



Where is Your Confidence?

Phil. 3:1-9, 17-21

Most of you will remember that we began our study of this book with chapter 3. At that time I said that chapter 3 contained the “Main Thing” in Paul’s life, and what should be the “Main Thing” in every Christian’s life.

Paul says, compared to this, everything he has attained or could ever hope to attain in this world was a little less than worthless to him.

What is it? It’s that God created Paul and us to live with a single, all-embracing, all-transforming passion—a passion to KNOW and glorify God by enjoying and displaying his supreme excellence in all the spheres of life. To *know*, to *gain* Christ, as Paul words it, is to magnify Christ with your life and exalt in Christ in your body. (e.g., Phil: 1:20)

Remember, the goal of spiritual growth, and our **spiritual growth covenant**, is not to get good at doing a bunch of spiritual disciplines. It is not to be more knowledgeable of the Bible or to be faithful in prayer or to be faithful to come to worship services. *These in themselves do not represent the goal of our Christian lives, however they do help us to reach it.* The goal is to make Christ bigger in our lives and to make Christ big in our world.

This is clearly the most important truth that we will ever know and it is found in Philippians 3. But it is not the only important thing we need to see in this chapter. In fact, one of the great enemies of true spirituality as

we have been talking about it, is highlighted in this chapter as well. And as the apostle Paul gives very strong warnings about it, we would do well to understand his warnings for our lives as well.

Philippians 3:2 ² *Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.*

What/who is the Apostle Paul talking of? He’s pretty clear that the Philippians needed to be *very* careful of these folks, and Paul described them in some pretty strong and colorful language *-dogs, evildoers, mutilators of the flesh!*

Paul is touching on a problem that may in fact be one of the most prevalent and pernicious problems that battle against the truth of God - in Paul’s day and today as well.

It is, in some ways so subtle that millions upon millions of professing Christians are blindly captured by its teaching and way of life. In fact, it is possible for you to walk up to someone that you know and they can confidently share that they believe in God, that they go to church, that they believe in Jesus, AND at the same time be totally blind to the fact that if the apostle Paul were here he would be speaking about the likes of them and their problem.

What am I talking about? I am talking about a subtle but deadly system of religion whereby its follower places his/her confidence in their own personal works, in their own personal performance, in their own personal religious striving, RATHER than in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:3 *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—*

You see, it is possible, no more than possible, that a person can be deeply religious and do the opposite of what Paul spells out here:

- To worship not by the Spirit, but in their own human strength

- To glory not in Jesus Christ's, but in their own self attainment.
- To have confidence in the things of the flesh rather than confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In our text, Paul a group we call Judaizers. Judaizers plagued Paul and his converts constantly. Confused about the gospel, they added works of the law to faith in Christ, both for salvation and for Christian living. The Old Testament rite of circumcision was of special concern to them. They insisted that it was necessary for salvation. They did not omit faith in Christ but added works of the flesh.

Now, at first, you might think about this and conclude, "Now I know that this isn't right, but it's probably not all that terrible, after all they still said to believe in Jesus. But Paul's words certainly don't line up with that way of thinking. In fact, down in verse 18 and 19 he has even more to say about them:

Philippians 3:18-19 *¹⁸For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.*

This is the only recorded instance that the apostle Paul cried. Why was there such emotional involvement over these deceptive teachings? Because, he goes on to say, that they, with their teaching, are *enemies of the cross*.

Tacking on even good things to the message of the cross makes you an enemy of it. Because it pulls people away from placing their faith in Jesus and his cross and instead in their own self attainment.

Tacking on what? Paul makes himself an example. His life, before he knew Jesus, was all about legalistic righteousness. And he knew that a person who played that game ended up diminishing the righteousness that comes *from God and is by faith*.

1. You can't tack on Religion and Religious Rites

Paul said that he had been *"circumcised the eighth day..."* and *...in regard to the law, a Pharisee*.

Now circumcision is a rite and like all religious rites, even those given by God, like this one, it simply an outward act that was supposed to mark an inward relationship, but if it didn't if didn't mean anything.

But the Jews, and the Judaizers both felt that somehow just having the ritual saved you.

In the second chapter of Romans, Paul argued the point like this,

Romans 2:28-29 *²⁸A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code....*

There will be some people who stand before the Lord Jesus one day when He asks, "Why should I let you enter my heaven?" and they will answer, "I've been baptized." "I am a church member." "I was confirmed."

You and I all know people who basically believe that they are going to heaven because some religious rite happened in their life. Baptism can be a rite. Infant baptism is a rite. Confirmation is a rite, dedications are all rites, and none of them will get a person into heaven!

If it could, then Paul could have done this. He was circumcised on the eighth day just like a good Jew, but he knew it couldn't help him gain eternal life with God because salvation has nothing to do with outward acts. It is an inward decision that we make.

2. You can't tack on Race and Relationships

Verse 5 continues by saying that Paul was...

"...of the tribe of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews..."

Not only did the Jews place their faith in the rite of circumcision for salvation, they also had come to believe that being born a Jew meant a special relationship with God. The Jews took this seriously. To know you were a Jew virtually insured you a position in heaven. And Paul said, "I'm not just a Jew, I know exactly where I came from because my blood line is as pure as it can be." But he also knew that this too was a dead end.

One day Jesus was talking to some Jews about salvation (Jn. 8:31ff). He had told them that they could know the truth concerning salvation, and that truth would set them free. The Jews answered Jesus by saying,

John 8:33 ... "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

What were they trusting for salvation and deliverance? Their family tree!

Some today live as if they think that being born into a Catholic family or a Baptist family or a good home is a sure sign of going to heaven.

Some people never go to church, use God's name in vain, and believe whatever it is they choose to believe, at the same time are convinced that because they belong to the right religion and were baptized when they were little, that they have a ticket to heaven.

I've met others who, because they have a godly mother or grandmother think perhaps they also are fine.

But this is a lie. It doesn't matter what our grandmother or grandfather was. It doesn't matter what our mother and father did. When you die and stand before the Lord. Your race and your family won't matter. All that will matter is the decision you made for Jesus Christ.

3. You can't tack on Religious Service

Verse 6 beings by saying,

"As for zeal, persecuting the church..."

Paul is saying, "look, as a Jew I really took it seriously. Other Jews opposed the Christians too, but not enough to do much about it. But not me."

Paul was wrong, but he certainly was religious.

Some people think, "it really doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe in God and follow your beliefs."

Let me tell you, it will be a sad day for many people who do much good work for God, when Jesus says to them that they cannot enter heaven. How many good people there will be in hell. There are going to be preachers and teachers and deacons in hell! There are going to be many church members in hell who did great works for God, but they never repented of their sins and trusted Him to be their personal Savior.

4. You can't tack on Your Righteousness

Verse 6 concludes by saying,

"as for legalistic righteousness, faultless."

Faultless. Paul had done everything he could that was possibly expected by anyone. He had spent his life trying to measure up to a very high standard of righteousness. No one could find anything in his life that didn't look right. He was faultless, blameless, in the eyes of man.

But God's estimation of him was that he was a sinner who stood condemned to die and go to hell.

Two Kinds of Religion

There are two kinds of religion in the world today. They have always existed and will until Jesus returns. They are the religions of faith and flesh. What does that mean? It means that you have two options concerning heaven and salvation. *Flesh religion* is that religion that says your getting into heaven is dependent on you and what you can do and how faithfully you can do it. *Faith religion* on the other hand isn't really religion at all. It is a relationship that is dependent on a decision you make concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. You're saved by grace through faith.

I love the responses of children. Sometimes they "miss" something in the translation, but they're so honest and sincere:

- A three-year-old went with his dad to see a litter of kittens. On returning home, he informed his mother there were 2 boy kittens & 2 girl kittens. "How did you know?" his mother asked. "Daddy picked them up and looked underneath," he replied, "I think it's printed on the bottom."
- On the first day of school, the kindergarten teacher said, "If anyone has to go to the bathroom, hold up two fingers." A little voice from the back of the room asked, "How will that help?"
- A father was reading Bible stories to his young son. He read, "The man named Lot was warned to take his wife and flee out of the city, but his wife looked back and was turned to salt." His son asked, "What happened to the flea?"

May I make an analogy — a very serious one? In the area of being rightly related to God, there are also many very sincere people who have missed something very important. Because of that, they have unwittingly chosen a Dead End rather than the path to God.

If someone said to you today, "Tell me, what proof is there in your life that you are a Christian?", would you start telling them about the good things that you do for others, or that you are basically a good person, or would you start talking about a relationship you have with one called Jesus Christ.

Where is your hope for your salvation grounded today?

Philippians 3:7-9 (NLT) *7I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.*

A relationship to God is the most important thing in this life. The only way that you can be guaranteed salvation and favor with God is to respond to His invitation to becoming a child of God. It's not a rite, it's not your race, and it's not your religion, your service or your righteousness that will save you: it is a personal relationship with Christ Jesus. Will you trust Him to save you today? Will you repent of your sins and place your faith in Christ and Christ alone for salvation? He is the only way.

My hope is built on nothing less,
Than Jesus blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus name.

On Christ, the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

Grace Explosion

The Principle of (the Cross) Grace is the most outrageous and risky thing that God could ever do! — to give us what we desperately need and what we could ever deserve, without any stings attached.

BUT you know one more thing about God's outrageous grace? God says, "You know what I am going to do? I am going to shock people by doling out something so outrageous and irrational that when this blessing *hits them* it is going to cause a spiritual explosion in their heart that will change them forever!"

When you know what you deserve, yet you get something more wonderful than you could earn in a thousand lifetimes— BAM — a grace explosion happens in your heart, and you will never be the same! And that's where growth comes from!

The Bible is full of stories of people who were "blown away" by God's grace. It is the strongest force in the universe. It is what separates Christianity from every other religion.

Consider the Prodigal Son in *Lk. 15*. This son did everything possible to destroy himself and his relationship with his Father. Finally no where else to turn, he goes home, hoping maybe for a little mercy — a chance to bunk with the hired hands and have food and a job.

Never in his wildest dreams did he imagine what was waiting for him! He got a huge love blessing that was completely out of line -- forgiveness, the embrace of his father, a ring on his finger, a celebration with his friends and family, the feast of his life. It was irrational.

And BAM! That kid was forever changed by a stunning assault of grace. I doubt he went out two months later with money in his pockets to the same town to do the same stuff to wind up in the same pig pen. The kid who would have done that doesn't exist any more. He died! He had been reborn by grace.

Listen, until this grace explosion occurs in your heart you'll never really understand growing. You have no idea of graces' power.

CONCLUSION

Have you received the grace of God? Have you received Jesus Christ? Remember, God didn't just wink at sin. Jesus, His Son, paid the price to satisfy His justice requirements. Because of that transaction, God can offer the gift of forgiveness and salvation **THAT YOU CAN RECEIVE BY FAITH.**

Thousands of cars are stolen every year, but in 1981, there was one car that was the lead story on the evening news. The police had issued an all-points bulletin to find the missing car in California and to make contact with the person who stole it.

Why was this car theft getting so much attention? The owner of the stolen car told the police that on the front seat of the car was a box of crackers laced with a deadly poison. The car owner had planned to use the crackers as rat bait. So the police were desperately trying to find the thief, not to punish him, but to save his life.

They were afraid he would eat one of the crackers and die.

In the same way, our Heavenly Father pursues us — not because he wants to punish us but because he wants to save us and shock us by grace. You may be running away from God because, like the car thief, you are a sinner. You have broken God's law.

But what you may not realize is that God is trying to rescue you, not condemn you.

He WANTS to pardon you! The truth is, God delights in offering His pardon.

The penalty for your sin has been paid by Jesus Christ on the cross, and God wants to give you your freedom. So stop running and turn yourself in.