

On Dogs and Joy

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Bible Verse: Philippians 3:1-3
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Well, as we come to God's word this morning, we're going to return to the book of Philippians beginning in chapter 3, and I want to just read my text for this morning to get us started, Philippians 3 in the first three verses, and it's just an opportunity for us to clarify exactly what is the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ this morning with this great text. Philippians 3 is, in some ways, a summary of the message more fully expounded in Galatians and the book of Romans, and so over the next several weeks we have an opportunity to come deeply into the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that I'm very excited to bring to you.

Philippians 3:1-3 is our text for this morning and it read as follows,

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. 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,

Paul has come to a pivot point in his letter here as recognized by the word "finally." He is moving away now from the long exhortations that he has given toward humility and unity in the church, his discussion of Timothy and Epaphroditus as illustrations and his earlier discussion of Christ as illustrations of that call, all of that is finished for now and he is pivoting to another matter to bring to the attention of the church. And it's a matter of great significance, great importance, and it's a matter of great importance and significance for us today corporately speaking, and it's a great opportunity and it's a great text for those of you who are perhaps trying to sort out exactly what Christianity is and what it means, you know, what does it mean to be saved, what is the true Gospel, what is it that I am to do, so to speak, to be saved. In this text, all of these things are clarified for us in a wonderful way and with a very pertinent contrast between the false gospel that was infiltrating the church at Philippi and the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now let me just remind you, if you'll turn back to 1 Corinthians 15 for just a moment, a very important key text for us to understand. 1 Corinthians 15, beginning in verse 1. This is just by way of introduction. In some ways, you could say there is no more important question for you to answer in your personal life, no more important question for a church

to answer in its doctrine and preaching, and no more important message for a sinner to hear and to understand than to know what is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and why is it so urgent. Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, verses 1 through 4 will kind of help pave the way and will clear a path for our thinking here this morning. Paul says in verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 15,

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

It's so critical for us to understand that the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is not be good in order that you may be saved. The Gospel and heaven is not a reward for people who have been good enough to earn God's favor. The Gospel, rather, is a gift given freely by God to people who do not deserve it. Those who come to God thinking they deserve something from him are only manifesting the reality that they are not Christians, that they have understood and believed a false message of how one comes to God and how one goes to heaven. That is not, being good is not the Gospel, the Gospel tells us that you are a sinner who has fallen short of the glory of God and there is nothing that you can do to save yourself. And the Gospel, the word "Gospel" means "good news." The good news is that despite your sin, God has graciously sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world 2,000 years ago, and that the message and the purpose of the coming of Christ was so that he might save sinners. Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "I have come to seek and to save that which is lost." And so lost people don't know how to find themselves, they don't know how to get to where they're going, and so the Scriptures present us as lost, depraved, helpless sinners who are in need of help from outside of ourselves if we are ever to be saved, and the Gospel tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ has done everything that is necessary for salvation. He died as a sacrifice for sinners. He offered his perfect, blameless, unblemished life on the cross to God as a sacrifice to satisfy his justice on behalf of guilty sinners. He took our sins in his body on the cross, it says in 1 Peter, and that he was buried, and that God accepted his sacrifice for sinners and that is shown by the fact that he raised him from the dead. The penalty of sin is death, the wages of sin is death it says in Romans 6:23. Christ paid the penalty of death, entered into that realm of death and came out on the other side, showing that the wages of sin had been paid, and now he as Lord having paid the price, he has the authority; he has paid the price that makes it possible for salvation to be proclaimed in his name, that everyone who believes in Christ and repents of sin and forsakes any confidence in the flesh, any confidence in their own goodness, and rests in Christ alone will be saved. Romans 10 says, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." But it is so vital and crucial for us to understand that that is not a message of self-improvement, it is not a message about being good or improving your morality to somehow measure up to God, the entryway into heaven is found when we realize we do not measure up, we cannot measure up, we will never measure up, and if we try we're only digging our hole deeper, and that therefore we

look outside of ourselves to the crucified and risen Christ as the one alone who is able to redeem us and to deliver us from our sins.

Well, that's the message of the Gospel but there are always opponents because the rule of Christ is actively opposed by Satan and false teachers that he energizes. The Gospel is always being corrupted. There are always men trying to corrupt it, to teach another way of salvation and this is what is concerning Paul as we come to our text in chapter 3, verses 1 through 3. There is a danger at play that he is beginning here in chapter 3 to help the church find their way through.

Now look at chapter 3, verse 1, and notice what he says as he speaks to them. He is protecting them here. He is giving them what they need in order to discern the truth and he says this, he says,

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

Rejoice in the Lord, he says. This theme of joy is a prominent one in the book of Philippians, in fact, there are books, commentaries written about Philippians that will use the word "joy" in their title, "Be joyful, the life of joy," indicating that it is such a prominent theme in the book of Philippians. And I want to just take you to a few of the passages that point this out for us. Paul starts the letter, so to speak, and in prayer and with this theme of joy.

Look at in Philippians 1:3 where he says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all." And he goes on in chapter 1, verse 18 and he says, "Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice." And in chapter 2, verses 17 and 18, he calls the Philippians to join in his joy, this gladness of heart, this confidence in Christ that produces a joy and satisfaction that overcomes everything in the world. And he says in verse 17, recognizing that he might possibly be executed as shortly after he writes this letter, he didn't know what was going to happen, he says in chapter 2, verse 17, "even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me." And then later in chapter 4, verse 4, he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near." And so you see that from beginning to end and woven throughout the letter is this theme of joy. He is writing to help the church, to strengthen the church, to repair them, you might say spiritually and take them from the grumbling and disputing that was marking the church at that time, and to replace it with this attitude of joy that is one of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness," and on and on it goes.

So the Christian life is meant to be marked by joy. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. Christ speaks of joy often in the Gospel of John. And so let's just step back for a moment and just take a quick look in the mirror, you might say, look into your spiritual mirror and ask yourself what the tone of your life is and what the tone of your heart and your attitude

toward life is. Is it one of grumbling about your circumstances, whatever they may be? Is it one of disputing and arguing and contention with others? Well, beloved, understand that that is not the mark of the Christian life. Genuine true Christians, it is true, can fall into that just as the Philippians did, but we are never intended to accept that as the dominant spirit in which we live, and if you find yourself grumbling, complaining, disputing, having contentions with people in your home or just finding that characterizing the nature of life, you need the message that is being presented here by the Apostle Paul to wake up, "Hello! This is not what Christian life is supposed to be like. The fruit of the Spirit is not grumbling and disputing and complaining, it's something else." And with that recognition to come humbly and teachably toward the text and say, "What is it that God's word would have for me here this morning that I need to take and implement over the course of time?"

And let me just say this also, my friends. I don't mention this directly and explicitly often but I think it underlies the nature of the way that, you know, this pulpit tries to teach. We are not looking for a hasty emotional response here today to the text, we're looking for an earnest interaction with what the theme is that you would meditate on over time and let it come to change your inner man, change who you are over time. You know, it's easy to strike a match of emotion and toss it someplace and it goes out really quick. That should never be the goal of preaching, simply to generate an emotional response. Scripture tells us that we are transformed by the renewing of our mind, by continually meditating on the word of God, seeing where it points us, and aiming our life direction accordingly.

And so there's a lot for us here in these coming verses throughout chapter 3, and this is the way that Paul introduces it to us. There is this theme of joy. Now the question, then, becomes what's my starting point for joy? What do I do, what is it that I look to, what is joy built on, so that it is standing on a firm foundation rather than simply the shifting sands of my passable and changeable emotions. Where is joy grounded in a way that it can be founded on something that is unchanging, and that is what Paul's concern is here in chapter 3.

Now most of us would be surprised to see where he goes with this because Paul launches into a discussion about what the true Gospel is. Remember, we talked about what the Gospel is and a false gospel undermines joy, and so we must have clarity on the source of our salvation in order to have joy. Now look, with that said look at chapter 3, verse 1, with me again. Paul says and this is kind of his transitional verse from chapter 2 to the rest of the letter. He says, "Finally, my brethren," he speaks to them kindly, lovingly, encouragingly, affirmingly,

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

It's a command. This is not optional for the Christian life. This is a command that we are to obey and he says this, he says,

To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

And there are different discussions about what Paul means when he talks about "the same things," what is it that he's writing about. I think in the context of the letter, he is simply emphasizing the fact that, "I have been speaking about joy repeatedly already and I'm going to talk about joy again right now, and to say the same thing, to call you to rejoice in the Lord is not a problem for me." You need the emphasis on joy to be a protection for your spiritual life. You need the emphasis on joy to guide and to direct and to show you the path forward in your sanctification. You know, grumbling, angry, contentious people are not sanctified and may not even be genuine believers, but the absence of joy and the presence of this grumbling and disputing is a spiritual warning sign, it's a spiritual, if you can make a medical analogy, it's a spiritual cancer that requires treatment rather than letting it go untreated. If cancer goes untreated, you know what happens to the body. If this grumbling spirit goes untreated, it is the same result spiritually, and so we need to forsake those things, Paul says, and so he's going to talk to them about the urgency of joy again in order that they don't miss the point. This emphasis on joy is important for their spiritual protection.

Now what's going to happen right now as we go to verse 2, is a sharp change in tone from what we've been seeing in the immediately prior context. He had spoken about Christ and his humiliation and his exaltation and the glorious themes of that. He had spoken about Timothy and his faithfulness and his love and his sacrifice. Epaphroditus, the same thing, affirming Epaphroditus in his sacrifice and his service and commending him to the church at Philippi. And so there's all of this warmth and affirmation going on and so you're going in one direction and suddenly it seems like he hits the brakes and turns real hard to go another direction.

Look at chapter 3, verse 2. The prior warmth is now changing immediately so that he says in chapter 3, verse 2,

2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

Now all I'm pointing out to you right now is to just notice the change in tone from affirmation of men and encouraging people in joy, he says, "Rejoice in the Lord," which all of that seems consistent, but suddenly there's this sharp dramatic change in tone and giving them warning right on the edge of having given them all of this affirmation and instruction in joy. Some people, you know, more liberal commentators wonder if, you know, if Paul got distracted at this point, he went away from the letter and he came back and he forgot his train of thought so he picked up and started writing something else. Even more liberal commentators will say, "Well, this is an indication that the letter wasn't written at the same time and somebody added something else." None of that's necessary and we don't need to go there in our thinking. There is a very obvious reason why Paul does what he does here and here's what I want you to watch and see, okay? This is what you need to understand, that joy is built on the foundation of the true Gospel. What that means is, is that a false gospel is a threat to Christian joy in a way that may be not immediately apparent for those who think superficially about such things, but his prior

warmth has now turned into a warning almost without anything to prepare you for the changing in tone. But this prior warmth now turns into a contrast between the true and false gospel, and that's what we need to see because your joy as a believer is premised on what the reality of the Gospel is and how you are reconciled to a holy God. That is where joy comes from, is knowing that I am reconciled to God, I am accepted by God, he will receive me into heaven, and I know why that is and I know what my hope is. As Paul said in Timothy and as we sing in a hymn, "I know whom I have believed and I'm persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day." That's where your joy comes from but if you think your joy comes from anything other than the true Gospel, then your joy is going to be polluted and eventually destroyed.

So what Paul does here in verses 2 and 3 is he gives us a contrast between the false gospel and the true Gospel, and by way of that contrast, he warns us and protects us from the infiltration of false influences and with the true he gives us that which reaffirms us in our joy. So there's a contrast. We're going to see three marks of a false gospel in our first point here this morning, and then secondly, we're going to see three marks of the true Gospel, and through this we're going to gain discernment as a church, as individual believers, and for those of you who are not Christians, it is going to help you see the path forward. There is a path that leads to death, there is a path that leads to life and heaven, and it is urgent for you to know which is which and to see them clearly from God's word.

So let's consider, first of all, three marks of a false gospel as Paul gives it to us here in verse 2. Remember, he is protecting their joy by warning them of an imminent threat to it so that he says there in verse 2, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision." Notice just by way of a simple observation three times in this one verse he tells them to beware, look out, be on guard, watch for this and do not let yourself be sucked into it. False gospel is like a giant vacuum hose trying desperately to suck people into its realm and in its power, and it sucks people in and you need to stay way from the initial attraction, the initial suction power of a false gospel. You've got to stay completely away from it if you are going to be protected in your joy. So this emphasis, three times "beware," this emphatic repetition is showing us that he is making an earnest and a very serious warning that we are to take heed to. This is not optional. This is not an elective in Christian life. This is a required course in understanding. This is a mandatory assignment to take to heart and to take to bear and to recognize and to understand what's being said here.

Now the Apostle Paul often had to contend in his ministry against those who tried to impose Jewish requirements, Jewish ceremonial requirements upon Gentiles. He often was refuting those who wanted to require circumcision and who told Gentiles that they needed to be circumcised before they could be saved. There was a work, a preparatory work that they said that you had to do, you had to enter in through the Jewish way, you had to enter in through circumcision or you cannot be saved. There was a work for you to be done. And so these Judaizers made the works of the law a condition of salvation. You can't be saved. You can't go directly to Christ in order to be saved, in other words. First, you have to go to the guy with the scalpel and in submission to Jewish law, do these things, do these works and then maybe Christ will receive you. Well, beloved, if that

were true, then salvation is no longer by grace, it is something that you do, at least in part, in order to earn the favor of God, and you go to the scalpel and then you go to God and say, "I've done what is necessary. Now You can accept me. Now You must accept me because I've done what's been required." And there is this attitude of going to God in a sense of pride in having done what is necessary which is totally contrary to the humble spirit of faith.

Now look, that might, maybe for some of you that may not sound to be like that big of a deal but understand that the clarity and the distinction between a true and false gospel is at place and in play for something like that because it perverts the Gospel. It tells somebody that there's something to do which is contrary to faith, it tells them that there's something that they must do physically in their outer man in order to be saved, and then it does something else, for people who think that there's a rule to keep and, "I've kept it," there is this sinister evil poison in their heart called pride that says, "I have done what is required. Now God, You owe me, God, because I have done what is required." And that pride and reliance on self is directly contrary to the humility and reliance on Christ alone that is the source of joy, and we'll see this as we walk through Paul's threefold description of these false teachers. And this very brief warning in verse 2 helps us recognize broadly speaking, helps us recognize broad principles that can help you recognize men who are presenting you with a false gospel, and the issues really haven't changed all that much over the past 2,000 years. The outward form of it may be a little bit different but the temptation, the call to works, to good behavior, to self-righteousness, to self-improvement, to morality as being that which earns you favor with God, it's all the same, it's all the same underlying principle, "You do this and you get right with God," and that's a false gospel.

So let's see what is it that Paul says that can help us recognize a false gospel. There's three things here. First of all, this is a subpoint here, so the marks of a false gospel, one of those marks is this, is a false gospel produces immorality, a false gospel produces immoral men. It produces immoral men. You can recognize a false gospel being taught by the man who teaches it, in part by the fact that the man's immorality gives it away.

Now look at what he says here, chapter 3, verse 2. He says, "Beware of the dogs." Now for some of you, you think about dogs and you think about them as good pets that you want to have. That's never been a problem in my thinking but we tend to think about dogs in the modern day as pets, as domesticated animals and those animals that are companions for us in one way or another. That was not the image in the first century. In the first century, dogs were not pets but they were unclean animals that often went about in packs and they were scavenger animals and aggressive animals against humans.

One writer says this, a writer on "Manners & Customs in the Bible," he says this, that dogs, speaking about first century dogs, "They barked fiercely at strangers that come their way. In the evening, they are usually heard barking about the city. To call anybody a dog was to consider him very lowdown indeed." They are these aggressive noisy dogs disrupting the peace. Noisy, disruptive animals disrupting the peace and Paul says that's what teachers of the false gospel are like.

The Jews in that day used to call Gentiles dogs to insult them for their unclean ways because they weren't following the ceremonial requirements of the Jewish laws. You're not doing what's right and therefore you're a dog, you're unclean because your life is not in accordance with the ceremonial requirements of our religion. And so Jews were calling Gentiles that. Paul, who interestingly enough you'll see next time, Paul himself was very much a Jew. Paul turns that insult on these false teachers and he calls them dogs. He calls these false Jewish teachers dogs and turns the insult against them. And the reason that they were unclean, the reason that these false teachers were corrupt was because of their pride and their spiritual deception that they were perpetrating on people. They were not pointing people to Christ and Christ alone, by grace and by grace alone, by faith and by faith alone, they were laying out requirements that had to be followed and calling people to follow them and their teaching rather than pointing them to Christ. That's a false gospel and so there was this great corruption in them.

If you look back at Revelation 22:15, back toward the very end of the Bible, Christ himself looking forward to the halls of eternity and the halls of heaven here, Scripture says in Revelation 22:14, he said, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside," outside the realm of heaven, outside the realm of truth, outside the true Gospel is this, "the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying." What I want you to see there is that dogs are associated with this gross immorality of deception, of fornication, of murder, of sorcery and demonic worship, loving and practicing lying. That's the association of a dog in Scripture. It is associated with immorality and this is a giveaway to recognize a false teacher, so often they are marked by immorality in their personal lives, so often they manifest the very corruption, the very sinful enslavement in their own lives that salvation is designed to deliver men from. And so a man washed up in deception and corruption and immorality is a dog in the sense that Paul is using it here in the book of Philippians.

And you must understand this, my friends, you must understand that the true Gospel and true salvation, true regeneration in the human heart produces a changed life. It doesn't produce a perfect life but a redirected and a reoriented life, one that is oriented toward holiness and away from sin. In 1 John 2:3 it says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." And so as you look at your own life here this morning, my friends, in part as you consider whether you are a true Christian or not, you need to ask yourself what is the orientation of your heart, is it toward righteousness and godly living, or are you still one who loves sin, loves profanity, loves corruption, loves immorality, you drink it in without, you know, and it goes down easy and smooth for you because there's not a reflex action against it by the motions of the Spirit of God in your heart?

A false gospel produces immoral men. In these days in which we live, beloved, it is just especially important for us to emphasize this and for you to embrace it and take it to heart because there are all kinds of men who live sinful lives and continue to claim to preach,

continue to claim to preach a gospel. Well, you can't trust what they say when their life is a living contradiction of what the message of the true Gospel is. You can't trust a teacher like that. They're dogs. They're immoral. They're not to be believed. You go somewhere else and you look somewhere else for it. And one of the great deceptions that people within the broadly speaking church of Christ are so happy to drink in, is a man disqualifies himself and then after a brief period of so-called restoration he's back to doing the same thing, he's back to preaching again, and the cover that is given to that is, "Well, I can speak to people who have sinned because I've sinned myself in like way." And in all their adultery and fornication and gambling and other matters of corruption, they don't disown the sin, they say, "This helps qualify me to preach to you, that I have been such a corrupt person, and without repentance of that, I come and I tell you this is what the Gospel is and how you are to live." And inevitably, inevitably, inevitably, inevitably they are minimizing the demands of God for holiness and telling people that your sin is not that important and everything's covered by grace, and it's a message that is devoid of any concept of calling people to repentance, to turning from sin rather than accepting it, and inevitably that is what you find.

So a false gospel produces men like that and they are not to be believed. They are to be avoided. When it comes to your attention that a man is like that, you just turn and walk away. You don't have to sort anything out. You beware of that, you turn away from it because it's a threat to your joy. It is a threat to your spiritual well-being. That's what a false gospel does and so Paul here by warning, saying, "Beware of the dogs," he's saying, "Beware of immoral men who are pretending to be in ministry and turn away from them." You don't have to figure it out. You should not speculate, "Are they real Christians or not?" None of that matters to you, you just turn your back on that kind of ministry because a false gospel produces immoral men and it becomes one of the ways by which you can identify them. And those with a works based salvation like the Philippians were facing and dealing with, they're bankrupt, immoral dogs, and Paul says, "Watch out for them."

Now secondly, there's another aspect of it, a false gospel relies on human works. It relies on human works. There are many ways to go astray in the presentation of the Gospel but one of the ways, one of the key ways is a false gospel relies on human works. Paul goes on and he describes them as evil workers. Look at verse 2 with me again, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision." These evil workers, why were they evil? They were evil in this way: Christ was not enough for them. Christ was not enough in their message. They wanted to add something of human merit to it. They trusted their fleshly works for righteousness before God. And so this Jewish ceremonial law became the means by which they justified their claim to be right with God and their fleshly works for righteousness, their religion became their message and what they trusted in, and what they called others to trust in as well.

Now in our post-modern time where everybody's, you know, truth is relative and your truth is as good as my truth and as good as Tom's truth, and blah, blah, blah, because we in our age have been so conditioned by that thinking, you may be tempted to view other religions with sympathy and to say, "Well, at least they're religious." Or, "At least they're

proclaiming some kind of morality in the midst of this decadent age in which we live, and at least they're saying something about morality." Friends, what you need to understand is that is an entirely wrong way to think. We should not view false religion with sympathy. We should not view it as though they are co-laborers for us, that we can work together with them to achieve other agendas. No. This is false religion and in the eyes of God it is damnable and corrupt and subject to eternal damnation. We are not at a cafeteria where we can pick out of whatever tray of religion we want and everything comes out okay. There is one way of salvation and it is by faith alone, in Christ alone, and to reject that, beloved, what I want you to see here is this, to reject that message, the exclusivity of that message in exchange for human righteousness is to reject the Gospel altogether. You cannot mix the two together. In fact, even if it's done unawares, even if it's done in ignorance, it is still a spiritual rebellion to reject the righteousness of Christ in an effort to establish your own.

Look over at Romans 10 with me. Romans 10, going back a few books in the Bible. In Romans 10, Paul is praying for his Jewish brethren as he writes to the Christians in Rome and he says in chapter 10, verse 1, he says, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." You see, in order for you to be saved, you must, you must subject yourself, submit yourself to Christ and to Christ alone, to submit yourself to the Gospel message and to what Christ said about himself. "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."

There is no other way of salvation and so in order to have joy and in order to be rightly related to God, you must come to Christ humbly and submit yourself to him, forsaking any claim to self-righteousness whatsoever. Paul in Romans says that his Jewish friends were not doing that, therefore they were unsaved and they were trying to establish their own kind of righteousness as the currency with which they would buy heaven for themselves from God and Paul says, "It's false. That is false work. You cannot do that. You cannot proclaim that and be true to the Gospel." It is sharp. It is clear. It is distinct. Salvation, the five Solas of the Reformation: salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on the testimony of Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. You know, and it's not enough simply to talk in vague terms about Jesus. It's not enough to talk in vague terms about the cross. The question that you have to answer is what is your hope, what are you relying on for your salvation. Is it Christ alone? Is it his righteousness? Is it his shed blood on the cross? Is that what you're trusting in alone or is there some mixture of pride and self-works that are mixed in there? It's distinct. It's Christ alone and we're not to rely on our false works for any aspect of our reconciliation with a holy God.

Now thirdly, thirdly, a false gospel relies on religious ritual. You can recognize a false gospel by the fact that it relies on religious ritual. You've got to do this every week. You have to show up every week. You know, you've got to take the wafer and do all of this stuff. Well, no.

Look at chapter 3, verse 2, with me. He says, "beware of the false circumcision," and what he means by that phrase, "false circumcision," is that these Judaizing teachers took circumcision to be a mark of spiritual salvation, that the act in the flesh was necessary and integral to a saving reality, but what Paul is saying here is that if you have circumcision without true faith, without true repentance, without a complete and utter reliance on Christ and Christ alone, all you've done is mutilated your flesh. You've just cut yourself up. It has done nothing for you in the presence of God. Circumcision without true faith is simply mutilation. And so they were trusting in their work of circumcision rather than trusting Christ alone for salvation and Scripture makes it abundantly clear that when you mix works with faith, you have come under the condemnation of a false gospel. Galatians 1:8-9 says, "If I or an angel from heaven comes and preaches any other gospel to you than what you heard from me, he is to be accursed, he is to be damned."

So a false gospel is not a lesser form of good religion, it's poison. And when believers come under the influence of this false teaching of trusting in works and a sense of self-righteousness, it's going to drive joy out of their life and that's why Paul warns against it so much is because your joy is premised on a complete and utter total reliance on Christ and finding your utter sufficiency in him and in him alone. That is essential to understand and that reliance on him alone causes us to reject everything else that rises up in competition against him.

Now quickly, all too quickly let's take a contrasting look at three marks of the true Gospel. Three marks of the true Gospel in our second main point, and then we're going to have three subpoints here. Paul, by contrast, sets forth the faith which the apostles preached. Verse 3, he says, "for we are the true circumcision." In other words, he's saying, "We go beyond a fleshly symbol and what we preach is that which inwardly cleanses and renews a man," as we're going to see in just a moment. Chapter 3, verse 3,

3 for we are the true circumcision, who [1] worship in the Spirit of God
[2] and glory in Christ Jesus and [3] put no confidence in the flesh,

So what can we glean about the true Gospel from those three statements that Paul makes in that one verse? There's a lot packed into there. Well, first of all, you need to understand that the Gospel, the true Gospel is spiritual in nature. It is spiritual in nature. It comes from within the heart. It's a matter of the heart, not that of outward performance. Paul immediately refutes the outward view of the false teachers with what he says there in verse 3.

Look at it with me. He says, "3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God." Understand this, beloved, as one of the clearly defining and separating marks, the distinguishing marks of the true Gospel is that there is a focus on the inner man. You know, false religion will tell you, "If you just go through the rituals, you'll be okay and what's going on inside isn't that important." That's why the Catholics could, why you could be a mobster in Chicago and be in good standing with the Catholic Church as long as you were going to Mass. Well, that's not true. That's false. We render

spiritual service to God in our inner man. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." So my friends, what's in your heart? Is it reliance on self or is it reliance on Christ? This is fundamental to understanding what the true Gospel is.

Look over at Psalm 51:16-17 and you see this clear renunciation of external ritual as that which God requires from sinners. What is the inner response? Psalm 51:16, "For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it," I'd give you the ritual if that's what you wanted, God,. "You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." True salvation is recognized in the heart of a believer by a brokenness over sin, a repentant mournful attitude over sin. It does not mean that you are sinless. It does not mean that you achieve perfection in this life, rather true salvation can be recognized by that inward attitude that renders spiritual worship to God, humble repentance wedded together with a faith in Christ alone. It's a spiritual act. The Gospel produces spiritual people like that rather than – watch this – rather than a boasting and a sense that, "I am good enough. I'm not perfect." Oh, I hate hearing that. "Sure I'm not perfect but I'm pretty, you know, I've done what, you know, I've pretty much done what God requires." That is the mark of someone who is not saved. The mark of salvation is someone who says, "I have sinned against God. I have fallen short of His glory and my only hope is in Christ alone." That's what Paul is saying there, we worship in the Spirit of God.

Now secondly, the Gospel comes through Christ alone. This is what we've been saying throughout. The Gospel comes through Christ alone. Paul emphasizes the only source of our salvation and notice how plainly he states it. He says, "we worship in the Spirit of God and we glory in Christ Jesus." Our hope and our confidence is in Christ alone. It is outside of us. I don't trust in what I have done to go to heaven. I don't trust in anything about me to make me right with God. My glory, my hope, my joy is in Christ outside of me. Christ in his righteousness. Christ in his shed blood, in his resurrection, in his ascension. I'm hoping in him to be faithful to his promise to save me. And when a man has that, when a woman has that clear in her mind that that's where my hope is, then joy is going to come because that is the way that men are truly reconciled to God. So true salvation comes when you trust Christ for his righteousness and joy comes when you forsake any reliance on self, and you are ever-reminding yourself that, "My hope is in Christ and in Christ alone," for as it says in Ephesians 2:8-9, "We are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works lest anyone should boast."

So I ask you, my friends, what are you hoping in? Do you realize and acknowledge that you are a sinner who has broken the law of God and you are irredeemably lost apart from Christ? Have you forsaken all sense of self-righteousness and looked to Christ alone to be that which can save you and the one who can reconcile you to God? Because the Gospel comes through Christ alone. We glory in Christ Jesus and not in ourselves.

Thirdly, finally, on the flipside of that coin, the Gospel denies all human merit. The Gospel denies all human merit. Look at it there at the end of verse 3. We've been talking

about this all along so I'll just quickly state this. Chapter 3, verse 3, "we are the true circumcision," our message is the true Gospel, we are true teachers of the Gospel, Paul says, we "worship in the Spirit of God, we glory in Christ Jesus and," here's the negative side of it, we "put no confidence in the flesh." Paul says, "We don't trust any works of our own." Paul says, "When we proclaim the Gospel to you, we do not teach you to rely on something that you do for your salvation. We don't tell you to be circumcised and then you can be saved. We tell you to go directly straight to Christ and trust Him alone for the forgiveness of your sins." So when he says we do not put any confidence in the flesh, he says we do not look to self for righteousness. You look to Christ and Christ alone. His life. His death. And you trust him exclusively for your reconciliation with God. And you ever make it clearer and clearer in your mind that, "My hope is in Christ and not in myself. It is all of Christ and not of me."

Let's just quickly look at one other verse from Galatians 2, if you'll turn back there with me. I'm almost done here. Galatians 2:16 and you see how this just reverberates through Scripture. Galatians 2:16, "nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."

So, my friends, to preserve and protect your joy, perhaps to enter into salvation for the first time, this passage calls you to examine your heart and the basis of your hope. Threefold question: is your life marked by unbroken patterns of sin, an unrepentant spirit toward iniquity? Do you think you are good based on what you have done? Do you think obeying religion can take you to heaven? My friends, that is the mark of a false gospel. You need the true Gospel because the true Gospel brings inner change to a man through the new birth, we glory in the Spirit of God. The Gospel rests on the person and work of Christ alone, "I trust what He did, not what I do." And the Gospel teaches us to deny all self-righteousness.

So, my friends, I ask you what is your hope? What are you hoping in to bring you forgiveness of sin, righteousness with God, and to enter safely into heaven? And in the spirit of this passage, my friends, all I can say is this, don't let the dogs steal your joy.

Let's pray together.

Our God and Father, please help us to distinguish a true Gospel from the false, to distinguish true faith from a reliance on works, and may Your Spirit help us to judge ourselves rightly that we might look to Christ and Christ alone and walk in the joy that only He can give. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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