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Confidence in the Flesh or Confidence in Christ; Phil 3:1-7

GPBC

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Introduction – In ch3 Paul begins addressing a new issue facing the church at Philippi. In ch2 he dealt with the internal issue of the necessity for unity in the cause of the gospel. Don't let anything disrupt the unity of the church because nothing silences the witness of the gospel more than division. The answer to potential disunity is humility. Stay humble and unity will prevail.

In ch3 Paul turns to the external issue of false teaching. Just as the church will always need to keep a pulse on internal unity, it will also always need to be aware of false teaching. Internal strife will shrivel the advance of the gospel. However, a false gospel is a far greater danger. If it invades the church, it will not merely lessen the impact of the gospel, it will eventually erase the gospel by replacing it.

The church of Jesus Christ, this church of Jesus Christ, must always be vigilant in striving for unity and in exposing and opposing a false gospel. Disunity is easy to spot. A false gospel is far more cunning to realize. Disunity is often public knowledge. A false gospel is often privately held, even at times unintentionally embraced. A new best-selling book, a popular celebrity Bible teacher, an undercurrent of Christian social media – and before you know it, a significant portion of the church is quietly adopting a view of the faith that sounds biblical because it's cloaked in spiritual jargon, but it's actually unbiblical. It's portrayed as what Jesus would do, but it's actually the opposite of what Jesus would do.

One of the common themes of the false gospel is often to minimize sin and maximize self, to downplay the need of transforming grace and uplift the autonomy and sufficiency of self. The particular form of false gospel seeking to infiltrate the church at Philippi was the teaching that circumcision was necessary for one to be made right with God. That sounded right to the human ear that is always susceptible. Circumcision was taught in the OT. God commanded it of Israel. It must be right. Furthermore, and even more enticing, it gives me a part to play in my salvation. I have to do something. It's not just Jesus and Jesus only – it's Jesus plus my work, my obedience. Paul goes to great lengths in ch3 to prove that Jesus + anything = a false gospel. If our assurance of salvation is grounded in anything other than Christ alone, our confidence is tragically misplaced! Salvation

is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Christ is my firm foundation.

I. False Confidence Equals False Faith

- a. V1 we learn Paul has already warned them about this dangerous teaching previously, but feels compelled to do so again. Maybe it was growing in popularity, maybe it had been whispered in the church, whatever the reason it warranted a fresh warning, it bared repeating.
- b. Paul has some choice descriptive words for those who promote and popularize this false gospel. He uses alarming language to sound an alarm. You can't accommodate or appease a false gospel. It will be to your ruin!
 - i. Dogs – to call someone a dog in this day was derogatory. Not like our day. To call someone a dog would be the cleanest bad word you could use. Ill. Cat. Matt 7:6 – Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs. In other words, there comes a point when trying to reach someone who wants nothing to do with God becomes vain. Paul is saying these people are not for God and certainly not for the gospel.
 - ii. Evildoers – he drives the point home here and makes it as clear as possible. It is an evil thing to distort the gospel. If you dilute the gospel with anything, what you have left is not the gospel. If you put salt in clean, fresh drinking water, you no longer have clean, fresh drinking water. To tweak God's gospel, God's means of salvation through His Son, is evil at its core.
 - iii. Those who mutilate the flesh. He's referring to circumcision here. You don't have to cut your flesh to be right with God. Christ's flesh was torn for you! BTW – you don't have to mutilate your flesh to be who God created you to be either!
- c. The circumcision of the Old Covenant was God's means to separate His people, to identify His people, from other nations, from those who worshipped other gods. That's not the New Covenant way. In the gospel, we are not one ethnic people distinct from all other nations, we are one people in all nations. It's not an external, fleshly act that separates us and makes us distinct. We are the true circumcision. We are now what the old circumcision foreshadowed.

- i. We worship by the Spirit of God. It's what's happened internally that makes us God worshippers. The Spirit of God has made us alive, and new, and children of God. That's why Jesus tells the woman at the well, "true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and truth."
 - ii. After that internal work of grace that brings us new birth, then the external comes, then the change comes, then the new life comes – we glory in Christ Jesus! We boast in Him. We rely on Him. We live for Him.
 - iii. We put no confidence in the flesh. True believers realize we don't have what it takes to be right with God. We can't do anything of our own doing to be right with God. Our flesh contributes nothing to our salvation except our need of it!
- d. Now in our day, we're not in danger of a false gospel based on circumcision. We practice circumcision for health reasons. But we do have our own brand of false gospels. We do have those cunning convincing ideas and teachings that distort the gospel message that Christ is utterly and completely sufficient.
 - i. Church attendance. Moral living. Legalistic outward conformity. Doing good deeds. Giving to good causes. If someone asks us how do we know we are right with God and we answer with anything other than who Jesus is and what He's done for us – that's a false gospel.
 - ii. BTW – the same way we come to God, is the same way we live for God – by grace. We also fall prey to this teaching that says once you come to Jesus, then it's up to you to live for Him. The same power that saves us is the same power that sanctifies us – the grace of God through Jesus Christ! Maybe the reason we can't see victory over our fears and over our sins is because we're fighting them in our flesh. Listen – we glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh!

II. Zero Confidence in Me

- a. In v4 Paul says if confidence in the flesh, in who I am and what I can do, is the answer, then I've got a better record than you. He lists 7 spiritual qualifications, that if we could do anything to be right with God, he would qualify.

- i. Circumcised (I did the OC thing) – check. Israelite (I am a biological child of Abraham) – check. Tribe of Benjamin (I can trace my genealogy all the way to original 12 tribes) – check. Hebrew all the way (I’m a Jew to the core) – check. The law (I was a top practitioner) – check. Zeal (I persecuted the church) – check. Righteous by the law (I was the most outstanding) – check.
 - ii. If anyone could be right with God by who he is and what he’s done, Paul would be closer to God than anyone. And yet with all his spiritual credentials, Paul was as far from God as one could get! How about you? What are your spiritual credentials?
 - b. That’s why he’s so passionate about dismantling false gospels – he knows from experience – the flesh can’t save you. You’ll never be good enough. You’ll never do enough good things. No matter who you are or what you do, you can’t erase your record of sin. It stands against you. It condemns you. Good, moral people go to hell. There is only one who is able to save.
- III. All Confidence in Christ
 - a. Whatever gain I had – Paul says, “I made a list. It was a good list. It was a long list. But even when I stacked all of my qualifications together, my list didn’t move me one inch closer to God.” The truth was that the longer his list grew, the further he moved from God.
 - b. And therein lies the cruel deception. The more right we think we are by what we do, the more wrong we become. So Paul says, I counted everything on my list as loss. I tore up my list. It profited me nothing. It made me stand tall around others, but it far from God.
 - c. I tore my list up and I clung to Christ – for the sake of Christ, I put no confidence in anything I had done and put all my confidence in what He had done on my behalf. And for Paul, and anyone else who does the same, it made all the difference in the world – and in him!

Conclusion – I ask you this morning – do you have a list or do you have Christ? Do you really plan to stand before God and present your spiritual qualifications? Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name. Lord, I was

a good man. I went to church. Or will you say – nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling?