



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 13th May 2016

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Scripture: Philippians 3:1-3

Subject: Chapter 3, Part 2 – Marks of a True Believer

We have previously looked at this important subject, the marks of a true believer. The more I think about it, the more it grows in importance. Recently I have been looking at the validity of the Koran, in which millions of people believe in. It is full of contradictions and yet millions of people place their eternal future in such. On the other hand, we have the true authoritative word of God, which many choose not to practice what its founder the Lord Jesus Christ says they should obey. It really should not surprise us, as it will those, for Jesus in Matthew 13 spells it out in the clearest fashion. We have covered that many times so there is no need to back track on it here.

The purpose for this study is really two fold. The first purpose is to check our selves out. The Bible tells us to do this not negatively but in a positive way. We are to measure our practice in line with what the Scriptures teach. Not hard at all you would think, but your experience may say something different. Keep in mind Matthew 7: 21 and 22.

The second purpose is to ascertain the fruit we should find in a true believer's life. We know what to expect when we go to pick apples on an apple tree, don't we? What would you expect if you went to pick potatoes in a potato field? But it's not all that easy when it comes

to the human mind and heart. We can so easily deceive even our own selves. Jeremiah the prophet is right when he pronounces this from the Lord.

*“The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?*

*I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.”*

Jeremiah 17:9-10 (NKJV).

Now it's not all that complicated, you see it's a "one size fits all" as far as the Lord is concerned. He did not tell the Germans to live one way and the Irish to live another. Nor did He tell the New Testament believers that what's in the New Testament is only for them but it is different for us because we are more intelligent so we work out our own way. I don't think so! The problem today is that instead of the Word of God being our guide, many are using it as a kind of good reference book and that's all. They have dramatically changed the point of authority from the Bible to themselves and they believe that they know best. So when non-Christians look at what purports to be the church it is no wonder they are as confused as many are who are on the inside.

Paul was not as arrogant as some are today. Remember we said last week that He checked out his God given Gospel with those who also had received the same from the Lord. So we need the church to get back to the Bible not just in their hands to read it for themselves but into their hearts so that they will bring glory to the Lord and assurance to their own souls.

In Philippians 3:1-3 Paul adds to the biblical teaching on the issue of distinguishing between genuine and false faith. Both by implication and explicitly, he presents five qualities of true believers, they:

1. Rejoice in the Lord
2. Exercise discernment
3. Worship in the Spirit
4. Glory in Christ Jesus, and,
5. Put no confidence in the flesh.

So let's see if we do just that. More importantly let's see if we understand what is been said. This morning I am going to concentrate on the first two points – rejoicing in the Lord and exercising discernment.

1. TRUE BELIEVERS REJOICE IN THE LORD

'Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.' (3:1 a)

Finally, (*to loipon*) is better rendered "furthermore", "so then", or "now then". It is a word of transition, not conclusion, since half of Philippians follows it. Joy is an important theme, both in Philippians (cross reference Philippians 1:4, 18, 25; Philippians 2:2, 17-18, 28-29; Philippians 4:1, 4, 10) and in the rest of the New Testament, where it appears in its noun and verb forms approximately 150 times. Simply put it is important but is it for you and me?

Joy is not just for when we are happy and clappy but how about when we are sad and snappy or sinful and doubtful? Let's just take a moment to understand something of importance.

Here, as in Philippians 4:4 and 10 (cross reference with Luke 1:47), Paul connects rejoicing to a **relationship**, commanding believers to **rejoice in the Lord**. The sphere in which their joy exists is in their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. If your personal relationship was up for discussion this morning what would it look like? How would you relate that to others? Maybe it is difficult for you to simply verbalise it to yourself. We are speaking about an on-going testimony as to your best friend the Lord Jesus Christ. When people speak about themselves they tell us who they would like to be, but when they act they tells us who they really are.

The joy of which Paul writes is not the same as happiness (a word related to the term "happenstance"), the feeling of exhilaration associated with favourable events. In fact, joy persists in the face of all things even weakness, pain, suffering and death (cross reference with James 1:2). Biblical joy produces a deep confidence in the future that is

based on trust in God's purpose and power. It results in the absence of any ultimate fear, since the relationship on which it is based is eternal and unshakeable (see for reference Psalms 16:11; John 16:22). Nor is it a humanly produced emotion. Paul commands it, showing that rejoicing is an act of the will in choosing to obey God. The result is a supernaturally produced emotion, the fruit of walking in the Spirit (Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22). So, rejoicing marks true believers (cross reference Psalms. 9:14; 13:5; 32:11; 33:1, 21; 35:9; 40:16; 51:12; 70:4; Luke 10:20; John 15:11; 17:13; Romans 15:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:16). This does not happen automatically, when you take time out and meditate on the truth you rejoice, when you think about who God is, His attributes, and only God really knows and loves us regardless of the kind of persons we are. Praise the Lord!

By the way how is your relationship with the Lord these days? You don't have to answer. I just thought I would ask you so that you can ask yourself honestly.

2. TRUE BELIEVERS EXERCISE DISCERNMENT

“To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, and beware of the false circumcision”(3:1 b-2)

After commanding the Philippians to rejoice, Paul turns to his next major theme in the epistle. His strong and direct warning denotes another distinguishing mark of true believers: their ability to discern. No one can be saved who does not understand the fundamental truths of the gospel (Romans 6:17; Romans 10:14 & 17).

Discernment, like faith, needs to grow and mature. Pastors and elders must warn the church of false teachers (Ephesians 4:11-14). Church, there are false teachers out there and you will know them if you know the truth of the Gospel. If you don't or won't take time to know what's in here (the Bible) you won't know what's out there. You will be fleeced, famished and finished. I say it lovingly and as tenderly as I can but only the Lord knows where you will end up. At best, in a sanatorium and worst in Hell.

For Paul **to write the same things again** was **no trouble to** him, because it was a necessary **safeguard** for the Philippians. False teachers, proclaiming salvation through ritual, ceremony, and legalism, posed a serious threat to them. **Safeguard** *a word that* literally means not to trip, stumble, or be overthrown. Paul faithfully warned the Philippians so they would not stumble (see for cross reference Acts 20:31). Listen to me very carefully; I know once mature leaders who are stumbling around today like drunken men, because they made bad choices in their relationships spiritually. Sadly they have led others down the same path. They have done two major things:

1. They have disgraced the Gospel and themselves.
2. They have been used as barriers for others coming to know the Saviour.

However, Jesus is always willing to forgive and restore them. We must never forget that, Amen! I think of Peter standing up in Acts 2:14 a very different man from John 18:10 or in verse 27. I think of Paul in Acts 7:58 and in Acts 8:1 in comparison to the man who is now writing or addressing us here. With man it is impossible but with God all things are possible.

The phrase **to write the same things again** indicates that Paul is about to elaborate on something he has previously mentioned. The apostle undoubtedly has in mind his exhortation in Philippians 1:27-28:

“Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God”.

In that passage, Paul told the Philippians not to be alarmed by their opponents while in the present passage he tells them how to recognize them. He describes these false teachers who opposed the gospel using three terms, each introduced by the term **(beware)**.

Paul first describes the false teachers as **dogs**. Unlike the pet dogs (*kunarion*) described in Matthew 15:26-27, *Kύων* (**dogs**) refers to the wild scavengers that plagued ancient cities. They were mongrels or mixed breeds that roamed in packs, feeding on

rubbish (Exodus 22:31; 1 Kings 14:11; 1 Kings 16:4; 1 Kings 21:23-24) and occasionally attacking humans. Those dogs were despised, and "dog" was frequently used as a derogatory term (cross reference with Deuteronomy 23:18; 1 Samuel 17:43; 24:14; 2 Samuel 9:8; 2 Samuel 16:9; 2 Kings 8:13; Psalms 22:16; Revelation 22:15). In fact, Jews in biblical times commonly referred contemptuously to Gentiles as **dogs**; as indeed just like Muslims who refer to all outside their faith.

Amazingly Paul, a Jew, called these Jewish false teachers **dogs**. He warned the Philippians to beware of those who call others **dogs**, but in reality are **dogs** themselves. The apostle's description is fitting. Were those mongrel **dogs** unclean and filthy? So are the false teachers. Were those **dogs** vicious and dangerous, were they to be avoided? So are the false teachers. So are all those who teach salvation by works and every other way imaginable to man.

Paul's words seem harsh and unloving in today's climate of tolerance and diversity. Many in the 'church' consider it unloving and divisive to point out doctrinal error. Yet truth and love are not mutually exclusive, and believers are called to both (Ephesians 4:15), as well as to discern.

Scripture teaches that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Those who teach otherwise are ravenous, savage wolves (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29), purveyors of demon doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1), who usher people onto the broad road to hell (Matthew 7:13). Pastors and elders must warn their flocks against them. Any deviation from the true doctrine of Christ is to be avoided (2 John 9-11). If we keep quiet we are partakers with them. So next time you want to tone it down, think seriously about what exactly are you really doing.

Though the false teachers prided themselves on their supposed righteousness, they were in reality **evil workers**. 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"
(Galatians 1:14).

After his conversion, the apostle realised that all his good works were worthless:

"Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have or 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"
(Philippians 3:7-8).

Many 'believers' today seek to see, justify, or believe in practicing both, their former religion, or parts of it, or even take on a 'new Jewishness'. Did the apostle do that? Was he even tempted to do that? 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 Timothy 1: 15-16).

Only believers controlled by the Holy Spirit can do genuine good works (Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:10; 2 Timothy 2:21; 3:17; Titus 2:14). Unbelievers can do bad things for bad reasons. They can also do good things, but out of selfish pride, not for God's glory. Only the redeemed can do good deeds motivated by a desire to glorify God. The false teachers plaguing the Philippians saw themselves as pleasing God, earning His favour (and their salvation) through their zeal for the Law. But Paul exposed them for the prideful **evil workers** that they were. As we already know now, you don't get eternal life or salvation as a reward for living a good life, even if it is the Christian way of life. It's the other way round; we do 'good' as a result of salvation but not to attain it. If it were the case, then it is of works.

Paul also describes these false teachers as **the false circumcision**, and clearly identified these false teachers as his perennial opponents and the Judaizers. Those Jewish legalists denied the gospel of grace, teaching that circumcisions and keeping the Law of Moses were necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1). The Jerusalem Council condemned their heretical teachings (Acts 15:1-29), as did Paul (for example from Galatians, Galatians 1:6-9; 2:16-21; 3:2-14, 22-25; 5:1-4: 11-14). Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone.

Circumcision has always been essential to the Jewish people, since it is the distinguishing mark of God's covenant with their forefather, Abraham (Genesis 17:11; Acts 7:8). So closely did they identify with **circumcision** that they referred to fellow Jews as the **circumcision** or **the circumcised** (Acts 10:45; 11:2; Romans 15:8; Galatians 2:7; Ephesians 2:11; Colossians 3:11;

Colossians 4:11; Titus 1:10), and to Gentiles as the uncircumcision or the uncircumcised (Judges 14:3; 15:18; 1 Samuel 14:6; 1 Samuel 17:26; 1 Samuel 31:4; 2 Samuel 1:20; Acts 11:3; Galatians 2:7-9; Ephesians 2:11; Colossians 3:11).

In obedience to God's command, every Jewish boy was (and is) circumcised on the eighth day after his birth (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3). **Circumcision** was so significant that uncircumcised Jewish males were to be cut off from the covenant community (Genesis 17:14). Although **circumcision** has through the centuries provided protection from some diseases that was not God's primary purpose in ordaining it.

Circumcision graphically illustrated man's depravity which is nowhere more manifest than in the procreative act, because it is then that the sin nature is passed on to a new generation (Psalms 51:5; Psalm 58:3). **Circumcision** was a symbol, picturing man's need to be cleansed from sin at the deepest root of his being. The bloodshed involved in the physical act of **circumcision** could symbolize the need for a sacrifice to accomplish that cleansing.

Like baptism in the New Covenant, **circumcision** was to reflect an inward reality. God commanded the Israelites,

"Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart" (Jeremiah 4:4).

Now this verse may seem very insignificant to you right now but look at it in the way that a Jewish religious person might look at it for a moment. They placed everything on ritual and this is God speaking about the **heart**. Paul in fact is explaining or revealing the Old Testament truth to us. Now if you wish you might like to study the following (Jeremiah 9:26; Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 10:16; Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 44:7 & 9). Sadly, by Paul's day **circumcision** had become a mere outward ritual, bereft of its intended spiritual significance:

"For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and

circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God." (Romans 2:25-29)

The Jewish people zealously observed outward religious ceremonies, but their hearts had become so detached from God that their

"circumcision [had] become uncircumcision"

In other words, the symbol isolated from the reality is meaningless. Then Paul added,

"He who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?"

God, the apostle declared, prefers uncircumcised but obedient Gentiles to circumcised but disobedient Jews. True *"circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit"*. No ritual—not **circumcision**, baptism, communion, or any other can transform the heart. Only those with transformed hearts can please God. When the Lord speaks or refers to the heart it is most definitely about relationship.

The Judaizers viewed themselves as set apart to God, and their **circumcision** as emblematic of that reality. But theirs was a **false circumcision**. *Katatome (false circumcision)* literally means "mutilation"; the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) used the related verb *katatemno* to describe pagan religious mutilation in Leviticus 21:5 and 1 Kings 18:28. The apostle's indictment of the Judaizers is shocking because it did not reflect a cleansed heart, their circumcision was as meaningless as the ritual mutilation in pagan religions. In Galatians 5:12 Paul expressed that very truth even more forcefully

"I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves"

Apokopto ("mutilate") is an even stronger term than *katatome*. In its other New Testament uses it is translated "cut off" or "cut away" (Mark 9:43,45; John 18:10, 26; Acts 27:32); but in extra-biblical Greek literature, *apokopto* was also used of castration (Walter Bauer, William F Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich (1979) *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago. pp:93), and that is the sense in which Paul used it in Galatians. The apostle's point is that if the

Judaizers believed that the mere outward ritual of **circumcision** pleases God, why did they not take that devotion to its ultimate extreme and castrate themselves?

How did this happen? Did they take their eyes off the ball? No they were in a totally different game. From relationship to religion, there is no comparison. Revelation 2 and 3 says it very well.

Circumcision (or any external ritual or ceremony) is meaningless if it does not reflect a transformed heart. Those who teach otherwise are not praiseworthy religious people doing their best to please God. They are purveyors of demon doctrines (1 Timothy 4: 1), who hold

"to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Timothy 3:5).

Believers are to *"avoid such men as these"* (2 Timothy 3:5).

Unlike the Judaizers, the *katatome*, **the false circumcision**, believers are the *peritome*, **the true circumcision**. They have an inward spiritual cleansing, not a meaningless outward mark. Three explicit qualities in verse 3 identify believers as **the true circumcision**, which we will look at that next time.

Amen.