



Old Testament Reading – Genesis 17:1-14

New Testament Reading – Romans 2:25-29

The Epistle of Joy

“The Distinctive Marks of a True Christian”

Philippians 3:1-11

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In Philippians 3:2-3, the Apostle Paul identified two groups of people.

- Group one: ***“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, and beware of mutilation.”***
- Group two: ***“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh.”***
- This is the contrast between the false circumcision, which the Jews believed in, which was purely physical, and the true circumcision of the heart, which is required to be a true Christian.

- This is the contrast between those who profess to be the people of God and those who are the people of God.
- This is the distinction between the religious and the righteous: those who only have an outward mark and those who have a true change of heart.

Since the central theme of the whole Bible is God's plan for the redemption of lost man, the two themes of the New Testament are:

- **The revelation and exaltation of Jesus as the Savior sent from God**, which is the theme of the four gospels, with the record and result of the proclamation of that good news being documented in the Book of Acts and the Epistles, and then the ultimate goal of His coming illustrated in the book of Revelation.
- **The demonstration and validation of the transformation that occurs in the lives of those who hear and heed the gospel** by their verbal confession of faith in Jesus Christ.
 - In Matthew 7:22, Jesus said many will come before Him in the last days and say: ***"Lord, Lord, look at all the things we have done for your kingdom, but He will confess to them, I have never known you, depart from Me you workers of iniquities."***
 - In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul urged his readers to: ***"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Know for sure that Jesus Christ dwells within you, or else you will be disqualified."***
 - 2 Peter 1:10-11, ***"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."***
- The contrast Paul defines here is a warning that is repeated many times throughout the New Testament:
 - There is a TRUE FAITH that leads to everlasting life.
 - There is a FALSE FAITH that leads to everlasting death.
 - Those with a false faith manifest their religiosity openly, to draw attention to themselves.
 - Those with the true faith manifest their relationship with God intimately, to give God the glory for His gift of grace.

1. Paul's Contrast Between True and False Faith – Philippians 3:2-3 – *"Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation, for we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."*

The distinctive marks of those with a false faith:

- **Beware of dogs** – Jewish Religious legalists who "dogged" Paul's trail and tried to undermine the gospel of salvation by God's grace alone, through one's faith alone, and in Christ alone.
- **Evil workers** – legalists who said a person's righteousness was based on their good works.
- **The Mutilation** – legalists who insisted that even the Gentile males had to be circumcised to become Christians.
 - God established circumcision to signify His covenant with Abraham and his descendants, but it also carried a

much deeper, spiritual meaning which the Jews of later generations overlooked. Since this portion of the male anatomy is associated with uncleanness, through circumcision, God was showing His people that to be acceptable unto Him, the filthiness of sin must be removed.

- **Deuteronomy 30:6** – ***“The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, so you can love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, so that you may live.”***
- Circumcision signified that salvation would come through blood and pain, and Jesus removed our sin through the shedding of His blood and the pain of crucifixion.
- **Colossians 2:11** – ***“In Him you were circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, so that we could become the children of God.”***

The distinctive marks of those with a true faith:

- **“We are the circumcision”** – those who, through the process of sanctification, have cut away our sinful nature, i.e., not by a physical cutting but by a spiritual transformation.
- **“Who worship God in the Spirit”** – true worship is not just the outward activity of singing, praying, and hearing the the preaching of the Word of God, but rather an inward experience that can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit.
- **“Who have no confidence in the flesh.”** – As Paul said in Romans, nothing good dwells in our flesh, for it too must be redeemed; therefore, there is nothing we can do to earn or deserve our eternal salvation.

2. Paul’s False Confidence in the Flesh – 3:4-6 – If anyone could be qualified to stand before God on their own merit, it would have been the Apostle Paul.

- Circumcised on the 8th day in accordance with Leviticus 12:3.
- A descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and therefore an heir to God’s covenant with them.
- Of the distinguished tribe of Benjamin.
- A Hebrew of Hebrews – Paul never tried to live like the Greeks or the Romans, as those who became ashamed to be called a Jew.
- Concerning the law – Paul was a Pharisee who was totally devoted to the law of God.
- Concerning his zeal in persecuting the church – Paul personally fought against those who abandoned Judaism and embraced Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.
- Concerning righteousness – no one could find fault with Paul’s godly lifestyle.

3. Paul’s Commitment to Know Christ – Vs. 7-8 – “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

- The Greek word for “knowledge” means to know someone experientially – to become a part of their very lives.
- The Hebrew word for “know” means to have an intimate relationship with someone, as in “Adam knew his wife and she conceived.”

- Amos 3:2 – ***“Israel only have I known.”*** – God was aware of all the nations of the earth, but Israel was the only one with whom He had a personal relationship.
- In verses 9-11, Paul said He wanted to be so close to Jesus Christ that he could be:
 - **“Found in Him”** – Paul had died, but Christ lived in him.
 - **“Clothed in Him”** – Paul wanted to be clothed in nothing less than the righteousness of Jesus Christ.
 - **“Conformed to Him”** – Paul was willing to suffer for Christ, if in doing so, he could learn those deeper things about Him.
 - **“Forever with Him”** – Paul longed for the day when his physical corpse would be “raptured” from the grave and united with Christ forever.