

Broomfield 

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Worshippers Rejoice in Christ

Philippians 3:3

We all have seen and heard about cases of mistaken identity. There are those stories of men who have spent fifteen or more years of their life in prison for crimes they did not commit. But then upon further evidence, they are exonerated and released with little more than a weak apology.

How horrible! And yet the reverse also can be tragic.

For example if you spent most of your life thinking you were somebody —say the son of a king or the heir to the throne of a great nation — and you discovered in the end that you were not what you were led to believe! That too would be shocking.

Yet, such is the case for many upon passing from this world. They believe that they are Christians because they were born in the United States — a supposedly “Christian nation” — or that they attended church, or lived a morally upright life. They believe that these facts or deeds are sufficient to place them in God’s kingdom. Yet, the Scripture is clear that upon the end of most people's life the terrifying judgment of hell awaits them.

Matthew 7:13, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.”

Matthew 7:22-23, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

This is a sobering passage. It has such an important message for us who claim to be Christian. What is the basis on which we can call ourselves a Christian? How do I know that I am saved? What are the elements or characteristics of an authentic Christianity?

The passage at which we are looking answers these questions. In the previous verses Paul has told us about those who are the “false circumcision” those who thought they were saved, but were not. These individuals professed to be Christians, but were not Christians. And it is against these false-Christians that Paul wrote Philippians 3:3.

Philippians 3:3, “For **we are the circumcision**, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

By stating that “we are the circumcision” Paul is saying that we are true believers. We are the genuine children of God. We are the authentic Christianity. Then he gives us three distinguishing traits by which we can judge or identify true believers. The first of these characteristics is that the genuine Christian is one who worships in the Spirit of God. The second characteristic that we are looking at here is that the authentic Christian rejoices or boasts in Christ.

Boasting in Christ Jesus

Philippians 3:3, “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, **and rejoice¹ in Christ Jesus**, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Literally rendered the phrase could read “and boast in Christ Jesus” This is a powerful and loaded statement deserving close scrutiny. So let us begin first by defining the term *rejoice*, *glory* or *boasting*.

The word rendered *rejoice* was a common word in Christ’s day. Of its thirty-seven² occurrences in the New Testament, Paul uses it thirty-five times. It carried the basic meaning of praise, and is the English equivalent of *pride*, *rejoice*, *glorying*, or *boasting*. Now in the Bible *boasting* generally has a negative connotation.

1 Corinthians 3:21a, “Therefore let no man glory [boast] in men.”

1 Corinthians 5:6a, “Your glorying [boasting] is not good.”

James 4:16b, “But now ye rejoice [boast] in your boastings [bragging]: all such rejoicing [boasting] is evil.”

And yet, some may ask, "What is so bad about 'boasting?'" I mean, a little boasting is necessary when it comes to getting the job, selling the product, and attracting the mate. Right? And as Babe Ruth said, “It ain't boasting if you can do it.”³

For us to understand the Biblical prohibition against boasting, we need to look at it from the divine perspective. When we do that we find that the term *boast* primarily deals with what a man hopes in or relies upon. This is especially true when it comes to this question: On what basis will a man stand before God?

¹ καυχασθαι kauchaomai

² Depending on the Greek texts used the term is used 37 or 38 times in the New Testament. In 23 of the instances it is rendered glory, 8 times it is rendered boast, 4 times rejoice, and make boast 2, and joy 1.

³ This quotation has various attributions. It most likely originated with John Nance Garner, a Vice President of the United States. “You have to do a little bragging on yourself even to your relatives—man doesn’t get anywhere without advertising.” Others have modified this saying to “it isn’t bragging if you can do it” to “you have to brag when you can do it.”

The key to answering this question is found in our understanding of *boasting*⁴.

As the Creator, God is the judge who is perfectly holy.⁵ God is also without sin.⁶ And God dwells in unapproachable light.⁷ All of us will someday stand before God to be judged⁸ just as we have courts in which criminals are judged by the law.

On what basis will a man stand before God? Or to change the metaphor, recall the ancient days — as in the book of Esther — how no man, woman, or child could approach a king without good reason. For example, if you saw a king walking and you attempted to approach him without being summoned, you most likely would be killed. Truly, anyone who was granted the ear of the king had to stand before him on the right BASIS. Perhaps yours was the news of war. Or maybe you were royalty. Whatever the reason you had to have credentials to speak to a king.

It is in light of this that I again ask the question: On what basis will a man stand before God?

There are only two options when it comes to answering this question. One can approach God in his own merits, or one can approach God on another's merits.

That is the backdrop for our understanding of boasting.

In the Bible, boasting is NOT simply acting as if you're better than others or telling people of your accomplishments — that's the result of boasting. The essence of boasting revolves around the basis upon which a person approaches God!

There are two facets to boasting. One is an internal reliance. The other is an external attitude or action. If one stands before God on the basis of his own merits, he is boasting on himself. If one stands before God on the basis of another, he is boasting on that other person.

Based on this a good translation of this word would be *glory* or *glorying*. Glorying in something speaks both of the internal reliance and external result. From this perspective all men are boasters. Yet, is the basis of our boasting valid?

Sinful Boasting

Sinful boasting or invalid boasting — the boasting that is bad — is approaching God on the basis of one's own merits.

James 4:16, “But now ye rejoice [boast] in your boastings [presumptions]: all such rejoicing [boasting] is evil.”

For a man to stand before God because in his opinion he is good enough, this passage says, "That's evil!"

⁴ The term *boast* has traditionally carried the idea that “you have something and wish to call attention to that.” The term *boast* is now being blurred with the term *brag*.

⁵ Compare Isaiah 6:3

⁶ Compare John 1:5

⁷ Compare 1 Timothy 6:16

⁸ Compare 2 Corinthians 5:10

1 Corinthians 3:21, “Therefore let no man glory [boast] in men. For all things are yours.”

The context of this verse refers to the reasoning’s of man. When a man stands before God he will be saying that he should be accepted because of what he has done. He will say things like these: I have been a nice person. I am not a thief, I’ve done good things, and I am an honest, descent, upright, good citizen. Ultimately we are standing before God or man on the basis of our own merits. This is a stance which the Bible again says is wrong!

The Bible says this is wrong because the wages of sin is death.⁹ Though I could do a world of good, be voted the man of the year every year, and equal Hitler’s crimes with goodness and I have one sin, that one sin condemns me. And to approach God on the basis o my moral conduct and good intentions will result in my execution because of my sin!

The Scriptures are telling this plainly:

2 Corinthians 10:18, “For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.”

We cannot approach God or man on the merits of our boasting. If we attempt to come on the basis of our own works, merits or reasoning we are a vain boaster!

On what basis can a man stand before God? What is the only valid object of boasting before God?

The Only Valid Object of Boasting: Christ

Philippians 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, **and rejoice [boast] in Christ Jesus**, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Paul identifies the attributes of a genuine Christian and says that a true Christian boasts in Christ Jesus. A man can only stand before God on the basis of Christ Jesus

Genesis 2:15-17, “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

When God created this world, man enjoyed a wonderful relationship with God in which he was called to cultivate the Garden of Eden. Here man walked with God. And we know from this passage that man’s relationship with God was based upon the obligation of perfect obedience. Adam was instructed that he was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and that if obeyed he would meet God’s standard of righteousness. Yet, if Adam disobeyed he was promised death.¹⁰

⁹ Compare Romans 6:23

¹⁰ Theologians refer to this as the Covenant of Works. Adam as the federal head of all mankind was told that upon the condition of perfect obedience that he would be confirmed in righteousness. The penalty for disobedience to the covenant was the penalty of death. Adam represented all mankind who descended from him by ordinary generation so all mankind fell in

Genesis 3:6, “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

Sin severed the relations that Adam had with God when he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This resulted in Adam and Eve being cast out of the Garden of Eden¹¹ and in their inability to approach God. They now stood condemned before God.¹²

How then can a man stand before God? Can or will we approach God upon our death? Can we be saved?

2 Corinthians 5:21 speaking of Christ states:

2 Corinthians 5:21, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”¹³

This is an amazing passage in Scripture. Because man could not save himself, God Himself became man — Jesus Christ. As God, Jesus has the right to stand before the Father. As man, Jesus has the ability to allow US to stand before God on His merits! Thus the hope of mankind, our only valid trust and boast, is Jesus Christ! He is the only basis upon which any man can approach God.

Romans 3:27, “Where is boasting then? [in one’s self] It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.”

When I live in reliance upon Christ, boasting in myself is excluded.

Galatians 6:14, “But God forbid that I should glory [boast], save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

On the cross, Christ died in my place. That being the case, when I anticipate standing before God I do so not on my own merits, but upon Christ’s merits! I approach the King of Creation on the authority of Christ! This is theme by which I live.

Jeremiah 9:23-24, “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory¹⁴ [boast] in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory [boast] in his might, let not the rich man glory [boast] in his riches: But let him that glorieth [boasteth] glory [boast] in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise.”

Family of God, this is the second attribute of a genuine Christian — they are ones who boast in Christ. They trust in Christ’s merits as the basis upon which they stand before God. They are relying upon Christ’s perfect life as the reason for God to accept them.

Adam’s sin.

¹¹ Compare Genesis 3:24

¹² Compare 1 Corinthians 11:32

¹³ This could be rendered this way, “For he hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we [who knew no righteousness] might be made the righteousness of God in him [Christ].”

¹⁴ הלל halal

The Result of Boasting in Christ

When our boast is Christ, what will be the result? First we will have a passionate longing to follow the Lord.

Romans 2:17, "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God."

In this passage Paul is reproofing some who claimed to boast in God. In reality they really weren't boasting in God. We know this from Romans 2:21-23.

Romans 2:21-23, "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?"

In essence Paul is saying, "You who boast in God are hypocrites, for your living denies your profession!"

The first ramification of genuinely boasting in God is that we have a passionate longing to follow our Lord. When Christ is the basis upon which I stand before God and man (Christ is the solid rock on which I stand) it naturally follows that my heart will beat with His such that I will want to serve Him faithfully.

This is an incredible diagnostic tool we have in our walks with Christ. For while positionally I may be boasting in Christ, nevertheless practically I can be found glorying in many other things. When I find that my heart is languishing when it comes to the things of the Lord, and that my zeal is fading and my passion is waning this is a good indication that the basis of my boast is not Christ but something else! Maybe I'm living for the praises of men. Perhaps I've been more concerned about my reputation.

Regardless, when Christ is the object of my trust and affection, my zeal will be strong! This is why the Apostle John gave this message to the Church struggling with zeal and affection, "Remember your first love!"¹⁵

Secondly our greatest delight will be in being used by God. .

Romans 15:17-18, "I have therefore whereof I may glory [boast] through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed"

This is a great passage. Upon boasting in God, Paul says that the only other thing on this earth in which he could boast was how and when God used Him! In fact, elsewhere Paul wrote this:

1 Thessalonians 2:19, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing [boasting]? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?"

When Christ is your boast, His working through you becomes your greatest joy and passion on this earth.

It is amazing for me to watch a person who starts to invest in the stock market. They closely watch their investments. They watch the stock price. They learn to read the stock page in the business section and start buying the *Wall Street Journal*. Every rise in the market is great cause for rejoicing. Every down

¹⁵ Compare Revelation 2:5

turn is a cause for immediate concern.

This is how, family of God, it ought to be when it comes to being used by God in the lives of other people! Rather than having the peaks and valleys in life revolve around the attention I am receiving or the awards and accomplishments that I seek (my leisure, investments, etc) my heart must beat for others. I want them to know the Lord. I want them to grow in their love for Christ. I want them to be the people God has called them to be. This should be the goal of parenting, marriage, and all other relationships!

3 John 4, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”

When Christ is your boast, the work of Christ in and through you becomes your passion.

This brings us to the result of boasting in Christ: we will be impervious to the crushing blows of life.

Romans 5:1-2, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice [boast] in hope of the glory of God.”

When Christ is the basis upon which I stand before God, my life is characterized by boasting in hope! In other words, I am healthy. Now when this is the case the result will be this:

Romans 5:3, “And not only so, but we glory [boast] in tribulations¹⁶ also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.”

The word tribulation was used in wine making. It describes the pressure needed to crush a grape. Thus as Paul considered the crushing pressures of this life — the trial, difficulty, and heartache — he thought of His Lord the one in whom he boasted!

Regardless of Paul’s lot in life, his heart was filled with further exaltation, delight, and boasting! When a person’s boast is in Christ, he is impervious to the crushing blows of this life! This does not mean that we won’t feel them and aren’t affected by them. Rather it means that the sin and misery of this creation will not crush us because we are living for that which transcends this life! This is the point of Romans 5:3.

Tribulation brings benefits to us.

Romans 5:3-5, “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

The benefits of tribulation or trials in life is that it ushers us into a deeper walk with Christ. It gives us a greater understanding of God’s love. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament put it this way:

“Sufferings do not bear their meaning within themselves. They are simply the envelope of the power of God...”¹⁷

¹⁶ θλιψις thlipsis

¹⁷ Gerhard Kittel, Volume III, page 650

Though tribulation and distress surround the child of God, he need not wither or die! Because the believer's hope and trust is not in living a long life, enjoying the things of this earth, or storing up "treasures" of this world. The believer's hope and trust is in Christ. Knowing Christ, walking with Christ, and spending eternity with Christ is our hope.

Such is the second Attribute of Genuine Christianity: Boasting in Christ.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 16, 2003. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

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