

## The Letter to the Philippians

### Lesson 16: The Distinguishing Qualities of True Believers

### Philippians 3:1-3

**“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”**

The apostle Paul closed the second letter to the Corinthians with a few warnings. One of them in 13:5 was, **“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”** John gives us many tests in his first epistle to see whether or not we are in the faith, one of them being in 1:6, **“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”** There seems to be an urgency in scripture that people perform a spiritual inventory, to determine whether or not their life evidences their profession. Quite the opposite of the modern Christian movement, we don’t see unrepentant, uninterested, uninvolved people being patted on the bum and promised the joys of heaven in scripture. If salvation were a limbo contest, the emerging church would have the bar set at nine feet so that people could get into the kingdom on piggy-back. And while that sounds like a superficially loving thing to do, it’s also unbiblical. We never see Jesus or the apostles going way out of their way to include everyone in the discussion of the saved. Jesus spoke on acceptance into the kingdom as being impossible by human effort! He said that it would be easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom! (Mt. 19:24)

There are many tests throughout scripture for us to know whether we are truly saved, or just playing the man. These tests are intended to bring us to repentance. And they ought to convince us that our God is holy, and requires us to walk in holiness. Yet many ignore these tests. Many people will live their entire Christian lives going to church on Sundays, shaking hands with the saved and smiling. In their hearts they will be convinced that they’re authentically Christian, but their heart and mind will be far from scripture, and their prayer life will reflect that. Jesus, in a way that ought to bring you goosebumps, said this about many people who consider themselves Christians when they come before His presence, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”** (Mt. 7:21-23)

IOW, there will be many (His word, not mine) who will be fully convinced (most likely through poor ‘preaching’) that they are on the right path towards Heaven, and they’re not. They’ve signed on the dotted line without reading the contract. They think they’re in, but they never were. The warning from God is to not only read the Word, but to consider the cost of discipleship before you commit. There’s a house about 3 minutes south of here on Walker Rd, where someone started to build a house about 25 years ago. It took them years to brick the front of the house, and the back of the house remains unfinished to this day. Why the house wasn’t finished I’ll never know, perhaps an illness or death came suddenly and stopped the work. But that house reminds me of Luke 14:28ff, where Jesus warns people to count the cost before you build so that you aren’t surprised by the bill. I’m convinced that many people who claim to be Christian today have never considered the cost of discipleship. They never knew that following Christ would cost them their life, reputation, honor, respect, finances, friendships, health. They never dreamed of losing those things, in fact, gaining them all in this life was the promise made to them. And many therefore will abandon Christ to their peril.

It is critical that people know the true message of the gospel, and consider the weight of it as they decide to follow Christ. Yet we're still fooling ourselves if we believe that simply hearing the gospel will convert most or all of its hearers. Jesus again warns us that many who hear the gospel will still fail to yield good fruit, **"And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear."** (Mt. 13:3-9)

The interesting part of this parable is how only one soil of four proved to be good, yet three of the soils at first appear good. The seed on the path is obviously wasted seed. No one including the sower expects crops to appear from seeds that rolled off into the path. But the other three soils offer us an insight into their appearance. The next soil is the rocky ground. You might have the image in your mind of a rocky terrain, full of boulders and large stones. If that were so, the sower wouldn't expect a seed to grow there anymore than he would on the path. Thirdly, we see the thorny ground. We might think of a path of large weeds, where it would be difficult for a seed to pass through the large weeds, and water and sunlight might be scarce at best. If that were so, the sower wouldn't expect growth there either. If that were how we understood this parable, the good soil would clearly be the only good soil. But that misses the point of the parable.

We're not going to discuss the sovereignty of God in cultivating good soil from the dead ground of our stone hearts. But I am going to bring to your attention how three of these soils all produce, though not all survive. The parable is not speaking of a half-crazed farmer. Farmers survive off of their land. Their goal is to produce the optimal amount of crops from the seeds they have. They wouldn't be able to afford to throw away seeds by carelessly tossing them onto mountain ranges and weed patches. A good farmer always prepares the land before planting. He removes as many rocks and weeds as possible before sowing. But the problem lied in that the farmer could only dig so deep. He could only remove so many rocks and weeds before it was time to sow, water, and trust God for the growth. To his eyes (and all others for that matter), he sowed every seed well (save those who clearly hit the path). Seeds sprouted everywhere. It looked like a good crop, until harvest time. Some seeds sprouted and lasted a week, some died by mid-summer, only those who lived until the harvest proved to be good. But every soil began with a good appearance. Every plant began healthy. Only time would prove that what lay at the heart (deep under the surface of the ground) was death, or life.

This parable is sometimes taught evangelistically. "As sowers we are to take the gospel to the world, and understand that most of the time the gospel is not going to be effective. But in God's grace, He has prepared the good soil for the hearing of the Gospel." I believe that. This parable gives me courage to speak the truth. It gives me confidence that I am speaking the words of God, in the power of God, and I know that He is at work. This parable helps me to understand that I am just a messenger, but I am not the one giving growth. But I bring up this parable today as a warning passage to you. Because many seeds sprout, that doesn't mean that all the bad plants died on the day of sowing. IOW, the parable warns us that there are going people in every church who looked like good soil, look like healthy plants, are producing some fruit, and will expose themselves to have been bad soil all along in the future. There are those people who may be convinced that they're Christians, and by God's definition, they're not.

Read [Acts 8:9-24](#). Simon looked the part. He said the right things, believed the right things, followed the obedient steps, earned the respect of other believers, and proved in the end that his heart was dead from the beginning. Paul warned Timothy about false Christians in 2 Timothy 3:5, as being people who have **"the appearance of godliness, but [deny] its power."** One page to the right in your Bible, Paul warns

Titus of people who, **“profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.”** (Titus 1:16) Listen to Jude’s warning in verse 4, **“For certain people have crept in unnoticed (into the church) who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”** Jesus, addressing the people who comprised the Laodicean church, said to them in Revelation 3:16-17, **“So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”**

There are examples all over the Bible of people who are in the category of believers, but who aren’t. No one thought that Judas was an unbeliever. But yet, despite all the warnings, there are unbelievers scattered everywhere in churches today. As I mentioned before, these warnings have most likely gone unread, or unheard, because of poor leadership and a poor handling of the Word. It’s not that every person is deceptive in these systems, but it’s more accurate to say that they’ve been deceived. Despite motive or intent, all teaching and living outside of the true gospel does not save.

When asked the question, “Are you saved?” or “Who is saved?”, a variety of answers come forth. Some sit under the teaching that “God is love and wouldn’t hurt anyone” and believe that all will be saved. Some have been taught that only the worst in society will be judged. Some are given an intense set of rules and regulations to keep in order to save themselves. Some are given a bare minimum requirement to know that they’ve saved themselves. And some realize that they cannot save themselves, and trust in God. There are some who know that they’re saved because they were baptised. Some have assurance because they made an emotional plea to invite Jesus into their heart after an antithetical gospel message was presented to them, even though they really haven’t lived for him since. I think the point has been made: There are many in the church who, know it or not, are not saved but are deceived. And who likewise, know it or not, deceive others. So how do we know who is true or not in the church? How do we know if we are true believers? How can we discern to ensure that the church remains pure and holy? Let me give you a list of aspects of your life that have absolutely nothing to do with being a true Christian. Some of these might surprise you.

#1) A superficially moral life. In other words, doing and saying all the right things in front of everyone, everyday. Joel Osteen is sickeningly happy everyday, yet I can’t think of a more poisonous man in the modern Christian era. Joel makes you believe that he would smile while you cut his toes off because love flows out of him. But the one thing not flowing out of Joel Osteen is Jesus Christ and His gospel message.

Does this make morality unnecessary in our life? Absolutely not. Jesus said that we’ll recognize the sheep from the wolves because of their fruit. The wolves are in sheep’s clothing, so discernment is required to tell them apart. You’ll discern the true sheep by their works. So, it’s not that being consistently moral is wrong, it’s that being superficially moral is evil. We call those people hypocrites, because they’re playing the part. They’re acting out a role for one reason or another. Pastor Scott taught me many years ago that there is likewise no such thing as a reverse hypocrite. While there are some who aren’t Christian and pretend to be, called hypocrites, there is no reverse. There is no such thing as someone who lives an immoral life, but truly behind-the-scenes is a Christian. Morality matters.

Let me paint the picture of morality with a little more detail so that you don’t miss the point. You know many people who are kind, honest, generous, loving and ethical who are not Bible-believing Christians. I’ve heard many people say that some of the nicest people they’ve ever met are not believers! What that should scream to you is that morality is not a proof of authentic salvation, although it certainly must be present in a Christian. To say it another way so that you don’t confuse my point, if someone were to ask you to prove that you are a Christian, and one of the first proofs out of your mouth was your morality,

you're pointing to the wrong evidence. Do you remember the account of the Rich Young Man in Matthew 19? He convinced himself that he had kept every commandment (v.20), yet his moral accomplishments left him feeling short of kingdom of God, so he asks Jesus, "**Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?**" IOW, "*I've done most of what you've asked, but I'm sure there's one thing I'm missing. Give me another commandment and I'll keep that one too.*" He got another commandment, "**If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.**" (19:21) He walked away from Christ at that moment. He thought he could prove his worth through his morality, and Jesus exposed that he had a wicked, selfish, greedy heart all along. He was never following Christ for the right reasons. He was never an authentic believer. God had never worked a salvific work in his heart. You're morality cannot save you.

#2) Understanding the gospel. If you lived to be 250 years old, you'd never know the Bible as well as the devil does. You're mistaken if you think the height of evil is being an atheist. The devil and the demons (the height of evil) have solid doctrine. They're not atheists, they're not polytheists, they know that there is only one true God. They are also quite aware of the attributes of the one true God. And they understand what the gospel is, better than you do. James 2:19, "**You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!**"

This second point is much like the first. Morality can have nothing to do with Christianity or genuine salvation, yet it must be present in the life of a Christian, and the same goes for an understanding of the gospel. You can know the Bible like the back of your hand, and not be a Christian, but you cannot be a Christian and have no knowledge or understanding of the gospel. There is a severe warning given to the servant in Luke 12:47-48, "**who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, [he] will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.**" What this passage is warning us, is that salvation is not less, but is much more than understanding a few facts of the gospel. There is condemnation is not knowing the gospel and dying in your sin, but there is a greater condemnation is knowing the gospel, and dying in your sin.

The writer of Hebrews gives us a parallel warning, "**For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.**" (Heb 6:4-6)

#3) Religious activity. "*Are you a Christian?*" "*Sure I am! I go to church every Sunday. I was baptized. I share at the communion table.*" I hope you're getting the pattern in these points by now. You can be totally active in your church, and still not be saved, but you cannot be saved while ignoring an active church life. Your religious activity cannot save you. There are numerous examples of people who served Christ in their lives and proved themselves to be unbelieving all along. Jesus says to the congregants of the church at Sardis in Revelation 3:1, "**I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.**" It is more than possible to fool everyone in your church. The whole congregation can praise God for the life in you, but if you're dead on the inside, God will see that.

#4) Serving Christ. This point really bothers me. Listen to the words of these false believers on judgment day, "**On that day MANY will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'**" (Mt. 7:22-23) Does it bother you that the Bible records that *many* will live their lives thinking they were saved and pointing to their religious accomplishments to prove it. That tells me that there are a ton of false believers and false

teachers in this world. It also ought to warn us that we are not saved by our service. And of course, as the pattern goes, we likewise cannot be saved without being a servant.

So, if morality, knowledge of the gospel, attending church, and being active doesn't save you, since many will be damned to Hell who do all four, than what are some characteristics of true believers? We will take the rest of the lesson looking at five qualities of true believers: they rejoice in the Lord, exercise discernment, worship in the Spirit, glory in Christ, and put no confidence in the flesh. All five are found in the text of Philippians 3:1-3.

#1) True believers rejoice in the Lord. **“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.”**

There are some who have believed that Paul was originally intending to conclude his letter at this point, but was carried away in his thoughts, and rambled on for what would amount to another half of his letter. But that's not so. As we've seen many times before, a proper study of the original text sheds light on our English interpretation. When Paul writes “finally”, he's not intending to conclude. A better interpretation of the term would be “For the rest of this letter”. Ralph Martin explains,

*“The phrase Finally (to loipon), my brothers would lead us to expect the conclusion of the letter; but this is not the case, and the apostle has occasion to renew the promise of a conclusion in 4:8, after much intervening discussion. In any case, to loipon could just as well be rendered ‘Well, then’ (Hawthorne) ‘Furthermore’ or ‘To proceed, then’ (Motyer), with no thought of ‘In conclusion’ (GNB, JB) or ‘farewell’ (NEB).”<sup>82</sup>*

What Paul is doing when he says, **“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord”**, is drawing our focus back to the overall theme of the letter, rejoicing. He hit theme of rejoicing at the outset of the letter, and then he came chapter 2, but he's commanding on the basis of chapter 2 that we again rejoice. This third chapter is likewise loaded doctrinally, and after some further commentary, Paul will return us again to the theme of this letter in 4:4, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”** The first thing to note from both of these verses is that they're commands. The natural tendency, the natural inclination of the human heart is to not rejoice. And if you think that given enough time, your heart will naturally, passively begin to rejoice in the Lord, you've misunderstood the depravity of the heart. As I've stated in previous lessons, and I'd point you to those notes for further commentary, Paul is commanding joy, not happiness. Happiness is rooted in emotion, and our emotions change faster than the weather. But our joy is rooted in the gospel truths. Our joy is rooted in our concrete relationship with God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of what dangers and trials that may come upon us, we are always safe in the hand of our Heavenly Father. Those truths bring joy. Those truths need to remain central in our thoughts and words. Therefore, Paul commands them to be joyful in the Lord.

A true believer rejoices constantly in the Lord. Believers are commanded to do so, but there are other good reasons why believers ought to rejoice. Again, I would point you to lesson 4, where we spent the lesson looking at ten reasons why we ought to rejoice. But allow me to give us a few more quick points. God's sovereignty is a major reason why we should rejoice. Regardless of the state of the world, the state of the country, the state of your health, the state of your circumstances, God is sovereignly working through them for your good as His child. (Rom. 8:28) Do we believe that God is orchestrating all of life towards His intended purpose? If we're a miserable Christian, we scream aloud that we do not believe in, or trust God's control and purposes. Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments, *“You and I have the inestimable privilege, therefore, of manifesting the glory of God, and the way we do so, supremely, is by showing that this Christian life of our is one that enables us to overcome this world and rejoice even in the midst of tribulation.”<sup>83</sup>*

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<sup>82</sup> Martin, Ralph P., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Philippians* IVP, 1987 (p. 138)

<sup>83</sup> Lloyd-Jones Martyn, *The Life of Peace* Baker, 1990 (p. 14-15)

It is implicit in Lloyd-Jones quote that people are watching our lives, which ought to give us another reason to rejoice. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved than Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:12) Which means that Christians are truly the only people who can rejoice. While others have temporal happiness, they have no hope for sins forgiven and an eternal relationship with God. And there are many watching us who are entirely miserable and unhappy with their lives. They tend to go from one catastrophe to another. For the sake of those people who are so frustrated with this life, it is our duty to shine the light of the gospel before them, in how we live and move and breathe through our lives which aren't always pretty. So, while we rejoice in the truths of the Gospel, and we trust God in the midst of adversity, we shine as an example to the watching world. Jesus said, **“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”** (Matt. 5:14-16)

We are commanded to rejoice so that God is honoured and glorified. We are commanded to rejoice because God will use our joy as a tool to show the watching world the power of the gospel, and their need of it. But another reason why we should rejoice is for our own benefit and growth in the Lord. Nehemiah said to all the people in Nehemiah 8:10, **“And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”** It's a rather simple concept. If my mind is fixed on Him: the strongest, the smartest, the biggest, the fastest, who lives in me, and works through every element of my life for my good, I'm happy when under the most stress. If my mind is fixed on my stress, my anxiety, my anger, my discomfort, the injustice in my life, I feel alone, and I have no hope.

Do you think with greater clarity, do you perform your tasks with greater precision, do you speak gentler when you're happy, or sad? The Christian who really rejoices in the Lord will have many fewer difficulties in this world. Did I borrow that from the health, wealth and prosperity movement? No. I didn't mean that God will take it all away, but I do mean that you'll steer clear of a multitude of sin by rejoicing in the Lord constantly.

When I'm having a bad day at work, because nothing is going right. I'm working hard, but it just seems like the careless mistakes of those around me have made my tasks almost impossible to complete. I can dwell on the laziness of someone, I can dwell on their stupidity. I can gossip to people about them. I can blow off steam! I can play the situation over and over in my mind, where I tell them exactly what I think of them. And suddenly, without realising it, my mind is consumed with the awful situation. My work has slowed down. My blood pressure is rising. I have a headache. I'm irritable. And suddenly I explode in anger at someone who was underserving. Do you see how a sinful starting point spread like cancer through my day? Sin destroyed my thoughts, my work, my speech, and damage another person, as well as our relationship.

Imagine the same day. I'm having a bad day at work, nothing is going right. I'm working hard, but it just seems like the careless mistakes of those around me have made my tasks almost impossible to complete. But I remember that first and foremost in my life, I'm a child of the King. And I recognize that He has orchestrated this day in my life. This day is not an accident. So I recall the goodness of God that He has shown to me in salvation. I recognize the sin that God is shining on my heart, and I repent of it. I recognize that laziness and carelessness of the sin of my co-workers, and I forgive them. I think of ways that I can shine forth the kindness, and gentleness of my God, when all around me are taking mental notes of my behavior. I stay calm, and my work is accomplished to the best of my ability. I chose to rejoice in God, and serve Him through this ordained moment in my life. Sin was slain, my thoughts honoured God, my work honoured Him, my speech honoured Him, and no damage was done.

The main concept necessary to remember in order to properly rejoice in the Lord, is that He is your...LORD! He is your master, you are His servant. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, **“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”** You need to forget yourself, you need to live in every moment as a servant working for the cause of his or her master. Paul commented likewise in Philippians 2:4-5, and used Christ as the ultimate example, **“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”**

#2) True believers exercise discernment. **“To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.”**

There is a standard. There is a truth. There is a prescribed way. And that way can be known, because God has made it known to us in His word. There are many who place themselves under the label of Christian who have little to no understanding of the Bible, who have sat under little to no teaching of the Bible. There are many who have been taught that right doctrine only divides. They're taught in their gatherings to focus on living well, as opposed to thinking well. I'm officially telling you that it's impossible to live well apart from thinking well, and it's impossible to think well outside of the direction of God's word. I am also making the bold statement in this point that it is impossible to be a true believer outside of knowing the pure Word of God and living in accordance with it. True believers not only know the Word, but they know it so well that they can discern what they read and hear, and see the errant teaching of others.

But this discernment does not happen overnight, it takes months and years and decades of study in the Word to sharpen our focus and discernment. And of course our discernment does not happen by accident. (I'm going to potentially embarrass Mike Daugharty for a moment.) I wonder how many of you have been encouraged in your life by Mike's ministry? How many of you have wished that you could have the knowledge and wisdom and discernment that Mike has? I listened to a Paul Washer sermon a few years ago that taught me an important principle. I attempted to find the transcript of it for an exact quote but I was unsuccessful, so I'll do my best to relay the story. There was a woman who played the piano as beautiful as anyone ever could. It was a delight to listen to her as she mastered the instrument before her. One day, a bystander said to her, “I'd give my life to play the piano as masterfully as you do.” Her reply was, “That's good that you're willing to give your life, because that's exactly what I had to do.”

Continuing to pick on Mike, do we actually believe that Mike grew in his knowledge and wisdom by osmosis? His knowledge wasn't amassed simply by sitting under the regular preaching of the word. Certainly that was vital, but do we realize the years of private study and books of writing where his thoughts were clearly put to paper? His discernment is the result of a life that has been spent studying the Word of God in order to see it with great clarity, in order to feed you with richness, and accuracy, and love. There are many outside of these walls who would consider Mike to have wasted his time and intellect and resources, but I know that in hindsight Mike would wish that he gave more of his life the service of His Master, for the purification and growth of the saints.

All believers, not just the teachers and preachers, are called to know the Word and be discerning. As slaves to our Lord (and we are His slaves if we call Him Lord) we ought to become slaves to righteousness. Paul says in Romans 6:17, **“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the teaching to which you were committed.”** IOW, we are to place ourselves under the pure teaching of the word of God, and obey it with a selfless, and relentless obedience. True believers will be discerning, but discerning cannot come apart from a knowledge of the Word. Paul says later in Romans 10:14, **“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they**

**to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?"** And then he says in verse 17, **"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."**

Back to the text: Paul has just been encouraging these saints in this letter, and he has just commanded them to rejoice in the Lord, and now he is about to speak to them about discernment. He wrote, **"To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you."** What does Paul mean that he is writing the same things? It means that he is about to review what he has already touched upon in this letter. At the close of chapter 1, he encouraged their joy and unity in the gospel despite their opponents, he said in 1:27-28, **"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God."** So again Paul is about to revisit this thought, and he tells them that it's no trouble for him to revisit it, because they need to be reminded to stay unified and rejoice in the Lord, and to discern the truth from the error of their opponents.

Paul gives these opponents three titles: dogs, evildoers, and those who mutilate the flesh. There's nothing in the text that would give us the impression that he is categorizing these false teachers in three separate categories. Paul is using strong language, the strongest language to give a serious warning to saints of the reality of these teachers and their character. In our culture, we love dogs, at least other people dogs...who don't bark too much...and don't shed. In our age, if someone calls you a dog, it would be a term of endearment. That last sentence was ridiculous. But the point is that we can't read our definitions, thoughts, or culture into the text if we're going to understand it correctly. Dogs at that time were regarded by the Jews as being the most despised, insolent and miserable creatures, they were unclean. If you called someone a 'dog', you were labeling them as the worst of people.

Even in the closing verses of scripture, John writes, **"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."** Clearly John isn't saying that indeed all dogs *don't* go to Heaven. He's not referring to the animal, he is lumping those people into the group of those who will not enter the Kingdom.

Next he calls these dogs *evildoers*. Paul is contrasting the claim of these men that they were in fact teaching and living out the truth. There's a lot of irony in calling these false teachers *evildoers*. These Judaizers prided themselves in being those who knew the law of God and kept it. From the perspective of the watcher, this false teacher, this opponent to the faith, this Judaizer was a good man. You might have been hard-pressed to find a man who would call them a dog or an evildoer, so why does Paul use such strong language? The reason is because these teachers were teaching a damning religion. It was a religion of works-righteousness, of which there is no need for Christ. They were not only damned because of their rejection of Jesus Christ and boasting of their own righteousness before God, but they were leading the masses in the same way, and converting more day by day. These men were dangerous, and needed to be warned about. Their teaching was more dangerous and lethal than any other teaching could ever be! While someone may lead someone else into danger or injury, what could be more evil than leading someone into eternal Hell?

MacArthur comments, *"Typically, those involved in external, ritualistic, ceremonial religions see themselves as doing good and pleasing God. Paul himself was once proud of 'advancing in Judaism beyond many of [his] contemporaries among [his] countrymen, being more extremely zealous for [his] ancestral traditions' (Gal. 1:14). After his conversion, the apostle realized that all his good works were worthless: 'Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."*

*More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:7-8). Instead of seeing himself as doing good in God’s sight, Paul, at the end of his ministry, felt that he was in fact the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15-16).”<sup>84</sup>*

Finally, Paul refers to these false teachers as those who mutilate the flesh. This term could be taken way out of context and misapplied to mean a zillion things. But what this means in the simplest terms is that these false teachers teach that circumcision is a necessary and saving component of being right with God. He uses the word ‘mutilation’ as a sarcastic twist for circumcision, because the act of circumcision is nothing more than mutilating your body if you are trusting in that act of faith apart from and above the saving work of Jesus Christ. Paul spoke about circumcision in Romans 2:28-29, **“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.”**

But that was not the message of these Jewish false teachers. The act of circumcision has always been a central religious act for the Jews. Even in Acts 15:1 we read, **“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”** And of course, the rest of Acts 15 is dedicated to the refutation of that belief by the Jerusalem council. Paul condemned the belief of becoming right with God through religious customs (or works) numerous times throughout the letter to the Galatians, 1:6-9; 2:16-21; 3:2-14, 22-25; 5:1-4, 11-14).

Circumcision has always been a central belief and practice for the Jews. It was established with Abraham in Genesis 17, displaying God’s covenant with Abraham and his people forever. Beginning in verse 11, God said to Abraham, **“You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”** (11-14)

The Jews were so connected with circumcision that they identified themselves as ‘the circumcision’. (Acts 10:45; 11:2; Romans 15:8; Gal. 2:7; Eph. 2:11; Col. 4:11) As you should have noticed from those verses, not only did the Jews identify themselves as the ‘circumcision’, but they referred to the Gentiles as the ‘uncircumcision’. The Jewish leaders cared very much about observing the religious ceremonies, and being outwardly clean, but inwardly they were decayed. Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”** (25-28)

So, to revisit Romans 2, the act of circumcision is meaningless apart from the reality of the human condition, and the need of Jesus Christ. Circumcision was a symbol, it pointed to a need, it pointed to a Saviour, it never saved, and it never will. Romans 2:25-29, **“For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who**

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<sup>84</sup> MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 218)

**have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, nor by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”**

So, when Paul referred to these men as ‘those who mutilate the flesh’, he’s not saying that the physical act of circumcision is useless, or sinful, or evil. But he’s exposing the uselessness of the act of circumcision because they were evil in their hearts. These false teachers have turned their external religious act into something worthless because although they were changed on the outside, they were untouched on the inside. Their inner man remained dead. They were not righteous by birth, meaning, they were not a spiritual and eternal child of Abraham (under God’s covenant) by birth. They, like all men, were dead by birth. And as all men need God to bring life for saving faith, so as verse 29 says, the inward Jew is one who is circumcised (in God’s covenant) in his heart, which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and not by keeping a ritual.

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

Lloyd-Jones leads us into this verse, *“They talk about ‘the circumcision’”, Paul says, in effect, to the Philippians, “these other teachers, who are trying to impress upon you that they are right. They are always telling you that you must be circumcised and go back to the Jewish ceremonies and rituals and temple worship, but I tell you that you cannot worship by doing things that way. We are the circumcision which worship God in the Spirit.” What does that mean? Well, in the first instance, the Christian is the one who worships God in the Spirit and knows that these others things are no longer necessary. There is a new way to God, another method, which is now the right one; the other has been done away with. It is not wrong in itself, but when you become a Christian it is not necessary, and to go back to it is to deny Christ. That is Paul’s message.”*<sup>85</sup>

Christians are the those who worship in the Spirit of God. They are those who have been changed. They are those whose hearts of stone have been removed by God, and it is God who has planted within them hearts of flesh. It is Christians who are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and none other. It is God who has invaded our lives, forgiven our sin, and is working us into the image of Jesus Christ day-by-day. Christians are the only ones who worship by the Spirit of God. Paul tells us in Romans 8:9-11, **“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”**

Believers are given new life. They are given new desires. It’s not that they’re made into worshipful creatures (all people are worshippers by nature), but their desires are brand new and Heavenward. The Greek word for ‘worship’ is *latreuo*, which is best translated “to render respectful spiritual service”. The feel of the word goes much deeper than the example set before us by many modern-day ‘believers’. Worship is not something that is done only on Sunday mornings. In fact, there are some who believe that ‘worship’ is only the part of the service where there is singing. Worship isn’t something that believers only do on Sundays. Worship isn’t something that believers start and stop randomly. And why? Because true worship involves every aspect of your life. Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 10:31, **“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”**

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<sup>85</sup> Lloyd-Jones Martyn, *The Life of Peace* Baker, 1990 (p. 26)

True worshipers worship God by loving Him. That's one of the major changes in a believers' heart, they love the same God that they once hated. Paul refers to all unbelievers as 'haters of God' in Romans 1:30. Jesus referring to the world of unbelievers said, **"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father."** (John 15:23-24) Jesus said earlier in John 7:7, **"The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil."** There will always exist in the heart of a Christian a love for God and His word, and a desire to be obedient. That love will not always be pure or consistent, but it will never be extinguished.

True worshipers delight in God and find their joy and satisfaction in Him. I remember my days in the RCC, witnessing those who I believed in those days to be the most religious. At the moment, I saw a sense of spiritual accomplishment and piety in their hearts, but in hindsight today, I don't see them as joyful Christians resting in the promises of God, I see tired men and women who lived their lives restlessly attempting to please God, but never feeling that their work was enough. Sadly, I don't think they ever knew a promise from God, or ever heard the Gospel. Only those who have heard and believed the gospel can ever experience the joy of knowing Him! Only those true believers will ever be prompted to sing His praises because of our great Saviour!

True worshipers have peace with God. This is the overflowing of joy, because our peace, our relationship to our Creator as our loving Father, is based upon the concrete work of God in us, and not in the filthy rags of our work. True worshipers are devoted to God. They heed the words of Jesus who said, **"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."** (Matt. 10:37-39) They serve with a fervour, heeding the words of Paul who said, **"Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."** (Romans 12:2-3) IOW, true believers are marked by a life of consistent servanthood, and not as those who check off the least amount of religious deeds as necessary.

True believers also **"glory in Christ Jesus"** verse 3 says. The word for glory is in the Greek gives us the definition of boasting with great joy over your greatest love. We all naturally think about, and want to talk about our favorite things. We all plan our time and finances to be able to do those things that we love to do more often. Everyone glories over something, for the Christian, it is Jesus Christ. But for the sake of context, we aren't comparing those who love Christ supremely compared to those who love the Maple Leafs supremely. (Which is impossible...because it's the Leafs) We're comparing believers, who boast in the finished work of Christ. Believers who trust in Christ, who credit Him for their salvation, who rest in His unfailing care. We're comparing those believers with those false teachers and their religious systems who glory in themselves, and point to their own worthiness before God. It was Paul who said, **"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."** (1 Cor. 15:10) Paul even boasts in God a few verses later in Philippians 3:9, **"And be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."** In Romans 15:17, **"In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God."** And one page to your right in your bible's from there, 1 Cor. 1:31, **"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."** These verses give a sharp contrast to the false believer who boasts in the work of his flesh. (2 Cor. 11:18)

Finally, true believers “**put no confidence in the flesh**” according to verse 3. The *flesh* is what we understand to be our natural man, our abilities than are given to us at birth, which are incapable of taking us to glory. Paul said in Romans 7:18, “**For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.**” Believers understand Jesus who said, “**It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.**” (John 6:63) Speaking of Romans 8, MacArthurs comments, “*Because it is fallen and unredeemed, the flesh cannot do anything to please God; it serves only the law of sin. Therefore, it is a distinguishing characteristic of the redeemed that they “do not walk according to the fleh but according to the Spirit” (8:4), because “the mind set on the flesh is death” (v.6) and “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (v.8).*”<sup>86</sup>

MacArthur will also close this lesson with words that I cannot improve upon, “*True repentance involves sorrow over the evil of sinful deeds; false repentance involves only sorrow over their harmful consequences. False repentance concerns itself with conduct; true repentance with man’s inner condition. False repentance deals with the symptoms; true repentance with the disease. Only true repentance, which puts no confidence in the flesh, leads to salvation.*”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 223)

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 223