

What Is A Christian? (1)

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[0 : 0 0] The following sermon is made available by Lakeside Bible Church in Cornelius, North Carolina.

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Verse number one, finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me it is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

Beware of dogs. I appreciate those warnings. Dogs, that's helpful if you've ever been out canvassing in a neighborhood and you come across a house that has a beware of dog sign. I appreciate their warning that they give.

[1 : 0 4] Paul here says, beware of dogs. He's not talking about the dogs when you're out canvassing a neighborhood. He's talking about a different kind of dog. Beware of evil workers. Beware of the concision.

For we are the true circumcision, which worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. Well, if there was ever a proof that Paul was indeed a Christian preacher, it's found as he uses the word finally here when he's only halfway through his sermon to the Philippian church.

In fact, it reminds me of the boy that was in church and the preacher was typically very long and he had gotten to a point in his sermon where he had used this word finally.

And so the little boy looks at his father and he whispers and he says, what does the preacher mean when he says finally? To which his father quickly replies, absolutely nothing, son. Absolutely nothing.

It doesn't mean anything. And of course, those of us like me that struggle with brevity can perhaps claim apostolic authority when we come to this part in our study. And we say, well, Paul said finally, had two chapters left in the letter.

[2 : 1 1] I can say finally and carry on for another 20 or 25 minutes. And at least Paul did it. Surely we can set that precedent as well. Well, the truth is that finally here is not used as a signal of conclusion, but it's actually a means of making a transition.

From what I've read about this actually specific word is that it was the typical usage of it in Greek as a form of transition and not actually as a form of conclusion.

A proper equivalent for us in our English language would be moreover or maybe so then so that when we come to this part of Philippians 3, we could really read it as, moreover, brethren, rejoice in the Lord, or so then, brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

Now, the reason I make the note of its use here is because it helps us to understand this division of Paul's letter. In the 22 verses between the first verse of chapter 3 and the first verse of chapter 4, the apostle provides a general discussion for us on what it means to be a true Christian.

Now, chapter 3 is not dependent on any other portions of the letter of Philippians. That's why we highlight this word finally as a transitioning point. Nothing about what we'll study in the next few weeks in chapter 3, there will be no point that we have to refer back to chapters 1 and chapter 2 in order to understand what Paul is saying here.

[3 : 38] There's also no point of chapter 3 that we have to look ahead to the end of the letter to better understand where he's going. This section of the letter really stands on its own. Now, if you're an unbeliever or you haven't come to faith in Christ yet, or maybe you're new to Christianity in the Bible, the first thing I want you to know is that I'm glad you're here.

You are welcome here. For as long as you want to be here, we want you here. But you'll probably find that these verses, as I read through them a moment ago, are somewhat enigmatic.

And the reason for that is because the most basic tenets of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, are assumed in this text, not explicitly stated.

Now, this is made clear for us in verse number 1, when Paul uses the word or the phrase, my brethren. Would you look at that with me again? He says, finally, that's his transition into this section.

And then he refers to his audience as my brethren. Now, we know this to be a common identification among Christians when we refer to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, as being true children of God.

[4 : 50] Now, we know that as we study the Bible, this was also a common reference that Jews would have for one another, for those that belong nationally to the nation of Israel.

There's no reason for us to think that that was Paul's intention here because he's writing to a group of believers in Philippi, which was a pagan city. It was a Roman colony.

And while there were Jewish converts present in the congregation here, it was mostly made up of Gentiles, Gentiles that had come to know Christ.

So when Paul references my brethren, he's referring to people that already know the basic tenets of the gospel. It would be unnecessary for him to talk about salvation in the same way to these believers that he would talking of salvation if his audience was primarily made up of unbelievers.

So there may be a bit of confusion as an unbeliever as you come to these verses, but the gospel is certainly present. And if you'll stick with us as we go through this study over the next four or five Sundays, I think you'll come to understand it clearly in this chapter.

[5 : 57] Now, the occasion for Paul's writing here is on the basis of his anticipation that the church would soon face an onslaught of false teaching.

Running alongside the teaching of salvation in the chapter is this secondary thread of a false gospel and of a false Christian.

And it's for this reason that these verses are bookended with the phrase, in the Lord. In verse number one of chapter three, Paul says, rejoice in the Lord.

Now, he's commanded many times in this book already that these Philippian believers take joy in something or rejoice. This is the only time that he uses it in this phrase where he says, rejoice in the Lord.

And then when you get to the first verse of chapter four, when he brings conclusion, look at it there. He says, now therefore, brethren, stand fast in the Lord. Stand firm in the Lord.

[7 : 03] So at the very beginning, he says, rejoice not in your own goodness as the false teachers would do, but rejoice rather in the power of Christ in your life to provide the righteousness necessary through his work in order to be saved.

And then at the conclusion of all of this, he says, now remember, stand fast in the Lord. Rejoice in him, but then stand fast in this truth of the true gospel.

It was a faithful reminder that the believer's confidence is found solely in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, plus or minus nothing else.

And you'll see that become a reality as we continue to study. Now, while this passage can be enigmatic for some people, if you are a seasoned believer, you may find it to be somewhat redundant and unnecessary.

So Paul, anticipating that response on the part of the Philippians, tells us in verse one that it is not grievous for him to write the same things to them, but it is rather a safeguard for them.

[8 : 17] It's Paul's way of saying, rehearsing the basics of the faith, practicing the fundamentals of the faith, is necessary and profitable.

Though you've heard the gospel preached a million times in your life, it is profitable and helpful to hear it preached again. And Paul says, so for me to write these things to you again, I know I've preached it to you a hundred times, and I know I've written it to you maybe on other occasions, and I know I've sent Timothy, and I've sent Epaphroditus with the same message, but it's not a problem for me to say it again, because for you, it's a safeguard.

There's a tremendous safety in coming back to the fundamentals of the gospel time and time again, because the gospel is the foundation of everything in the Christian life.

When we begin to lose sight of the basics, we will inevitably find ourselves in danger of falling away from the faith and actually following a lie.

And so Paul says, I'm gonna write the same things to you again, and it's not a problem for me, and it is not anything but a safeguard for you. Now, anyone that has spent much time playing organized sports understands the concept of rehearsing the fundamentals.

[9 : 39] It's not only those that are just learning the game that are in need of mastering the basics of the sport, but even the most seasoned athletes must continue in the fundamentals if they are to succeed.

Now, if athletics is not your favorite illustration to use, perhaps you'll remember and recall the days of learning the elementary principles of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Maybe all of those hours spent reciting multiplication tables and diagramming sentences are instrumental in one's ability to function in the more complex systems of life as an adult.

In fact, even as adults, we find ourselves often referencing back to some of those elementary things of education that we learned in kindergarten and first grade and second grade and third grade in order for us to succeed in various ways now.

It's important. So that's a warning for those of you in elementary school. Pay attention to your teacher. It will pay off for you in the long run. You say, what's really the best way to spot a counterfeit?

[10 : 51] Paul's dealing with counterfeits here in this chapter. He's dealing with a false Christian. And he says, the best way to identify a false Christian is to be overwhelmingly familiar with the truth.

If you only have a surface knowledge of the gospel, it won't be much for you to be deceived by a false gospel. But the more you come back to the fundamentals of the faith, the more you come back to the basics of the gospel, the more familiar you are with the foundation of the Christian life, the more easy it will be for you to point out deception and to see it when it's coming.

And so Paul felt that it was necessary to call the church back to this again. Now he opens by directly confronting the threatening false gospel in verse two.

And then in verse three, he states what are the clear marks of a true Christian. We'll only get to the first one today. We'll come back and we'll finish it in verse three next Sunday.

But let's look at least at verse number two, where we see a warning against false teaching, a warning against false teaching. Look with me again at verse two. Paul says, beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

[12 : 17] To tell us what a true Christian is. Paul starts by telling us what a true Christian is not. And he does this by exposing a group of people that took on the label of Christianity, but were actually teaching a false gospel.

And his command for the church was to beware. It means to watch out for or to look out. It was a warning for the church to take initiative in watching closely for those that would deceive them with a false gospel.

And it's not unlike Peter's command to us in first Peter five, eight, a verse we're mostly familiar with. Remember what Peter said? He said, be sober, sober, which means serious minded, grave, take serious the command that I'm about to give you.

And he says, be sober, be vigilant or watchful. So continuously watching, taking serious the threat that's against you. And then Peter says, here's the threat. Our enemy, Satan, walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Now the problem with false teaching, the reason it's so dangerous is because it always has the appearance of being something that's good and helpful. I remember a few years ago around Halloween, parents being encouraged to carefully inspect the candy and the items that their children would get in their bags at trick or treating.

[13 : 50] But I'm sure it's a matter of second nature now, but I remember when there was a time you wouldn't think much about that and parents were being warned to do this. The reason they were being warned is because there were people that were taking apples and oranges, they were dropping it in these kids' bags, but before they did it, they were inserting razor blades.

And so that a kid would pull out an apple out of his bag and he would see this nice healthy thing, this good thing, and at least compared to everything that was around it in the bag. And he takes a bite out of it only to have his mouth cut to pieces.

And some people thought this was fun. And on the outside, it looked like it was good. It looked like it was right. And it looked like it was healthy. But upon indulging in it, it come to find out it was actually deadly.

It was destructive. And that's exactly what false teaching is. It looks good. It may even sound reasonable on the outside. But when you indulge, you find out that it's actually very dangerous and destructive and even spiritually deadly.

Sometimes false teaching even takes on the very label of being Christian. But it's actually just a cheap invitation. Julie and I, one of our favorite places to go is New York City.

[15 : 06] We enjoy it. We have friends there. And for years and years and years, we've gone to New York and enjoyed our time there. Julie's favorite place in all of New York City is not Times Square.

And it's not the Statue of Liberty. And it's not the Freedom Tower. And it's not all of that. Her favorite place is Chinatown. That's what she loves. Not only, anybody been to Chinatown in New York City?

Not only is the food fantastic, but there's all of these little shops where you can go in and you can negotiate with the shop owners and you can try to get a really good deal on an imitation purse.

So if you really want a coach purse, but you don't want to drop 300 bucks on it, you can get one for 30 bucks that looks just like the real one. And you can kind of negotiate with them. And so Julie loves it. She loves doing that.

So she loves going to Chinatown and try to find these deals. And I remember one time when we were in college, I had, in being naive, I had gone to this shop and they had had a bottle of cologne that I liked.

[16 : 06] Aqua De Joe by Giorgio Armani was my scent of the day. And they had this bottle and it was like super cheap. It may have cost like 60 or 70 bucks at Belk's, but in Chinatown, it was like \$15.

And I'm like, this is crazy. So I bought the cologne. It had the exact packaging of what I would get at Macy's. Same exact, same box, same label, same barcodes.

It was wrapped the same way. You pull the bottle out. It was the exact same bottle that looked like all the other bottles that would have been on my shelf in my college dorm room. But when I went to spray it, it was actually window cleaner.

And I was embarrassed by that. I can't believe I fell for it, right? It's one thing to get a cheap imitation purse when you know it's a cheap imitation. It's another thing to buy a bottle of cologne and you think it's the real thing because it looks like the real thing.

And it even says that it's the real thing. But when you get into it, it's actually just a cheap imitation. And that's exactly what false teaching is. There are many, many, many false gospels that say they are Christian.

[17 : 14] But when you dig in, it's actually just a cheap imitation. Some of them will even go so far as to not just say that they're Christian, but they are a conservative, evangelical, gospel-preaching Christian.

And they will take on this label, but really when you dig in, it's a false gospel. It's a cheap imitation. And it's deadly and it's dangerous. And Paul says of these false teachers, of these false gospels, beware.

The Bible consistently warns us about false teaching. I don't think there's a single letter in the New Testament that doesn't address it in some way. Paul warns the elders in Ephesus in Acts chapter 20 to be watchful and to even expect these dangerous liars.

Here's what he said to them upon his departure. He said, I know this, that after I depart, grievous wolves are gonna enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

And then he says, even from among yourselves, even from among you as elders of the church of Ephesus, men will rise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.

[18 : 28] And then he says, therefore, watch and remember that by the space of three years, I cease not to warn you day and night. And I did it passionately with tears.

It was a strong warning. And it wasn't a warning of potential. It was a warning of expectation. This will happen, church. This will happen to you, church.

This is not a matter of potential in Lakeside Bible Church. This is a matter of expectation in Lakeside Bible Church. So beware and be on the lookout.

Watch out for the deception. Jesus compared false teachers to ravaging wolves as well. In Matthew chapter seven and verse 15, he says, beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing.

But inwardly, they are ravaging wolves. And then using a parable in Matthew chapter 13, Jesus thought that every time God does a true work, Satan then produces a counterfeit to deceive us.

[19 : 42] You say, well, I hear all these warnings and everybody's saying that you never know and it could be a deceptive labeling like the cologne in Chinatown and it could be something that looks good like the apple or the orange in the trick-or-treat bag.

So how in the world am I supposed to know what's true and what's real and what's not true and what's not real? And the answer to that question is you don't take my word for it.

And you don't take your friend's word for it no matter how reasonable it may sound, no matter how attractive the purporting of their gospel seems.

You don't take their word for it. You wanna know what's true and what's false? Go to the Bible yourself. Study the Bible. The Bible is absolute truth.

You don't need me to tell you what truth is. You can go to it yourself and read it chapter by chapter and verse by verse and what you'll find is everything that you need to know about truth and error is there.

[20 : 43] So when you come to church on Sunday, I hope that you'll trust me. But don't just take my word for it. Get in the word yourself. The Bible tells us that as we study the Bible and as we study the word, we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as believers that does this work of enlightenment.

It helps us to understand. And as we study the Bible, we only come to understand it better and better. And so Paul says, I'm rehearsing all of this to you because in order for you to see the truth and acknowledge the error, you're gonna have to be familiar with the truth.

But don't take my word for it. Read the scripture yourself. There are many forms of false teaching that Paul dealt with. But here he's speaking about a specific group of deceivers known as Judaizers.

These people plagued the early church in fact, most of what Paul deals with in his letter to the Galatian churches had to do with these Judaizers and their false gospel.

No sooner than Paul would leave town, the Judaizers would begin to infiltrate the church. They claimed to be Christians and they even believed that Jesus was truly God.

[21 : 56] They believed that he did die and rose again. But they insisted that true salvation only came to the believers that would submit themselves to the ceremonial rituals of the Old Testament.

You can see where their gospel would be attractive. They'd come into town and they'd say, yes, Jesus is God. We believe him. Yes, he died for sins.

We believe that. Yes, he rose from the dead. We believe that. But he is not enough. You must also obey the law. You must also follow circumcision and the dietary restrictions and all the other ceremonial riches of the Old Testament.

They had a particular fixation on the Jewish practice of circumcision, which is why Paul uses the language here that he uses. It's also how we come to find out exactly who he's talking about here in this chapter.

It's not that they taught that Jesus was bad. The problem is that they taught that Jesus was not enough. And any gospel that claims to know Jesus and believe Jesus, but doesn't quite believe that Jesus on his own is enough is a false gospel.

[23 : 26] Those are not true Christians. They are false Christians. They are planted there by Satan to be a deception to you and a deception to the church and to say perverse things, as Paul said, to lead true disciples away from the faith.

To them, Jesus was only a piece of the puzzle that was made complete by their system of religious works and morality. And it's of this group that Paul emphatically warns the Philippian church to beware.

The truth is there's only two real forms of religion that exist. There's the religion of God's grace and the religion of man's works. Beware of any religion that will tell you that faith in Jesus Christ alone is not enough.

Church, beware of any religion or any so-called Christian that will tell you Jesus is not enough. In order to truly be saved, you must also be baptized. That's a lie.

That's a false gospel. Beware of any so-called Christian that will come through and say that Jesus is great, we worship Jesus, but you must also say a series of rote prayers or pray through the rosary or pray to a certain amount of saints or light a certain amount of candles or give a certain amount of money.

[24 : 55] That's not a true gospel. It's a cheap imitation and it will only lead you to destruction. It will not lead you to the glorious future that awaits true believers.

Beware of the deceivers that will insist that true salvation only comes to those who have some kind of supernatural experience that reveals itself in a charismatic way through speaking in tongues or being slain in the spirit.

That is not true. It's a false gospel. That's not in the scriptures. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Nothing else. So beware the people that will try to say, yeah, I believe Jesus. Yeah, I trust Jesus. Yeah, I believe he rose from the dead. Yeah, I'm a Christian, but I just think that there is a little more to it.

Beware. That's not a true Christian. That's a false Christian. Don't buy the lie. Evangelize that person. Don't capitulate to their error.

[25 : 58] Beware. Beware. Of anyone that will tell you that salvation only comes after you clean your life up too.

And that if you dress a certain way, and that if you listen only to the best music, and that if you only do all of these things, beware, beware.

Salvation is not of works. The danger of that kind of false teaching is that it mingles its lies with a portion of the truth.

And if it's not a whole truth, it's not truth at all. The truth of the gospel is that salvation is found in Christ alone.

You cannot have Christ plus something else. True salvation is not about Christ plus baptism or Christ plus anything else. True salvation is in Christ.

[27 : 00] And to add anything else to it is to pervert that gospel, and it is not true saving faith. The Bible is clear. True saving faith is only in Christ.

And when you add something else to it, you purport a false gospel that says Christ is not enough. And therefore, what you have is an intellectual knowledge of Christ, but you have not experienced the true experiential knowledge of Christ that only comes by faith in him alone.

It's for this reason that the great reformers of the Protestant Reformation gave us the five solas of the Reformation. Do you know what they are? I've got them on the screen for you. I want you to see them.

This would be so helpful for you to memorize and rehearse to yourself, to display in your office, or something along with other passages of Scripture. Here's what their five solas were. The first one was sola gratia, which is grace alone.

The second one was sola fide, which is faith alone. The third was solus Christus, which is Christ alone. The fourth was sola scriptura, which is Scripture alone.

[28 : 06] And the last one was sola deo gloria, to the glory of God alone. In other words, we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone.

That's the truth. And in a period of time when there was tremendous error that had pervaded the Christian realm in the 1600s, the great reformers who ultimately lost their lives, many of them, in order to recover the truth among the church, purported this, and it's helpful for us.

Grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, the Bible alone, to the glory of God alone. Well, what did Paul actually have to say about these Judaizers?

Verse two, he gives three specific warnings, each with a very direct and confrontational dynamic. There are portions of Scripture where Paul seems to be a very meek individual, and there's no doubt that he was.

But Paul did not mince words when it came to false teachers. He didn't back down. The reason is because their lies were leading people to hell.

[29 : 21] And any false gospel that leads people to hell is not worth our tolerance and cordiality. It is worth our bold stand against it.

And we must preach against him. And that's what Paul does here. Three quick warnings that he gives. The first one is he says, beware of dogs. Beware of the dogs.

Now, this wasn't a reference to a household pet. By the way, if you would like a household pet, I'd love to give you one. Dogs weren't domesticated pets for the most part in the time of the Bible writings.

They were actually vicious scavengers that roamed in packs. They carried disease. And a bite from one could actually result in serious illness, even death in those days because they certainly didn't have the medical treatment that we have now.

They were dangerous. And it was to these dangerous predatory animals that Paul likened the false teachers of the Judaizers. They were just as dangerous and vicious.

[30 : 29] They were full of spiritual disease. And a bite from their theology was damning. And so he says, beware of the dogs. This was also a favorite insult of the Judaizers toward the Gentiles.

Because dogs were unclean animals, the Jews regularly referred to non-Jews as unclean dogs. Now, to be unclean in the Old Testament was significant.

It meant that an individual could not belong to the covenant community of Israel. And it also meant that in uncleanness, an individual could not participate in the ceremonial practices of worship.

If an individual was out in the field and he touched the dead carcass of an animal, he would have to go through a series of ritual baths before he could actually go to the temple for or tabernacle for worship.

God took cleanness seriously. Not because cleanness earned salvation, but because it represented his own holiness. It was a sign to God's people that to truly be mine, you desperately need cleansing because you are filthy with sin.

[31 : 39] And what they anticipated in their faith is that God would ultimately fulfill these ceremonial laws in a person that ultimately would cleanse us from sin.

That came in Jesus Christ. But the Jews took the sign to be the very means of salvation. So they took cleanness as a very serious thing.

The Jews had come to give the Gentiles the insult of dog permanently. So you can imagine the Judaizers' reaction when Paul actually refers to them as the dogs.

He says, beware the dogs. Beware of the unclean ones, church. The second warning he gives is that we are to beware of evil workers. Beware of evil workers.

The Judaizers believed themselves to be workers of righteousness. They took pride in their efforts to uphold the letter of the law.

[32 : 38] In fact, their system of good works is what they believed would actually provide them acceptance with God. Paul called them evil workers instead.

Now imagine how they would have accepted that upon hearing this letter read. Imagine your friends that you know that you work with that actually believe they're going to make it to heaven because of all of the religious things that they do and all of the good things that they do and all the money that they give away and all of the time volunteering that they give and they've been through the baptism and they've been through the Eucharist and they've been through the prayers and they've been through all the things that they're supposed to do.

They can check off their list. Imagine when they consider their works of righteousness to find them acceptance with God. their good works and you say you're actually an evil worker. I can imagine they take too kindly to that statement.

That's exactly what Paul's saying. They think they're good workers. They're actually evil workers. Any good that takes away from the person and work of Jesus Christ is in actuality evil.

That's exactly what their teaching did. It said that Christ was insufficient for salvation and it ultimately rendered his death and resurrection as purposeless and that is evil.

[33 : 59] Though their works were good they were actually evil workers. Now John MacArthur helps us here with our understanding or at least he helped me in describing it this way.

He talks about bad bad and bad good. Now we all know what bad bad is that's when wicked people do wicked things for wicked reasons.

They do bad things and they do it for bad reasons. It's bad bad. But did you know that there's a bad good? Bad good is when unbelievers do good things for bad reasons.

True goodness only comes from the inner working of God's power in the heart of a person. You cannot build up true goodness on your own. That comes through God's work in you after salvation.

That's the sanctifying process of God's grace. But good that is done out of pride or for some kind of recognition or especially to try and earn salvation is not actually good.

[35 : 12] It's bad. bad. And that's exactly what works-based religion is. It's bad good. As long as your good works are trying to earn salvation, they are leading you to deny the sufficiency of Christ and are therefore evil.

Jesus described these people in Matthew chapter seven. In fact, would you turn there with me? I'd like for you to see it. You're probably familiar with the statement, but I want you to see it in Matthew chapter seven.

Jesus is dealing with false teachers. His dealing with false teachers was the religious establishment of the day, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the teachers of the law.

And here's what he says in verses 21 to 23. Jesus says, not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven or shall be saved, but he that doeth the will of my father, which is in heaven.

Well, what's the will of the father, which is in heaven? Jesus clearly said the will of the father is that you would accept the son and in accepting the son, you accept the father and the father accepts you.

[36 : 31] There's nothing else to that. That's the will of the father. But here's what he said happens in verse 22. Many will say to me in that day, that is the day of judgment when we all stand before Christ.

Many will say, 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 I will profess unto them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, ye that work what? Iniquity, evil, sin, lawlessness. Jesus said that in the day of judgment, many, he says, many people will stand before me and they will acknowledge me as Lord in title.

And they will say, Lord, Lord, do you not remember that we prophesied, we preached in your name, Lord. We cast out devils in your name, Lord.

[37 : 38] We did many wonderful works in your name, Lord. And he will turn to them and he will say, depart from me, I never knew you, you are an evil worker.

You thought all of that was good works, but it was actually evil because your prophesying and your demonstrations of power and your demonstrations of good works were based on your own righteousness as you tried to achieve salvation on your own.

And he says, you're an evil worker. They will even claim that their works were done in Jesus' name. They will say they are Christian.

They will say they believe Jesus, but in actuality, their work is evil. Finally, he says, beware of the concision. Beware of the concision.

That's a real finally, not a transitional finally. This term would have really upset the Judaizers. It's a form of the word that actually means mutilation or the word of a form of circumcision that actually means mutilation.

[38 : 47] In fact, it's not uncommon to find these verses translated in English as mutilators of the flesh or the false circumcision. circumcision. Again, the Judaizers had a particular fixation on circumcision.

And the reason is because it was the physical sign in the Old Testament of someone belonging to God's covenant people, God's chosen people. Now, God never said that circumcision was necessary for salvation.

In fact, Paul argues in the book of Romans against the Jews when he says that God said that Abraham was justified because of his faith before he was ever physically circumcised.

It was meant to be a sign. It was a sign of the cutting away of sin out of the heart of an individual and it looked forward again to Christ. It was never meant to be an action that brought about salvation.

Rather, it was a sign that pointed to those that had actually experienced the circumcision of the heart as the Bible calls it. The transformation of the heart symbolized in a outward sign.

[39 : 57] The Jews had long left the symbolic significance of the sign and taught that it was necessary for salvation. So the Judaizers were telling the Gentiles that had come to faith in Christ that Jesus is great, he's not enough though, in order to truly be saved and be a part of God's chosen covenant people, you must also go through the physical rite of circumcision.

And so when Paul references this in verse 2, he means to say that the sign is worthless without the transformation of the heart that comes by faith.

And so he references the circumcision of the Judaizers as actually mutilation of the flesh. Mutilation. He said without the actual working of Christ, that doesn't actually mean anything, you're just mutilating your own flesh.

The Judaizers believed that their adherence to the letter of the law made them righteous before God, but each of Paul's descriptions put them in the unclean category of the Old Testament.

And it meant that it was actually impossible for them to be a part of God's chosen covenant people, despite their relationship as natural Israelites.

[41 : 19] That's not what mattered. they were actually unclean. The dog was an Old Testament term for being unclean. Evil workers were considered unclean because of their sinfulness.

And men that had specifically mutilated their bodies like the prophets of Baal or the eunuchs of the day in pagan worship were considered unclean.

And the Old Testament law said anyone that would treat their body in that way was excluded from God's covenant people. So when Paul says this, what he means is that these people were actually unclean no matter what they said or taught about Jesus.

The Judaizers thought that their religion and morality made them God's people, but in reality it made them unclean and excluded from God's covenant.

They looked like Christians. They talked a lot like Christians. In a lot of ways they probably behaved better than the pagan Christians of Philippi, especially the pagan Christians of Corinth.

[42 : 35] But they were in fact unclean. And those people that they hated so much, the Bible tells us, were clean. Of all the troubles that the church in Corinth had, they were believers.

They were saved people. And Paul acknowledges that a number of times in his letters. And he rejoices in their salvation. But they were as messed up sinfully as you will ever see in a church.

And yet the pious Judaizers that kept the law to a tea were actually in reality unsaved people. Which tells us that you can be the most religious person on the planet and follow a moral code to near perfection.

But if that's what you're counting on for salvation, you are in reality unclean. The truth is that Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of those Old Testament laws and symbols.

Paul wasn't being disrespectful to the Mosaic law. He was preaching the truth that Jesus Christ has provided for us what the law could not provide. It's impossible for any of us to follow the law perfectly and bring glory to God.

[43 : 58] Jesus fulfilled that law with perfection and then suffered the wrath of the Father on the cross in our place. He did what we could not do in fulfilling the law and then he suffered our death so that his righteousness through the law could be imputed by our faith.

And we know that his sacrifice was sufficient because three days later he rose from the dead. The wonderful truth of the gospel is that you don't have to fulfill all the rules and follow all the codes.

Christ did that for you. That's the good news. You don't have to work yourself to heaven. It's not even possible for you to do it anyways. Jesus did it for you and not only did he fulfill that law perfectly for you but then he fulfilled the prophecy perfectly for you.

Then he took your place. He said I know you can't do this. You can't satisfy God's wrath but I can and so I'm going to take your place.

We call it propitiation in the Bible. He took our place. He endured God's wrath so that we could be his. That's the gospel.

[45 : 18] Anything that adds to that or takes away from it is not true. It is a lie. Beware. Christ has done this for you. You say well where does the morality and the rules and the righteousness and the holiness come into play?

It doesn't come into play for your salvation. It comes into play as a result of your salvation. You don't work your way to heaven. You work because you're on your way to heaven.

And that's what this chapter is all about. He's exposing the false gospel that existed and that exists still today. And he's not saying that you don't need to live a holy life.

He's not saying like the liberals would have said in that day and that would say in this day that God's grace is enough for you to have a license to do whatever you want. That's not what Paul is saying. He's saying you can't be good enough for salvation.

Jesus did that for you and once you know him you'll do whatever he wants you to do in order to live for him. Not because you owe him but because he is fit for you to live a life that is worthy of the calling to which he has called you.

[46 : 25] Look with me. The middle of chapter three and we'll be done. Paul says in verse 12 I follow after if that I may apprehend or if I may achieve that for which I was apprehended of Christ Jesus.

In other words I know Christ and Christ did all of this for me and one of the reasons that he did all of this for me is so that I can know him and so that he could set me aside as holy and he could start to fashion me into Christ likeness and make me righteous and holy because of my salvation.

Now he says my goal and my desire is to live the way that God saved me to live. And it's not because my living earns the salvation.

It's just the fact that God has given this salvation freely to me and I want to live the way that he saved me to live. What a glorious truth, the gospel. What a burden-free gospel that God gives us.

I was encouraged this week in a moment of prayer to acknowledge that Christ's forgiveness is so wonderfully great and extensive.

[47 : 59] The forgiveness that we receive from Christ is not just a forgiveness for the things that we have done in the past. It's a forgiveness for the things that we falter in now.

As a pastor, someone that has served in church ministry now for 13 total years, days of doubt that I battle, days of severe doubt, days that make me ashamed, not only as a pastor but as a Christian.

I was overwhelmed this week in a moment of prayer to consider that God's grace is so much greater than that doubt. what a freeing gospel that is.

Not only that he has forgiven what I have done but he's forgiven what I'm going to do. Sometimes we get this idea even after salvation that God is just waiting, he's on the edge of our seat waiting for us to doubt him in some way or waiting for us to slip up in some way and then bam, he's gonna nail us with something.

It's not God at all. That is not grace. God's grace is he has saved you. He has imputed the righteousness of Christ in your life and yes you will struggle and yes the battle in spiritual warfare is fierce but even in that battle and even in those moments of weakness and even in those moments of doubt as we'll sing in just a moment, he will hold you fast.

[49 : 40] How wonderfully glorious that is. Can I tell you what won't hold you fast? Your baptism. What won't hold you fast is your choice of translation.

What won't hold you fast is the way that you dress and the moral code that you follow. None of those things are gonna hold you fast. What will hold you fast is Christ.

Christ will hold you fast. Let's pray together. Thank you for listening to this sermon made available by Lakeside Bible Church. Feel free to share it wherever you'd like. Please do not charge for it or alter it in any way without express written consent from Lakeside Bible Church.

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We meet every Sunday morning at 10 a.m. in the gym at Cornelius Elementary School. We'd love to meet you. NINGNINGNING