

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN Church

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Put No Confidence in the Flesh

Philippians 3:3

This past week I received a rather interesting phone call. The gentlemen had read our church advertisement in the Longmont yellow pages which expresses our desire to “raise up true worshippers of God.” He said rather roughly, “So you're raising up true worshippers of God?”

I said, “That's our desire.”

He then responded in a somewhat angry tone, “We'll let me ask you: How many homeless people spend the night in the homes of your congregation?”

I said, “None.”

His response was that he hung the phone up on me. He was clearly leaving the message, “If you don't house homeless people, you are not a Christian.”

Now quite honestly that phone call disturbed me. It didn't disturb me because he was challenging the validity of our faith. It disturbed me that he made the horrible assumption that the basis of genuine Christianity is housing homeless people.

Indeed, God's word says this:

2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

It is healthy to examine ourselves and our church as to our fidelity to God and His word. Yet, the question remains on what basis are we to judge the credibility of our salvation? Is it based on how many Bible verses I have memorized? Is it based upon how much money I have given to feed the poor? Is it my affirmation of trust? Is it my “decision” to follow Jesus? Is it based upon how many homeless people I house? The text at which we are looking answers this question definitively.

In Philippians 2:2, Paul mentions what our Bibles translate as, “the false circumcision” ones who thought they were saved, but were not. They claimed to be Christians, but were not. It was against these false-Χηριστιανος τηατ Παυλ ωροτε ζερσε 3, “Φορ ωε αρε της τρυε χιρχυμχισιον.” Ηε τηεν γιζεσ υσ της τηρεε characteristics of a genuine child of God. These are the true believers, or authentic Christians. The first two characteristics of a true believer are that they worship in Spirit. The second is that they glory in Christ. The third one is they have a suspicion of self.

Suspicion of Self

Philippians 3:3, “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, **and have no confidence¹ in the flesh².**”

As we address this description of the child of God I want to begin by discussing with you the background of Paul's exhortation. Beginning with the religious setting of the apostolic age we find these verses in the Scriptures.

Luke 18:9, “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”

Matthew 23:5-6, “But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.”

Matthew 6:1, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.”

Romans 10:3, “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”

These passages are representative of an entire system developed around securing and proving one's own righteousness. The Jews, because of the promise made to Abraham and his descendants that God would be his God and that they would be His people, believed that salvation was a blessing given only to the sons of Abraham. They further believed that to become a “son of Abraham” that one had to be circumcised. This is how one got through the door to eternal life. Furthermore if you were to be a good son or daughter, you had to uphold the various and sundry laws of Judaism. Consequently, the whole Jewish system at the time of Christ revolved around creating and proving one's own righteousness — one's right to stand before God. They did this through great acts of forgiveness,³ religious orders,⁴ various washings,⁵ and financial sacrifice.⁶

Romans 10 summarizes the essence of Judaism at the time of Christ.

¹ πειθω peitho

² sarx sarx

³ Compare Matthew 18:21

⁴ Compare Matthew 23:1-4

⁵ Compare Mark 7:3-4

⁶ Compare Mark 7:9-14

Romans 10:2-4, “For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

It is the last phrase in verse four that I want to focus on.

This passage is discussing the Jewish attempt at performing certain religious acts of devotion as the means of standing before God. We can envision their struggle for righteousness because Paul writes about this struggle in his life.

Romans 7:19, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.”

Romans 7:22-23, “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

Paul is referencing this struggle in Romans 10:4.

Romans 10:4, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

What does this mean? What is "the law for righteousness"?

Let me translate this verse more in line with Paul's overall intent in this passage: “Christ is the end of the struggle for righteousness.”

Though the Jews understood themselves to be children of God they nevertheless related to God on the basis of their OWN righteousness. When a person relates to God—or the world—on the basis of their own merit, they necessarily become enslaved to the requirement of living up to a certain standard for acceptance. This is “the law of righteousness.”

This struggle for acceptance from either God or man is the “law of righteousness.” This is what Paul is referring to in Romans 10:4.

We like to think that Christians are immune to this struggle. However, let us recall Acts 5.

In Acts 5 we read of Ananias and Sapphira pretending to be godly. They sold their property for a certain price. Then they conspired to lie about the price. Why the game? Why the conspiracy? They played this game because they were seeking to establish their own righteousness.

.They wanted the church to think that they were godly, devoted, super-Christians. This required them to lie first to themselves, and then to the Holy Spirit. Rather than telling the truth that they had sold their property for a certain amount and were only going to give a portion of it to the church (and this would not have been sinful) they wanted to uphold the perception that they were as godly as Barnabas.⁷

Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit that all might believe they were the “spiritual elite.” They were no different from the heretical leaders at Corinth who “boast[ed] according to the flesh.”⁸

⁷ Compare Acts 4:36-37

⁸ Compare 2 Corinthians 11:18

If you are honest with yourself, you will see that there are times in your life when your endeavor is no different than that of Ananias and Sapphira. You know that your walk with Christ is in shambles. And privately between you and God, you don't care. God's grace has become cheap. Your conscience has long been seared. But when you stand before a brother or sister are you going to confess your sin? Do you want to allow the body of Christ to know that your act is not together? Are you going to confess that you really don't care about the things of the Lord? Will you say that you're not as godly as you let on? In the words of Paul, "God forbid!"

Instead your masks and the props continue. You have become prisoners to the opinions and standards of men. The typical person in these circumstances either will find his niche in the church — a place where his play acting is accepted or he "burn out" in his walk, blame the church for his misery, and slink away.

No man can bear up under the struggle for righteousness!

What is the answer?

The Answer for the Struggle for Righteousness

Paul's answer when it comes to this struggle is this: Christ.

Romans 10:4, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

This is exactly what we have seen in our passage this morning.

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.**"

Through the cross of Christ, God has given His child His very own righteous record. Consequently, the children of God are assured that in spite of their sin, failings, and unrighteousness that they are not guilty of sin, and thus are beautiful in God's eyes.

Now if you simply will accept this grace, you no longer will need to WORRY ABOUT YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. You won't have to play the ugly game of establishing your righteousness before God or man! You will not be man pleasers! Spouse pleasers! Parent pleasers! Peer pleasers! You will rest confidently in the fact that you are God's beloved child! Christ is your boast! You do not need the praises of men?

This is very important for us to understand. It is because of the Covenant of Works, mankind — not just the Jews of Paul's day — relates to God and the world on the basis of merit. This is our fleshly passion! Consequently, as children of God you must see that there is a war that wages in our being. This is a war directed at acquiring a right standing before God.

I used to think that Romans 10: 2-4 was just one of many warnings when it came to the spiritual battle set before the child of God. Yet when I look at it in light of Genesis 2:15-17 I realize that Romans 10:2-4 is the battle!

Our flesh hates the gospel!

Though we have been saved by God's grace there is a passion resident in each and every one of us that

flees from it. We want to establish our own righteousness; it feels good!

Though we are saved, nevertheless time and circumstances find us again and again living as if our acceptance before God is based upon ourselves. We struggle to be holy. We struggle to read God's word. We struggle to pray. We struggle with perception. We struggle not because we love Christ, but because we are trying to impress Him and others. This is a struggle we always will lose!

Family of God, don't miss it! The gospel ends this struggle!

The gospel gives us a right standing which is inviolable, unchangeable, and undefilable!

If we just hear the gospel once and walk away, our flesh will rear its ugly head and RE-ENSLAVE us in the futile battle for righteousness. Again don't miss it: **OUR FLESH HATES THE GOSPEL!**

This is why it is necessary that we preach the gospel to ourselves each and every day! We must guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. We must be quick to "destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God." We must ever and always labor to keep Christ as our boast!

The Christian's Confession

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.**"

This is an incredible description of the child of God. In fact it constitutes a rather graphic play-on-words.

This passage tells us why the false-circumcision, the mutilators of verse 2 thought they were saved. According to Paul in this passage (now don't blame this on me, I'm just the messenger) held in their hands the product of their circumcision. They were relying upon a bloody piece of skin!

This is the point that Paul is emphasizing here.

In contrast to this placing confidence in a bloody piece of skin the true believer places "no confidence in the flesh [skin]." Aside from this graphic portrait Paul paints he is asking the rhetorical question: What is "the flesh" that the believer does not trust in? The obvious answer is this: It is any endeavor at grounding one's right to stand before God on the basis of human effort.

It is in this regard that the Christian places no confidence in the flesh. The Christian knows this:

Isaiah 64:6, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing."

Romans 8:6, "For to be carnally minded is death."

Romans 8:8, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

This means that when it comes to standing before God our prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, housing homeless people, etc., are nothing more than filthy garments. These things constitute nothing more than a bloody piece of skin

And thus as he relates to God and this world, the Christian does so with NO REGARD for religious activity or duty. He knows that these things are of little value. This is exactly what Paul states in 1 Timothy.

1 Timothy 4:7-8, “But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and **exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.**”

Paul is writing this to a people being told that abstinence from marriage,⁹ and food or drink could in some way make them more pleasing to God.

Paul says, “Forget it! It is true that singleness is a calling and should not be looked down upon. It is also true that abstaining from certain foods may be of value when it comes to one's physical health. It may be true that doing this or doing that may in some way benefit us as it relates to this world. However, if you're going to invest in anything in this life do not put your confidence in the flesh — in a spiritual asceticism which is worthless to God.¹⁰ Rather, invest in the kingdom of God!”

Such is the final attribute of the child of God!

Based upon all this I want to exhort you to get out of the “salvation” business! Stop approaching God on the basis of your flesh!

You say, “I'm saved! I would never do that!”

Family of God, listen to a very important passage.

Galatians 5:17, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

Do you realize that your life is a battle ground when it comes to trusting Christ? The Spirit — life in the Spirit, life lived out walking with and trusting in the Lord — is opposed to the flesh. And the flesh — life lived in the attempt to please God — is opposed to the Spirit. The result is that there will be times in our walks with Christ when we will be found living contrary to our boast such that we will not “do the things that [we] please.”

In fact it is my conviction that as a whole we are losing this battle now.

Today the church is permeated with believers who relate to God on the basis of their conduct. They “desire to make a good showing in the flesh.”¹¹ The gospel is so rarely preached from the pulpit today that congregations are filled with practical pagans!

You say: What are you talking about?

Let me refresh your memory.

⁹ Compare 1 Timothy 4:3

¹⁰ Compare Isaiah 64:6

¹¹ Compare Galatians 6:12

It is almost a universal rule of the church that when “bad things happen to good people” it is because the “good people” have done something bad. The ungodly words of Eliphaz are the theme verse.

Job 4:8, “Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.”

In the midst of trial or tribulation, the question most frequently raised are these: Why the sorrow? Sickness? Disease? What have I done to deserve such a bitter providence? Why is God punishing me?

These questions are altogether pagan! They belong in the religious cults of Paul's day. They are asked in a system in which a petty god rewards or punishes man for his deeds. They are what we expect from a worshipper of Zeus or Apollo, not a worshipper of Christ! Why?

In Christ WE PLACE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH!

Do you understand what this means? Our acceptance before God and thus our expectation of His treatment of us is not based upon the flesh! It is not based upon our merit. It is not based upon what we have earned! Rather, in Christ we have been made beloved children with the expectation that as God treated Christ so will He treat us!

Now again, this doesn't mean that we won't be disciplined. Hebrews 12 teaches plainly.

Hebrews 12:6, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

If you are in Christ you always are being disciplined! In fact, we believe that one of the most important forms of discipline that we receive from God is the preaching of the word!

When God disciplines us, He does so, not with our trials, but in our trials!

In light of this, guard your heart this day. Monitor closely what you allow your minds to dwell upon. Place no confidence in your flesh. And in everything, make Christ your boast!

It is only then that we will offer to God an acceptable sacrifice of worship!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 23, 2003. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

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