to please their deity...absolutely useless. So is circumcision. So is any external thing that does not reflect a transformed heart. He is not a Jew who is one outwardly. He is a Jew who is one...what?...inwardly. Romans 2:28, "For circumcision is of the heart."

What's Paul's message here? He's saying...Look, we're the true circumcision. How are we characterized? All internally. We worship in the Spirit of God, we glory in Christ Jesus. Who gets all the glory for our salvation? Christ. Our worship isn't external, it's...what?...it's in the Spirit. He gets all the glory and how much confidence do we have in our flesh? None. That's the difference. You see, they worship on the outside, they glory in their human achievement, their religious activity and they have a lot of confidence in the flesh. They think it can perform.

So Paul leads us then to verse 3, and an understanding of the explicit qualities of the true Christian. I can't wait till next week to find out all that that means. Let's bow together in prayer.

Thank You, Father, for leading us again this morning by Your Spirit to the understanding of Your Word. O God, what can we say to thank You for saving us by grace? Thank You for the grace of salvation. Thank You that because we've been saved by grace we can rejoice in You, we do have a joy not tied to circumstances but all bound up in a relationship, a supernatural emotion that transcends the circumstances of life. Thank You, O God, for grace, for joy. And may we rejoice always in all things because of this grace that has made us one with the living and loving Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

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