

Christian author, Ann Voskamp, has written:

“From all of our beginnings, we keep reliving the Garden story.

Satan, he wanted more. More power, more glory.

Ultimately, in his essence, Satan is an ingrate. And he sinks his venom into the heat of Eden. Satan’s sin becomes the first sin of all humanity: *the sin of ingratitude*. Adam and Eve are simply painfully, ungrateful for what God gave.

Isn’t’ that the catalyst of all my sins?

Our fall was, has always been, and always will be, that we aren’t satisfied in God and what He gives. We hunger for something more, something other. No longer do we see God as one we can trust. No longer do we perceive Him as wholly good. No longer do we observe all of the remaining paradise.

**Ingratitude** may be a **bigger** problem than we think. ... And without being **grateful**... how can we have God’s intended **joy** in our life...? ... A person who is not grateful... simply cannot experience any kind of joy.

It is easy for us to get wrapped up in "things"... not only the **tangible** things that we can see... but also the **intangibles** ...such as reputation... fame... achievement. ...We today can be **snared** both by tangibles and intangibles... and as a result lose our **joy**.

In Paul's case... the "things" he was living for... before he knew Christ... (the things that he **thought** would produce joy)... were very commendable pursuits - a righteous life... obedience to the Law... the defense of the religion of his fathers. ... But even when he accomplished them... none satisfied him... provided true joy... or gave him acceptance with God.

Like most "religious" people today... Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble... but not enough righteousness to bring him real joy. It was not bad things that he tried using to find joy. It was good things! ...

Joy is front and center in our passage this morning in Philippians. In fact... this is a re-occurring theme of Paul's throughout this letter. ... Many commentators announce this as Paul's theme for Philippians.

But here is what I would like for you to notice with me about Paul's treatment of this topic. ... Each time Paul calls for them to "rejoice" ... it function like a **hinge** at the beginning or the end... of the distinct sections of what Paul wants to cover with these believers. ...Look how he has used it... to indicate that he is finished with one topic and is moving to another... in some of the sections we have already studied....

Paul uses "rejoice" first in 1:18 when he concludes his discussion about those fellow believers who preached out of rivalry to Paul... *"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice."*

The second occurrence of "rejoice" was in 2:17, 18 where he had affirmed, *"Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me."* ... Paul also expressed his joy over the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus... especially for Epaphroditus... who almost died for the gospel ( vv. 19-30, vv. 28, 29).

So as Paul begins a new section... in today's passage... that outlines the doctrinal troubles the Philippians might soon face... it is no surprise that he writes... "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord..." And when he transitions to the next section in 4:4 ... he will hinge it with the command, "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.*"

Now... just before we look at today's passage... I want to say something that... I think... will help us understand Paul's train of thought. ... A person who is always rejoicing in the Lord will not go astray. ... As the believer walks through life... circumstances... false teaching... and false hopes will always be there to rob us of joy. These... by the way... will be the "thief's" that Paul deals with in our passage today. ... (We are going to focus on false teachers and false hopes.) But... the key will be that we need to guard ourselves through rejoicing...

Rejoicing is essential... if the believer is to guard himself against the onslaught of trials and false teaching in this life. ... Let me do what Paul does... and say it again... If the believer is to press on in his Christian life... he **must** walk about rejoicing in the Lord.

The great thing that rejoicing does is this: it places and keeps a person in the presence of Christ. No matter what confronts the believer — no matter how terrible the trial — he knows that he is being looked after by Christ Jesus his Lord. ... He knows that whatever comes upon him can never conquer and overcome him... even if he should die. If he **is** called upon to lay down his life and move on to heaven... he knows that Jesus Christ is going to escort him right on into God's presence immediately — quicker

than the eye can blink. Therefore, any believer can walk... rejoicing in the Lord... no matter what confronts him.

Rejoicing in the Lord is one of the very best ways to guard oneself against the trials of life and false teaching. When a person rejoices in the Lord... his mind is focused upon the Lord... upon what the Lord has done for him. And the mind cannot be two places at once. ... If it is upon the Lord and His numerous blessings to us... then it cannot be upon the trials and false teachings of this world.

#### Phil 3:1-2

You know... if a preacher dares to say "*finally...*" in his sermon... like Paul does here in verse one... you would expect him to say just a little more and then sit down. It signaled the conclusion of his message. ... It is... therefore a very sweet word to many listeners. ... But Paul uses it... and then goes on for two more chapters. What gives with that...?

The word "**finally**" is not a good translation for the word in the original language of the New Testament... which is (λοιπον). More closely... it might be better if it was translated "*as for the rest*" or "*furthermore.*" Paul is only about halfway through... he has more to tell us. ... So Paul is not announcing "*I have just one more thing... and then I am done...*" Instead... Paul is jubilantly saying, "*As for the rest, my brethren, nothing remains but to rejoice in the Lord.*"

Paul sets down what we might call the **indestructibility** of Christian joy. The reason this joy is indestructible... is because it is "*in the Lord*." ... A Christian can lose all things... lose all people... but he cannot ever lose Jesus Christ.

The opening command sets the tone for the entire chapter ("*rejoice in the Lord*"). ... They were **not** to rejoice... however... in positions of status or what they had done. ... They were to rejoice constantly... in all that Jesus Christ is... and in all that He has graciously provided... through His redemptive death and resurrection. ... Such holy joy... however... can be threatened by the onslaught of doctrinal and moral error.

Paul knew that he had "*to write the same things*" which he had taught them during his past visits to their city. ... Repetition and reinforcement are basic laws of spiritual leadership. Peter... also said... basically the same thing...

**2 Peter 1:12 (ESV)**

*Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.*

Such warnings were "no trouble" Paul says. ... It was not an irksome task. Even though there is doctrinal error in your midst... that wants to rob you of your joy... don't let it! Rejoice!

**Phil 3:2**

Anyone who has ever been to my house knows that I love dogs. Three of them allow us to live in the house with them. The dogs that we know as "pets" today are well-loved. They are a part of our family.

Dogs... however... were not highly loved in Bible times. The dogs referred to here were the pariah dogs which roamed the streets... sometimes in packs. ... They would hunt amidst garbage dumps... snapping and snarling at people. ... They were known to attack people... especially children. ... In the Bible... dogs stand for the lowest thing people can think of.

We got a taste of this when we were in Indonesia. In Manado and Tandano... such dogs roamed the streets... and were nobody's pets. ... They didn't seem to even want to relate to the human around them. And don't even think about leaning over to pet one of them. They would just snarl at you.

The dogs that Paul was referring to were Jewish leaders who were perverting the Gospel. ... They were men who professed to be Christians... but still considered it necessary to be bound to the Mosaic Law. ... Paul was saying... "*Watch out for the infiltration of mere professors of Christ.*" ... He is sounding a warning for all churches to beware of any and all influences... that might weaken the message of the Gospel... and turn away converts from the truth. ... The term "dogs" also referred to reckless... impure... men and women who were shameless in their sinful lifestyles.

These "dogs" and "mutilators" were very likely Judaizers — Jewish Christians who wanted to hold onto their Jewish laws and customs... and were motivated by spiritual pride. ... Because they had invested so much time and effort in keeping their laws... they couldn't accept the fact that all their efforts couldn't bring them a step closer to salvation.

Paul criticized the Judaizers because they looked at Christianity backward — thinking that what they *did* (circumcision — cutting or mutilating the flesh)... made them believers... rather than the free gift of grace given by Christ. ... What believers do must always be a *result* of faith... not a *prerequisite* to faith. ... This matter had been confirmed by the early church leaders at the Jerusalem council 11 years earlier. (We read about it in Acts 15).

Who are the Judaizers of our day? ... They are those who say that people must add something **else** to simple faith. ... It might be a good thing like baptism... or church membership... but if anyone tells you... that in order to be saved... you must be baptized... or join a certain church... they are a modern-day Judiazer... (Dogs... evil-doers...) Don't let anyone rob you of your joy. ... No person should add anything to Christ's offer of salvation by grace through faith.

Churches need to beware of adding baptism... the Lord's Supper... church membership... special prayers... speaking in tongues... and ONLY the use of the King James translation... as the means to be saved. How tragic it is... that there are so many out there... **stealing** the joy from believers... by saying that you cannot be saved... unless you conform to some external

requirement. It is a lie... and those promoting this teaching... are either deceptive or ignorant... and are going to be held accountable for the **confusion** they are creating in the body of Christ.

According to Jewish belief... circumcision was ordained upon Israel... as a sign and symbol... that they were the people with whom God had entered into a **special relationship**. ... But Paul declares... that the symbol of a people who are in a special relationship with God... is not that they have mutilated the foreskins of all their male babies.

### **Philippians 3:3**

There are three marks... or evidences of true circumcision. These are the signs that a person is in special relationship with God... because it is no longer the cutting of human flesh on all the males.

#1. It is worship of God in the Spirit.

What does it mean to worship by the Spirit? ... It means the Holy Spirit makes us worshipers. ... He calls forth worship that is genuine and deep... and from within... instead of fake or superficial.

The true people of God worship Him... not with outward forms and observances... but with true devotion and sincerity of heart. ... The Jews placed confidence in their worship in the performance of the duties of the Law.



Believers are those who worship God as He really wishes to be worshipped. ... The basis of worship is the Spirit of God... and the spirit of worship... is the Spirit of God.

To worship God... a person needs to have the Spirit of God living within their body and spirit. ... we can no longer worship God externally... through rituals and ceremonies. ... We now... can only worship God inwardly... through the Spirit of God who lives within us.

True worship is no longer through anything that is of the physical or material world... It is no longer of anything that is of man's flesh. True worship is of the spirit.

(LISTEN) ... No longer can a person attend church... keep all the rituals and ceremonies... **still live in the depths of sin**... and think that he or she has worshipped. They haven't! All they did was worthless activities that **look** like worship. Worship requires that the worshipper's spirit is right with God. They repent of all known sin... and are growing more Christ-like. The truly circumcised person... the person who actually is in right relation with God... is the person who worships God in spirit... and doesn't **rely** on external rituals or activities... thinking that they are good to go... merely because they went to church... helped someone less fortunate than themselves... said a special worded prayer... or any religious activity.

The first sign mentioned in verse 3... of true circumcision... of being in a special relationship with God... is worshipping God in Spirit. The second

sign that identifies who the people of God are... also here in verse 3... is that these people “glory in Christ Jesus.”

This evidence of “true circumcision” ... is that the person speaks often about Christ. They aren’t afraid to hide the fact that they are a Christian. They confess Him before others... For the most part... their friends... neighbors... family members... co-workers... all know that they are a believer. You cannot boast in Christ... and be a **secret** Christian at the same time. Christ is the focus of ongoing praise... and they display a certain confidence in Christ’s love and provision for them. Also take note... that you cannot boast in Christ... without expressing a joy in Him.

Evidence number 3 of true circumcision... is that they put no confidence in the flesh. And by what Paul writes in the ongoing verses... this means they do not place much stock... or rely on the things... that society says... brings a person status... or respect among peers. ... They put no confidence in ethnic... or tribal heritage... observances... the gifts they were born with... or their own accomplishments. ... They don’t believe these things have anything to do... with a true relationship with God... in terms of commending them to him.

Judaizers... on the other hand... believed that their accomplishments **would** earn their salvation... thus giving them reason for having confidence in what their society thought brought them great esteem. ... So Paul challenged any false teachers to a credentials “showdown.” ... If anyone could have confidence in worldly achievements... **Paul** certainly could... in

fact... he... no doubt... had **more** than any of those Judaizers... who so adamantly opposed Paul's teaching of salvation by faith alone.

### **Philippians 3:4-6**

Of course there is nothing wrong with being Jewish or being part of any ethnic group... that has a strong culture and identity. There is nothing wrong with identifying yourself with a particular group of people. ... But there is something wrong with every group of people... every group... is comprised of sinners... and when sinners get together... they come up with some **bad** ways of defining life.

The tendency of groups... is to somehow put trust in the membership itself... to prop up its own identity... and self-worth. A tribal consciousness develops... and the members begin to look around at other "tribes" and find reasons why their "tribe" is the best. ... "My college is better than your college..." "I attend Living Water... what church do you attend..." ... "I am a \_\_\_\_\_ fan... and we are going to a BCS Bowl... too bad your team isn't..." ... Each member of the tribe tends to take pride... and gain a sense of specialness from being a member. Eventually ... every tribe or people-group develops its own identity markers.

For the Jews... as we have seen... their identity markers were circumcision... and adherence to the Mosaic Law. ... Although God gave circumcision and the Law to the nation of Israel as a means for them to know him... Paul says that these are now **false** identity markers for the true people of God.

That's the context of Philippians 3. ... But what about **our** context? ... How can we identify ourselves as the people of God... and move away from the false identity markers that we may be drawn to?

First of all... what **are** the “tribes” that we identify with? ... And again... there is nothing is wrong with being part of a tribe. ... We need to be concerned with this... **only** when these other identity markers **compete** with allegiance to Christ in our hearts... when we put confidence in **them**... instead of in Christ.

Now... we know a wrong kind of allegiance is within us... whenever **we want to triumph**. *“I’ve been a member of this church for 30 years...” “I have taught in AWANA for the past 3 years...” “I am an Elder...”* We want somebody to look at us and say, *“Wow! That’s pretty cool. You have status over me... You have done better than I have...”* ... We are looking for some kind of validation that says we’re doing all right. ... And this is a wrong confidence... (a wrong allegiance.)

We cling to these identity markers... in order to feel secure and significant. We want to feel safe in the sphere we belong to. ... And we are very good at figuring out the rules... for the different tribes that we enter into. ... It’s kind of instinctive. ... You walk into a new group... and just kind of sense how you could order your life... according to its rules... and make it in this group. ... Or if you don’t think it’s going to work... you find some other tribe whose rules are easier for you to follow.

So we try to **distinguish** ourselves within the sphere that we belong to. Our need to feel significant... often takes precedence... in our speech and in our actions... in that group. Again... we are insecure... and we want to outdistance everybody else in some way... so that people will say we're doing okay. We want to feel good about ourselves.

What are the tribal identity markers that you might gravitate toward? Let me throw out a few... academic or athletic achievement... hard work and long hours... success... wealth... home ownership... rugged individualism... self-assertiveness... pride in survival skills... ability to speak in a certain way... (being able to speak that “cool” language within a language)... having a certain appearance... dressing with a certain style... honoring the family.

Of course...there are family identity markers... each family has a certain way of doing things. ... And often if you run afoul of the identity markers in the family... you'll hear about it... or you'll feel it anyway. You may feel that you have become the black sheep of the family.

Then of course there are smaller “tribes”... the people you hang with... the friends you share a lot of life with. ... And these little tribes often develop identity markers. They have their own way of speaking... and their own inside jokes.

And let me tell you... there definitely are all sorts of wrongful evangelical Christian identity markers. ... Here are a few of those evangelical Christian identity markers: dutiful church attendance... regular quiet times...

thorough Bible knowledge... doctrinal purity... involvement in ministry... consistent witnessing... adherence to a particular church system... raising your hands... not raising your hands... having a good marriage... raising godly children... affiliation with a certain political party... And the list goes on.

There is **nothing** wrong with most of this. ... If the Holy Spirit is calling forth these activities... they have quite a natural and satisfying place. ... If... **however**... we are looking to derive our identity from these things... if we are trying to “wow!” others... or build a sense of significance from them... which we often end up doing... we will soon be engulfed with pride... guilt... or burn-out.

Have you ever felt that way in your life as a follower of Jesus? Guilty, overwhelmed about not doing enough? Prideful? “I’m kind of doing okay right now.” Exhausted, because there’s so much you are supposed to do... and do it well?

Christian author... Lee Knapp... wrote about how his evangelical church culture frustrated him in Discipleship Magazine:

“While nothing I had been taught was in any way contrary to Scripture, the church culture, one in which I rarely felt like myself, applied layer upon layer of conformity. Being insulated in such a culture either took away an honest estimation of sin, as people became spiritually proud, or it made them preoccupied with their sin in trying to eliminate it. I won lots of morality points and spiritual status this way, but in the end I lost my humanity.”

The church is the place where you are supposed to find your humanity. Jesus Christ came to show us how to live a truly human life... to give us his Holy Spirit to draw out our humanity... so we become free... real humans... no longer bound to false identity markers. ... (LISTEN) I pray that everyone who enters this church... finds his/her own humanity... because they find Jesus... and also find here... legitimate... deep... authentic worshipers of Jesus.

When we are drawn to all these false identity markers... we become hypersensitive. ... We're always thinking about what other people are thinking about us... and we give other people the right to define us. We develop rabbit ears. We can be lifted up or crushed by one little comment. We give in to the tyranny of others' expectations. We get so wired this way that we begin to imagine expectations that aren't even there. We begin to have imaginary conversations in which we defend ourselves and triumph over somebody who just might be putting us down.

Many of us have sought to distance ourselves from these false identity markers... but they keep calling out to us like the sirens of Homer's *Odyssey*.

So I need to affirm to every single Christian who is listening to me now... Our culture does not define you. Your significance is not bound to how well you live up to that measurement. Your significance is no longer defined by family... how well you match its definition is not the basis of your importance. Your friends do not define you. God defines you.

I hope that you have been listening to Him this morning. What has He been telling us? ...

If you are a Christian... He's telling you that you belong to Him... that you are a son or daughter of the great high King... that you are loved... cherished... and adored. That's who you are. You are a member of God's tribe. THIS is the only tribal membership where you derive true significance!

The children's movie *The Lion King*, has a lot of new age messaging going on in it... yet there is one part worth noting here. It is when Mustafa tells Simba, "*You are more than what you have become.*"

That is pretty profound... isn't it...?

That is so true for many who are here this morning. You are more than what you have become. ... This is certainly true if you have settled for a reduced identity. ... When we accept a reduced identity for ourselves... we live reduced lives. We worship Jesus in reduced ways. ... We live out the gospel in reduced ways.

It is time to live by our true identity markers... to glory in Christ... even in front of others... to worship by the Holy Spirit... making far less of the external elements of worship... compared to what is going on inside our hearts... and refusing to find our significance... where society tells us it comes from.



Finally... my brothers (and sisters)... rejoice in the Lord.

That is how!