

Fellowship of Joy: A Study in Philippians, 3:1-11, Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on September 7th, 2008

“The terrible condition of man's heart will never be recognized by people who assess it only in relation to other men. Romans 14:23 makes plain that depravity is our condition in relation to God primarily, and only secondarily in relation to man. Unless we start here we will never grasp the totality of our natural depravity...Religion is one of the chief ways that man conceals his unwillingness to forsake self-reliance and bank all his hopes on the unmerited mercy of God (Luke 18:9-14; Colossians 2:20-23)... it is a myth that man in his natural state is genuinely seeking God. Men do seek God. But they do not seek him for who he is. They seek him in a pinch as one who might preserve them from death or enhance their worldly enjoyments. Apart from conversion, no one comes to the light of God.□”

John Piper

Intro:

Paul has written this letter to deal with issues of humility and unity in an otherwise decent church in Philippi. As I stated last week Paul has been hammering out this idea that their issues needed to be worked out in community for the sake of the mission. If we are going to live our lives *“Worthy of the gospel”* (**Philippians 1:27**) and *“Work out our salvation in fear and trembling”* (**Philippians 2:12**), we need to do that in real life situations in real life community. Our witness, according to Jesus is that we’d *“Love one another”* (**John 13:34, 35**). This can’t be done in a vacuum. This reminds us that our Christianity cannot be merely private. It is meant to be lived outward, in community, so that the world could see what God is doing in us, and through us. This includes repentance when we mess up.

In our passage today, we see Paul introducing another way in which the church can, and will be attacked. In the first section, Paul rejoices (**Philippians 2:17, 18** see also **v.29**) in spite of, and for the reason of physical persecution, which will be a reality for all of those that follow the Lord Jesus (See **Philippians 1:29**; cf. **2 Timothy 3:12**). In our passage today, Paul begins to show that the suffering can, and will come in the form of false teaching. False teaching is a joy robber, especially if it is weighed down with legalistic “Self-saving” mechanisms.

From the Head...

A Change of Direction (Philippians 3:1)

What is often translated *“Finally”* (loipon) can be translated “Therefore” or “Furthermore,”¹ as it appears is true here. One reason for this, is Paul seems to use the idea of “Rejoicing” as section markers (**vv. 1:4, 18; 2:17, 18, 29; 4:4**). He has just reminded them that being a community in the gospel, may/would include suffering (See **1:28**), and ends that section with rejoicing (**Philippians 2:17, 18, 29**); Now Paul begins to remind the Philippians of the danger (Which is unsafe for them) of theological infidelity. Theological infidelity, though thought by many to be minor, can, and often is the cause of suffering. When we miss the truth of the gospel, it will always end in suffering, even when we try to spin it in the words of freedom.

A Contrast of Belief (Philippians 3:2-3)

In these couple of verses Paul uses some of the harshest words that we have seen in scripture (See too **Galatians 1:8; 5:12**). Paul, like Jesus, seems to leave his harshest criticism for the religious people. I think the reason they do is that religion offers the subtlest, and therefore, the most delusional and dangerous forms of rebellion against God. When we substitute religion, ritual and personal piety for faith, and the grace of God, we delude ourselves into believing that we are good with God, we become self-righteous, and ultimately frustrated with the fact that our formulas haven’t worked. Paul’s words contrasts true faith, with the false faith of those that wanted Jesus plus something more. His words *“Dogs”* (Kunas), *“Evil-doers”* (Kakous) and *“Flesh Mutilators”* (Katatoman), not only are a rhetorical device (Alliteration) in the Greek, but would have been heard very harshly by those that Paul intended it for. These words suggested that these people were unclean, lawbreakers, that resembled Baal worshippers (see **1 Kings 18:18**), which had to have angered those hearing this greatly. But Paul was trying to show a clear contrast from those that were still using self-saving mechanisms to save themselves, and faith in a God graced salvation. It is these formulas, and mechanisms that ultimately shackle us to the impossibility of living up to the standard, and rob our joy. In contrast to keeping oneself “Clean”, keeping an external law, and who use ritual to make themselves righteous, is worship “In the Spirit” (See **John 4:24**), put the glory where it belongs *“In Christ Jesus,”* and puts absolutely *“No confidence in the flesh”* (ie. Self-saving mechanisms). It is this theology (That will creep into the church) that will be damaging and ultimately dividing, which is the reason I believe that the Philippians are struggling with division. Paul goes on to illustrate this contrast in the following verses.

¹ Context determines this (cf. **2 Corinthians 13:11** and **1 Thessalonians 4:1**). IN this case, it seems that Paul is transitioning thought, and not necessarily concluding his thought.

The Contrast Illustrated Pt. 1

A Resume of Flesh (Philippians 3:4-6)

Paul is not boasting here. He is simply trying to illustrate the fact if salvation was by placing confidence in the “Flesh” then He, an ex-Pharisee who kept the law flawlessly, would have something to boast of (See **Romans 4:1-4; Ephesians 2:8, 9**). The problem with this type of thinking, is we cannot understand the totality of our depravity. Deep down, we live the gospel of self-esteem that continually tells us we are special, and that God owes us one. With this theology, it is impossible to understand the grace that God has given us, and therefore live in the joy that God has provided us. We stay shackled to the chains of self, and entitlement, and can't figure out why this world and God is so against us. We deserve more than this. This is why the doctrine of “Total Depravity” is an important one for every believer to understand. It doesn't mean that we are as bad as we can be, but it does mean that every aspect of who we are is in rebellion against God, and in need of salvation; especially our religious formulas.

The Contrast Illustrated Pt. 2

A Resume of Repentance (Philippians 3:7-11)

Here Paul does what every good religious person needs to do; repent of his righteousness. Whatever was “Gain” to Paul, is lost, and “Rubbish!” It is not our religious piety that saves us. Whether we are religious or not, we continually judge ourselves by others, and count ourselves as more holy, more righteous, smarter, wiser, etc. The non-believer looks at the believer and calls him/her an idiot; the believer looks at the non-believer, and calls him/her unrighteous. Why, because it glorifies us! As those that have their faith in Christ, we can only point to Christ as the only one to gain any credit. We are truly beggars that have found our bread in Christ. Paul sees the loss of all things as nothing compared to gaining Jesus. This comes with a righteousness not of our own (v. 9 cf. **Romans 10:1-4**), but a righteousness that comes from God, and gives God alone the glory. This comes from faith, which takes the control away from your reason, and your controlling formulas and mechanisms. It humbles you, and promotes unity, because in Christ you realize that you are undeserving of God's grace, but you have freely received it. This is counter to the self esteem gospel of our culture, which ultimately places you in bondage to yourself, which you know deep down isn't what it is meant to be. Knowing Christ in a real way, is the only thing that can raise you from death; here and in eternity. Paul knows this by faith, a humbling trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way, life and truth.

...to the Heart

Do you see Jesus as your treasure? Is He your gain? Do you desire to “Know” God and the “Power of His resurrection?” Do you desire to die with Him, so you can be raised to a newness of life? This is the way to freedom from the depravity and rebellion that shackles you to your own desires, and ultimate crushing weight of needing to be something you aren't.

Books for Further Study: *Word Biblical Studies; Philippians, Gerald Hawthorne; The NIV Application Commentary; Philippians, Frank Thielman; The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Philippians, Peter T. O'Brien; Preaching the Word; Philippians, R. Kent Hughes; Paul's Letter to the Philippians; Gordon D. Fee*

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