

Broomfield

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Authentic Christianity

Philippians 3:3

It is possible in the course of a competition or battle to become that which you are warring against. For example in fighting terror it is not hard to become a terrorist. When one starts fighting against criminals it is not hard to become a criminal. Many who oppose slanderers become guilty of slander.

It was this concern that prompted Paul to write 1 Corinthians 9:26-27.

1 Corinthians 9:26-27, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

This passage represents a concern on the part of Paul. This concern was that after laboring for the salvation of others, he himself could fall short of knowing salvation.

Paul had good cause to be concerned. He had witnessed a generation of Jews who in their passion to be the people of God had themselves become the exact opposite. Let's go back to the beginning in the book of Genesis.

In Genesis 15 we read of the time when God entered into a formal relationship with Abraham. Now in the Ancient Near East, when two nations entered into a treaty, the ratification of the national covenant occurred in a ceremony where animals would be divided in two, and both kings would walk between the animals thus signifying, "Let this be done to me and my nation if I fail to uphold this covenant." Reminiscent of this we read these words:¹

¹ Many believe this practice of making a covenant was patterned after God's dealing with Abram. The cutting used here is different from the cutting of the idolatrous practice, a part of idol-worship. Compare Deuteronomy 14:1 and 1 Kings 18:28. The Israelites were commanded not to imitate this practice.

Genesis 15:9-10, “And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.”

Genesis 15:17-18, “And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.”

On what basis did God enter into a covenant with Abraham? Prior to God’s passing between the halved animals we read these words:

Genesis 15:6, “And he [Abram] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

God entered into a formal relationship with Abraham because He already was saved. Abram already had been made righteous by trusting the Messiah.²

This covenant was made with Abram he was a weak and miserable being — like you and I. In the thirty years the Scripture records that God spoke with Abraham how many times? Ten times? This means that God approached Abram on the average once every three years! Further, Abram did not have the written word with which to have quiet times. When he worshipped, he did not worship with a group of people, just his family!

It was in this framework that God gave Abram a rite. This rite was made not only that would remind Abram of this relationship but also that, at those times when having a relationship with God was beyond belief, it would serve as a token of proof.³

And what was that rite? Circumcision.

Genesis 17:10, “This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.”

Now let’s fast-forward in time 2000 years to the time of Paul. God had been faithful to the covenant that He established with Abraham. But the people through whom God had promised to bring this salvation to the world — this covenant of grace — had not been faithful. Somehow and somewhere the Old Testament Jew came to identify the sign of God’s covenant — circumcision — with that which it signified, a saving relationship with God. Thus, rather than trusting in the Messiah for their salvation as did Abraham, they trusted in the outward rite, circumcision. Consequently the Judaizers labored and battled to save Gentiles through the administration of circumcision, but in the process they themselves became as the Gentile.

Romans 2:28-29, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

² Compare Romans 4:3, and Galatians 3:8

³ Compare Romans 4:11

That is the background of the passage at which we are looking. In the previous verse, Philippians 3:2 we saw that Paul identified deceivers, the false-teachers which he called the false-circumcision. In light of the false-circumcision who could trace their lineage back to Abraham we now must ask ourselves who are the genuine children of God? To whom belong the promises that God made to Abraham? What is Authentic Christianity? Paul answers these questions in Philippians 3:3.

Philippians 3:3, “**For we are the circumcision**⁴, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

This is an important statement which could easily be glossed over. There is an obvious contrast that Paul is making here. In verse two, Paul mentions the false circumcision — the concision.⁵ *Circumcision* means to *cut around* while *concision* literally means to *cut into small pieces or mutilate*.

And that is exactly what those Jews had become. They based the salvation of an individual on whether or not someone was circumcised. They weren't the circumcision — which was a statement in Paul's day in reference to a genuine child of God! They were the mutilation!

Who then are the circumcision? In our passage Paul answers this question by giving a threefold description of what constitutes the true circumcision — not a *new* circumcision.⁶ He is describing the true Israel, not the *new* Israel. He is describing authentic Christianity, not sham Christianity.

Worshipping In Spirit

Philippians 3:3, “For we are the circumcision, **which worship**⁷ **God in the spirit**⁸, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

This is an incredible description of the Christian! From this verse we derive two very important truths about the child of God. First he is one who worships, and secondly that worship is in the spirit.

The Child of God Worships

The term rendered *worship* is a very important word in the Bible. In fact we have seen this term before in the Old Testament. There this term refers exclusively to the work of the priest in the temple.⁹ In the New Testament this word is always used of religious service, and is therefore often translated as *worship* or *serve*.

⁴ περιτομη peritome

⁵ κατατομη katatome

⁶ Paul here is not saying that the New Testament church is a separate entity from Old Testament Israel. Rather, he is saying that the New Testament church is simply a continuation of what God had begun with Abraham. Compare Galatians 3:29

⁷ λατρευω latreuo

⁸ πνευμα pneuma

⁹ The term λατρευω latreuo is used ninety times in the Septuagint LXX. In each instance it references the work of a priest

Hebrews 10:2, “For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the **worshippers** once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.”

Revelation 7:15, “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and **serve** him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.”

Just as the Old Testament priest understood himself to be a perpetual servant of God — one who ever and always lived to worship the Lord — so also must Christian bear this identity. **WE ARE WORSHIPPERS OF GOD!**

Truly everything that a Christian does can be summarized in a word: **WORSHIP!**

This is why Scripture identifies that the purpose of salvation is the securing of a worshipping people.

1 Peter 2:4-5, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

Winning someone to Christ is an act of worship.

Romans 15:15-16, “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.”

Holy living is considered to be an activity of worship.

Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable **service**.”

Giving money to meet the needs of the body is considered to be worship.

Philippians 4:18, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.”

The Christian's life of godliness and honesty is an activity of worship.¹⁰ Loving the brethren is worship.¹¹ In fact, **ALL** that we do is to be done to the exaltation of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

Don't miss a very important point. Worship is not just an activity of the believer, it's his **IDENTITY!** Every thought, desire, and act is nothing less than an offering of worship to the Lord! In fact, worship is so essential to the child of God, a synonym for the Christian in the Bible is “A Worshipper of God.”

¹⁰ Compare 1 Timothy 2:2-3

¹¹ Compare Romans 14:18

John 4:23, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

Acts 18:7, "And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue."

When the Jews spoke of Paul they said this:

Acts 18:13, "Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law."

Thus we conclude that the first mark of a genuine child of God is worship!

It is so important that you and I see this! For, we tend to fall into two errors in our thinking. The first error is that we wrongly identify WHO we are. We tend to fall into the trap of viewing ourselves through what we do in the kingdom. I'm an evangelist. I'm an encourager. I'm a singer. I'm a teacher. I'm a parent. And yet this is wrong.

We are NOT evangelists, encouragers, singers, teachers, or parents! We are **WORSHIPPERS OF THE LIVING GOD** who have been given gifts, talents, ministries, and responsibilities. We are given these gifts in order to fulfill our call to worship God!

When we understand this truth our life takes on meaning with a whole new light! Evangelism is no longer an attempt to save people from hell, but rather an attempt to bring **TRUE WORSHIPPERS TO GOD!** Parenting is no longer the task of keeping our children in the proper path, it is raising up **TRUE WORSHIPPERS FOR GOD!** Teaching and preaching is no longer the desire to merely instill knowledge, it is the quest to secure **TRUE WORSHIPERS OF GOD!**

What difference does this make in our lives? It gives us guidance in everything we do!

Many of us are confronted with whether or not we should have family worship? Or perhaps your struggle is wondering whether you should take this job or that? Perhaps you wonder whether you should move from here to there? Young people struggle with should I pursue this relationship or not? Each of these questions seem much simpler when we ask the real question: How will this decision affect my ability to worship?

The second error many of us make is that we wrongly divide our living. Many of us fall into the error of thinking that what we do at church is worship, and what we do everywhere else is ministry, work, or play, etc. However, Scripture won't allow you to make this distinction. As we have seen, **EVERYTHING** we do is an act of worship.

Thus the issue that we are faced with is NOT: To worship or not to worship? **BUT RATHER:** What kind of worship are we offering to God? Is our daily worship the worship of obedience? Is our worship the worship of submission? Is our worship the worship of purity? Is our worship the worship of devotion? Is our worship the worship of self-control?

Or is our daily worship tainted by what I think? Is my worship corrupted by the movies I watch? Is my worship lessened by the places I go? Do my desires enhance my worship? Do the unbridled passions of my heart bring me closer to Christ?

The NATURE of everything we do as Christians is worship. In view of this, let us all strive to present all that we do as a HOLY sacrifice to God!

Yet how can we do this? Notice the next phrase of Philippians 3:3.

Worship by the Spirit

Philippians 3:3, “For we are the circumcision, **which worship God in the spirit**¹², and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

The literal rendering here is this: who worship in the Spirit of God.¹³ In Galatians 4 Paul further defines what it means to worship in the Spirit of God.

Galatians 4:6, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

When a person is saved, the Holy Spirit enters into their person, thus transforming them into a new creature. Consequently, to worship “in the Spirit of God” references the worship of ones who have been radically transformed by the Holy Spirit. These believers are given eyes to see, ears to hear, and have been granted the faith to believe. These are those who worship in the Spirit of God.¹⁴

As such, we are called to:

Ephesians 5:18-20, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; [now notice the result] Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When a Christian is filled with the Spirit he is so filled by the word of God that it controls him. The lives of those who are filled with the Spirit respond in worship which proceeds from their innermost part of their being. The result is that they speak in Psalms. They sing. They worship the worship of thanksgiving.

From these passages we conclude that to worship in the Spirit of God speaks not only of a worship that flows from a redeemed people, but it is also a worship which flows from the innermost part of their being! It is worship by conviction!

What we do flows from the knowledge that it is well-pleasing to the Lord. What we think is shaped by the word of the Lord. What we desire is centered on the will of the Lord.

¹² πνεῦμα pneuma

¹³ There is textual variation in the Greek texts. The Authorized Version states “worship God in the spirit” the Revised Standard Version “worship God in spirit.” The New American Standard version follows the rendering of the Authorized Version but clarifies it this way: “worship in the Spirit of God.” The dispute centers around which text is the oldest and /or most reliable. Textual criticism studies these variants and concludes which rendering is best. For the purposes here we are following the text types which render this “worship in the Spirit of God” since many believe this rendering is most accurate.

¹⁴ Compare Romans 8:26

Now at first, you might be tempted to think, “This isn't my experience, nor is it the experience of most of the people I know who profess Christ!”

Worship Defined

The English word *worship* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *weorthscipe* which evolved to the pronunciation worth-ship. The term *weorth* implied reverence and devotion to a deity. Worship simply is the appropriate response to the character of God. And this is the life of a Christian, one who has responded and continues to respond appropriately to the character of God!

Thus as Christians we confess that we are ones who have responded appropriately to the character of God. We have seen God's holiness and have concluded we are sinners! We have seen God's beauty and have concluded that we are vile and wretched. We have seen God's righteousness and have concluded that we have fallen very, very short! We have seen God's justice and have concluded that we are condemned! We have felt God's love and mercy as demonstrated by the cross and have responded by asking Christ to be our Lord and Savior!

One cannot be a follower of Christ without having responded appropriately to Him. Thus by definition one who follows Christ is a true worshipper.

But you say, the character of God has indeed driven me to the cross, but that is about all that it has done. God's character rarely is that which influences me in my life.

Insofar as that is true, then we confess that we have a long way to go in our sanctification! Don't we?

This brings me to a very important consideration. The common teaching among many Evangelical Christians is that when Christ died on the cross and the temple curtain — which divided the holy place from the holy of holies — was torn,¹⁵ this allowed mankind to enter into God's presence. However, this is not what happened. When the temple curtain was torn it was God's holy presence coming to dwell with us. From Matthew 27:51 we profess that all of life is lived *Corem Deo* — in the presence of God!

It is on this front that we have failed today! We have proved ourselves to be practical atheists! We have fallen short in our worship of God! We don't believe that Christ dwells among us anymore; or better yet, we have forgotten!

On Sunday we allow our minds to consider the greatness of God. We think about His holiness, grace, and love. We sing His praise and how we want Him more than silver and gold. But then on Monday it is as though we have entered a different world. We wake up (or is it that we fall asleep) burdened by the week. We are bothered at having to face the co-worker. We are worried, distracted, pre-occupied with the things of this life. Let me ask you this: Is the holy God you worshipped on Sunday — is He still holy On Monday? The God before whom you wept on Sunday over your sin because you know you have grieved the Holy Spirit — does your sin still grieve Him on Monday? Does not the Lord who controls Leviathan also control your boss, co-worker, and neighbor? Does not the voice that commanded the waves still control them? Does the hand that flung stars into space hold you?

¹⁵ Compare Matthew 27:51

Why are we so “worried and bothered about so many things”¹⁶ when a kingdom lay before us? It is because we have forgotten!

Just like at the time of Josiah when the long forgotten book of the Deuteronomy was found and read as for the first time. It is my privilege to remind you of a long-forgotten truth! If you are a child of the living God then God's presence has entered into your life. You are standing on holy ground. Your life is lived *Corem Deo*! You are nothing less than one who worships — who lives his life in response to — the living God!

Let us therefore respond appropriately to Emmanuel — God with us! Let us endeavor to come to a greater and fuller understanding of God, and thus live each moment of our lives in light of what we have come to know about God! Let us make it our chief aim in life to know our Lord better. Let us study His perfections; gaze at His beauty; marvel in His love; live in light of His grace! Let us encourage one another with these words.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 9, 2003. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

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¹⁶ Compare Luke 10:41