

True Christians vs False Christians — Philippians 3:1-3

Introduction and Outline

- Scripture reading: Philippians 3:1–11; Galatians 5:1-6.
- The spiritual health of the Philippian church is threatened by three things: 1) Persecution from outside (1:28-30); 2) Disunity within the church (2:1-4, 4:2-3); 3) Confusion caused by false Christians (Chapter 3, especially the contrast in vv 2-3 and vv 18-21).
- This chapter’s rough structure: True Christians vs false Christians in vv 1-3; Paul’s own example of a true Christian’s heart in vv 4-17; True Christians vs false Christians again in vv 18-21. The whole chapter is talking about who are true Christians and who are false.
- Outline:
 - Topic: **True Christians vs False Christians**
 - 1. Rejoice in the Lord (v1)
 - 2. Recognize the False and the True (vv 2-3)
 - 2a. Characteristics of False Christians — Dogs, Evil Workers, False Circumcision (v2)
 - 2b. Characteristics of True Christians — Spiritual Worship, Glory in Christ, Total Repentance (v3)

Rejoice in the Lord (v1)

- “rejoice in the Lord”: Joy comes from a close relationship with Christ, not the outside environment. Rejoice not in what the Lord provides, not in the good things He gives, but rejoice in His person. It’s the joy that comes from abiding in Him and enjoying an intimate relationship with Him.

To know what’s true and what’s false, to live out the true Christian life, we must rejoice in the Lord always. Joy is the Christian’s defensive weapon against Satan’s attack. To stand firm, we must learn to rejoice in the Lord.

- “To write the same things again”: includes the command to rejoice in the Lord and warning about false teachers. The two are closely connected and are both key principles of Christian lives. Paul must have taught them many times when he was in Philippi.
- “and it is a safeguard for you.” Paul repeats the same teaching over and over because this is the safeguard for the Philippian church to stand firm.

Paul knew that Christians need repeated reminders. Paul did not say, you've heard all this, so let me tell you something new or some testimony stories. Many pulpits today are filled with all kinds of testimony stories, sprinkled with a few verses here and there.

Recognize the False and the True (vv 2-3)

Characteristics of False Christians—Dogs, Evil Workers, False Circumcision (v2)

- “beware of”×3: The three-fold “beware” shows Paul’s urgent heart, for many of these people are present in the church. Under God’s sovereignty, they enter the church and spread heresies seeking to confuse the believers.
- “the dogs, the evil workers, the false circumcision”: describing the same group of people known as the Judaizers who promote circumcision. They teach that circumcision is required for salvation. They distort God’s law by externalizing it, making it all about external rules. The most important one, they say, is to cut off that small piece of flesh from the male organ! They want to boast in their own work, so they do not accept salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Galatians 5:2 “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.”

The true circumcision ordained by God is a visible mark that reflects an internal spiritual reality. The key is the spiritual reality, which the Jews have long lost, retaining only the external appearance. They cut the flesh, but are not circumcised.

The spiritual reality reflected by true circumcision is faith, which demonstrates itself through obedience to God’s Law (cf. Romans 2:25-26). Circumcision vividly shows we can only obey God when the great obstacle in our heart is removed, that is, our sinful and selfish desire.

Deuteronomy 10:16 “So circumcise your heart.”

Deuteronomy 30:6 “Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.”

Colossians 2:11 “and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;”

- “the dogs”: Not small pet dogs, but dirty vicious wild dogs. They are scavenger animals roaming around, looking for stinky corpses for food. They are filthy and stinky and they carry all kinds of bacteria and they would bite people. Jesus says “Do not give what is holy to dogs” (Matthew 7:6).
- “the evil workers”: All their works are evil. This can be said of all unbelievers. “There is none who does good, there is not even one.” (Romans 3:12) An unregenerated person can do two

kinds of things: bad-bad, and good-bad (looking good on the outside), for everything is from bad motives — All motives which do not have glorifying God as the ultimate goal are bad motives. Only Christians can do good-good from good motives seeking to glorify God.

- “the false circumcision”: The Greek uses a word-play that changes the prefix of “circumcision” so it becomes a secular word, a word that’s used for cutting meat in cooking. So it can be translated as “meat cutting.” Beware of the meat cutters. True circumcision cuts the heart, they cut the meat. They’re fake. In a broader sense, all false Christians are meat cutters, for they profess to believe Jesus with their mouth, but they do not have the life of Christ in them. What they believe is not the Person of Jesus, but the work of their profession, which is the substitute of circumcision. They want to earn salvation with this work.

Characteristics of True Christians—Spiritual Worship, Glory in Christ, Total Repentance (v3)

- “worship in the Spirit of God”: True worship is spiritual worship. It’s not about going into a certain building, singing songs of a certain style, or saying certain spiritual jargons or doing certain good deeds. People always like to equate these outward behaviors with worship.

Isaiah 29:13: Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me.”

Only Christians have the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) and can worship in the Spirit of God. How do you know if you have the Holy Spirit?

Romans 8:13-14 “for if you are living in accord with the flesh, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons *and daughters* of God.”

The Greek word for “worship” here is often translated as “serve”, emphasizing the acts of worship. It is not just serving in the church, but as Romans 12 :1 says, “present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice ... *which is* your spiritual service of worship.” Serve with your body and mind and your whole life.

“glory in Christ Jesus”: “Glory” means “to boast” in the original Greek. What you glory in is what you’re proud of and find your greatest joy in. A fake Christian can praise the Lord with his mouth, but the boasting of his heart is all about his own achievements.

Galatians 6:14: “but may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 1:31: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

True Christians boast in Christ Jesus. You know there is nothing you can boast except in the Lord. Knowing Christ is the only thing that brings true joy to your soul. You long to know Christ from the Bible, to live out Christ by the Holy Spirit, and to be in the body of Christ (the

church) to know more of Christ. That's where your joy is. This is what it means to glory in Christ Jesus.

- “put no confidence in the flesh”: The previous two points focus on the internal nature, and this one relates to outward appearance. What does outward appearance have to do with a true Christian? ——that he puts no confidence in it. “Flesh” refers to all outward appearances by which you may appear godly in front of others. True Christians do not build their faith on any outward appearance.

In other words, this is total repentance. Repentance is not just to quit drinking and gambling and other external sins, but to realize that your entire flesh is totally corrupt, without any merit to please God. Those who quit drinking and gambling may have their faith built on the fact that they no longer drink or gamble. In other words, they are still boasting in their flesh! This kind of repentance is false and superficial. True repentance is total repentance which realizes the entire flesh is corrupt with no ability to do anything good by the flesh to please God.

Beware of some common fleshly confidence in today's world: 1) The emotional experience of accepting Jesus; 2) having a good moral life; 3) rich biblical knowledge; 4) active church participation. These external things are not bad in themselves, but are they where you put your confidence in for salvation? The true Christians' only confidence is in Christ dwelling in them.