

# Gospel Partners Guard Their Joy

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Date: 22 May 2016

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So one of the most well-loved elements of Christmas cheer in our culture, it's the Dr. Seuss book, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Right?

So we've got this guy up here, we've got this nasty monster who's living in a cave just north of Whoville, and his heart is two sizes too small. So if you've either read the Dr. Seuss book or you've seen the TV special, what you know is that the Grinch decides that he's going to plunder the homes of all the Whos so that they can't enjoy Christmas.

The Grinch is out to steal all of their joy. Now, maybe you know a few Grinches. Maybe you know a few people who are staring down from their caves with a sour, Grinchy frown, right?

They've got this dour, despairing attitude, and so this week I decided I'd go and ask a couple of acquaintances of mine, you know, what makes someone a Grinch? What makes someone a Grinch? And so these folks here in Squamish, one person said that a Grinch is someone who is unhappy because they're stuck doing something in their life that doesn't fulfill them.

And then another person I asked, they said more or less the same thing and said that when you encounter a Grinch, you're encountering someone who's probably unhappy with something else in their life.

[ 1 : 1 7 ]     Their unhappiness then spills over into your relationship or your interactions with them. And so this person, she explained that in her experience, one of the main reasons the other person is unhappy is because they're English.

So she spoke from experience. A Grinch can really suck the life out of any relationship they're in. They can drain every conversation of happiness.

And so, you know, if these things I see people posting to Facebook are any indication, most people are already on high alert against that sort of Grinch. They're already looking to get that negativity out of their life.

But what we're going to talk about today is that there is a more subtle form of the Grinch out there. There's a more subtle danger. And that's the danger of stealthy Grinches.

The Grinches who are dressing up like Santa Claus. There's a danger of stealthy Grinches. And so you and I, what we're often busy is we're often busy sitting on our roofs with a shotgun, sitting on our roofs overlooking Whoville.

[ 2 : 2 3 ]     And we've got a shotgun in our hands. We're watching for these twisted creatures whose heads aren't screwed on right and whose shoes are too tight. But we won't let them, we're not going to let them rob our house of its joy.

We're not going to let them into our lives. We're not going to let them into our families. We're not going to let them into our churches. But we're so busy looking for those obvious Grinches that we let in the back door certain people.

Certain stealthy Grinches. In fact, they're so stealthy that a lot of times these people don't even know they are Grinches. These stealthy Grinches will introduce a mindset that will painlessly corrode our joy.

You won't even notice it's gone until it vanishes. And these individuals can tear apart a church from the inside. They can separate Christians from one another.

They can undermine their partnership in advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ. So who are these stealthy Grinches? How do we identify them?

[ 3 : 27 ] Well, these Grinches aren't a modern phenomenon. Grinches like this have always been infiltrating God's people. They've always been growing up among them like weeds in the middle of a wheat field.

And back in the first century, the Apostle Paul talked about them. We saw him talk about them in the book of Galatians. And he was concerned as well with another church that he planted in the city of Philippi.

And he was concerned about this church that it might be invaded by these wolves in sheep's clothing, by these stealthy Grinches. So in his letter, he warns them in the strongest possible terms not to be influenced by the stealthy Grinches.

So what we're going to do next, we're going to read what the Holy Spirit of God has to say through the pen of his Apostle. Our scripture is found in the New Testament of the Bible.

It's in Philippians chapter 3, verses 1 through 7. Now, if you've been handed a Bible by one of our ushers, you can find Philippians 3, verses 1 through 7 on page 981.

[ 4 : 28 ] So Philippians chapter 3, verses 1 through 7. Here's what the Apostle writes. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day, the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. As to the law, a Pharisee.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

[ 5 : 33 ] Now let's take a look at verse one here. Because this is sort of an odd beginning to Philippians chapter three. It's funny that what follows is going to be this amazing torrent of passion that spills out from Paul's pen.

And it's funny that it begins with such an innocuous statement. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. So that should really raise in our minds this question.

What about this idea, what about this concept of rejoicing in the Lord sets Paul off? Why does this thought cause him to then spill his heart out in this honest and powerful manner?

And I believe what's happening here is that what Paul really wants is he wants to reinforce the joy that the Philippians have. Paul wants to reinforce the joy that they have because of what Jesus Christ has given to them.

Paul wants to reinforce the joy that they have in their salvation. He wants to reinforce the joy that they have in this new identity they have as God's family.

[ 6 : 41 ] and this new identity they have because they've been given the righteousness of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for them. Who took their sins on himself and bore their punishment for them.

He wants them to rejoice in this identity they have that now when God looks at them he sees the righteousness the goodness of his own son and he welcomes them into his family. He wants them to experience this joy they have in their partnership in the gospel which is the whole theme of the book of Philippians this letter.

This partnership that they have in advancing the good news of what Jesus Christ has done. And Paul knows that this joy it has to be guarded carefully. It needs to be maintained and protected.

You know sometimes we might get this idea that it should just kind of be there without any work and any effort on our behalf. That this joy is something like that you know those old candlesticks that you take and you sort of shove into your junk drawer in the kitchen.

Right? And you know and you know how things work when you put something in that junk drawer it's going to be there 30 years from now. Right? That's not what joy is like. Joy is like the flame that burns from the wicks of those candles.

[ 7 : 57 ] That flame needs to be maintained. It needs to be protected because if you don't guard your joy it's going to burn out. And that's why Paul adds to write the same things to you verse 1 to write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

He's not getting tired of telling his kids the same thing over and over and over again because he knows that they need help. Paul wants to remind them of his previous instructions.

When he's writing finally my brothers rejoice in the Lord they're well aware of what he means. They know that this isn't some sort of generic joy. This isn't just sort of this giddy feeling this high blood sugar moment this manic phase this adrenaline rush this isn't a this isn't that sort of passing thing that people in Squamish are living their lives for.

This is a deep rooted happiness a deep rooted contentment that comes from knowing that we as Christians are united with Christ. That's what the phrase in the Lord indicates.

That union we have with the Lord Jesus Christ that identification that we have with him. As we've seen before that's Paul's shorthand for our union with Christ and what Paul means by this union is that Jesus Christ died in our place he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

[ 9 : 33 ] So we're identified with him. Our whole eternity is staked on a life that we did not live and a death that we did not die. It's staked on the life and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're dead and buried to our old way of life and just as Christ was raised from the dead because we're united with Christ we're raised with him to a new life because we're united to Christ by faith in him and we experience the presence and the power of God the Holy Spirit.

And this isn't just some sort of fabulous tale invented after the fact by the apostles to justify Jesus' death. This was something that God predicted through his prophets hundreds of years before Jesus was born.

You can go back to the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. God is delivering this message to the people of Israel in Ezekiel chapter 36 and he says I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

I will put my spirit within you cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. So how do we guard our joy in the Lord? How do we guard our joy in the Lord? Well, Paul is excited to talk about how we can guard our joy.

[ 10 : 58 ] He's so excited to talk about it that he continues in verse 2. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers.

Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Well, Paul is not one of those guys where you're kind of wondering what he's really thinking, is he? He is completely frank here.

For years, and you often wonder, man, Paul, that is so rude. That is so unkind. Dogs, evildoers, mutilators of the flesh. If I said that about somebody I didn't like, man, I'd be in a heap of trouble.

We have to put ourselves in Paul's shoes. For years, he has been trying to plant these churches to introduce the good news of Jesus Christ.

[ 11 : 57 ] And for years, these false teachers have been following in his footsteps, coming into these churches and poisoning them. Biblical historians often call this group of false teachers Judaizers.

We encounter them in the book of Galatians. They first show up in Acts chapter 15, verse 1, where Luke writes this about them. Some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

And then Luke records that church leaders like Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them. You know, no small dissension and debate. And if you've been part of our sermon series on Galatians over the last number of weeks, you'll recognize that's, you know, just a little bit of an understatement from Luke.

You know, just a little dissension and debate. You know, Paul politely suggests in Galatians, right, that they emasculate themselves. You know, if you're going to be circumcised, just go all the way. And his tactful and diplomatic words in Philippians chapter 3, verse 2, are that they are dogs, evildoers, those who mutilate the flesh.

Now, if you read all of what Paul writes and teaches about, the problem isn't circumcision itself. The problem isn't circumcision itself.

[ 13 : 18 ] Even at the end of the book of Colossians, Paul writes about how much he enjoys having fellow members of the circumcision with him, that is, fellow Jews, with him in his imprisonment. Paul himself is circumcised.

And in the Old Testament, what circumcision did is it served as a sign of God's covenant with the people of Israel. It was a sign and a marker of God's covenant with the people of Israel, of his relationship with them.

It was meant to point forward, though. It wasn't meant to just be there on its own. It was meant to point forward towards the new covenant that he was going to make with all of those who believe in Jesus Christ, all of those who follow him as his disciples.

And so, you'll even read in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, in chapter 30 of Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people of Israel, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live.

The Lord your God will circumcise not your body, but your heart, the inner core of who you are, the very center of your being, he's going to change.

[ 14 : 34 ] And the problem with the Judaizers is they want to keep going back to that old covenant. They think that the Gentiles have to become Jews in order to be saved from their old nature of sin, in order to be saved from their old nature of rebellion against God.

And so, these Judaizers, they're failing to recognize it is not ethnic identity that saves you. It is not religious behavior that saves you. It is your union with Christ.

That's the new covenant. That is the new covenant. It is your union with Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. And by insisting on circumcising these Gentile Christians, what these stealthy Grinches are doing is they are tearing down the gospel that brings us joy.

And they are tearing apart this partnership in the gospel that existed in these churches. Dividing Jew from Gentile.

Paul warns in verses 2 through 4 that they're putting their confidence in the flesh instead of worshiping by the Spirit of God.

[ 15 : 45 ] Now, in our series of Galatians, we saw that contrast between the flesh and the Spirit. It's a contrast between, on the one hand, we've got human autonomy, human independence from God.

Human beings saying, I can do this on my own. I don't need God. And the foolishness, the weakness, the rebellion that comes with that.

And on the other hand, there is dependence on God. The wisdom, the power, the life that His Spirit brings. So what's happening is that by trying to revert back to law-keeping, to ethnic divisions, these Judaizers, they're trying to gain salvation by the power of the flesh rather than by the power of the Spirit.

And if they succeed in doing so, they will rob the Philippians of their joy. They will rob the Philippians of the joy of the gospel.

They will rob the Philippians of the joy that comes with partnership together in the gospel. Of that oneness that we experience as we serve the Lord together, the oneness that God invites us to.

[ 17 : 05 ] And so Paul warns these Philippian Christians, look out for joy robbers. Look out for joy robbers. Look out for these stealthy grinches who may look like brothers in Christ.

They may talk like brothers in Christ, but they are false brothers. They're grinches dressed up like Santa Claus, masquerading. They think they are holy and clean.

They think they are lovers of heavenly things. But they are unholy and unclean dogs. No different from the Gentiles that they revile, rooting around in dumpsters, eating their own vomit.

They think they are God's servants and workers of good deeds, but they are evil doers. They are promoting a false gospel, incurring the anger of God.

They think they are staying faithful to God's law by insisting on circumcision. But their ritual has become twisted into nothing better than a pagan mutilation of the body because it serves as a substitute.

[ 18 : 03 ] It serves as a substitute, leading people away from the true gospel of God's grace that comes to all his people. Their confidence comes from the flesh. Their confidence comes from the ability to mark themselves as God's people through their zealous obedience to him and through the preservation of their Jewish heritage.

Now keep in mind that these individuals, these false teachers, they're stealthy Grinches. And the truth is they're probably nice people, if you're Jewish.

I'm sure many of them are very nice people, loving parents to nice children. They're probably well-spoken. They're probably well-intentioned. And they are joy robbers.

In verse 19, Paul identifies them as enemies of the cross of Christ. Here's what joy robbers do to you. Here's what joy robbers are going to do to you and to me if we allow them into our hearts, if we listen to the message that they have for us.

They teach you and me to worship and to serve God in the flesh. Which means that they are trying to convince you that your own merit, your own actions, your own deeds, they are the basis on which you are justified.

[ 19 : 29 ] They are the basis on which you are counted as right before God. They are the basis on which God accepts you and welcomes you. They are the basis on which you can call yourself one of God's people.

But if you adopt their mindset, what's going to happen is that you will have earned no more merit than an evildoer. Joy robbers teach you to glory in the flesh.

They teach you to, you know, tactfully and subtly find ways to boast about your money, about your social status, about your moral character, about your talents and skills and abilities.

They try to convince you that these are enough to win God's favor. That on the basis of these, God accepts you and counts you righteous. That on the basis of these, you belong to God's family.

But if you adopt their mindset, these things that you glory in and that you value, they're going to make you no more glorious than a filthy dog. Joy robbers teach you to put your confidence in the flesh.

[ 20 : 36 ] They teach you that your ethnic background or your heritage as a lifelong churchgoer are reason enough for God to accept you as one of his own. They try to convince you that, you know, you grew up in the church, you belong by default in God's kingdom.

That you are counted righteous as God's people. But if you adopt their mindset, your confidence will be of no more value than the self-inflicted cuts and mutilations of a pagan idol worshiper.

As gospel partners, we must guard our joy. Look out for joy robbers. And if you want to guard your joy as partners in the gospel, if you want to learn how to look out for joy robbers, here is the message of the Holy Spirit for you.

You have to look at who you are. You have to look at who you are. And I need to clarify that first of all because this is very different from the sort of self-discovery that is recommended by our culture.

In our culture, self-discovery, finding your identity, finding out who you are, it's kind of an, to tell the truth, it's sort of an unattractive navel-gazing sort of thing.

[ 21 : 49 ] There's this idea, you know, you need to find yourself. Maybe, you know, one of the most popular ways seems to be by becoming Julia Roberts and traveling the world, you know, doing that eat, pray, love thing until you figure out who you are.

It's an identity crisis for the 1%. It's a pilgrimage of narcissism for first world rich people. Let me save you several thousand dollars in plane tickets to Bali.

If you want to pay me up front in cash, I won't turn you down. If you want to look at who you are, if you want to know what your identity is, it's right here.

Paul has already written in verse 1, rejoice in the Lord because that's who we identify with. So the key to your identity is not who you are, but whose you are.

It's who you belong to. And you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. You are united with Christ Jesus. You're not in the flesh.

[ 22 : 57 ] You're in the spirit. You're not an autonomous free agent who decides his or her own meaning and purpose in life, who decides his or her own identity, who decides who I am as a human being, what my identity and purpose and sexuality and everything else is.

You don't get to do that. You're a servant of the Lord. You're a child of God. You are united with Christ. And that's why Paul writes in verse 3, we are the circumcision.

What he means is that it's not circumcision of the body that is the basis for our identity and our status before God. It's what Moses called the circumcision of the heart.

It's what Ezekiel called being given a softened heart, a warm and beating heart, rather than a hardened, dead heart made out of stone.

We are the circumcision. Because Jesus Christ, what he did is he fulfilled all that Israel was meant to accomplish. Now he is the true Israel.

[ 23 : 59 ] And because you and I are united with him in faith, we are now God's people as well. That is good news.

You and I are the spiritual Israel. We are the people of the circumcision and the covenant. And Paul mentions three characteristics that mark out this new people. Three characteristics that mark this new covenant which gospel partners belong to.

These are the three patterns of living that God's people follow. First one is this. Verse three. God's people don't serve with the feeble power of the flesh.

Instead, God's people serve or worship by the Spirit of God. God the Father has sent his Holy Spirit among us. He sent his Holy Spirit among you and me to fill us with his life-giving presence.

That's what God's Spirit among us means, that God is with us. God is among us. His presence is here. He is giving us life. The Holy Spirit equips us. He empowers us to serve in ways that please the Lord God.

[ 25 : 07 ] Without the Holy Spirit, you can't do a single thing that pleases the Lord God. It's all tainted. It's all corrupted. And you can't keep it up.

You can't keep going week after week after week trying to do the right thing. You have to have the Holy Spirit. And so, because we depend on the Spirit of God, we bear the fruit of the Spirit.

This Holy Spirit in us produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. It is the Spirit-empowered life that Paul prayed for earlier in his letter in Philippians chapter one, verse nine, when he writes, it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

So rather than becoming on the one hand these self-righteous stick-in-the-mud do-gooders or people who are just, you know, running out and trying to do all the right things and stuff like that or on the other hand maybe becoming shame, deeply ashamed, gloomy, self-loathing moralists on the other hand.

So you have on the one hand happy moralists and then the other hand sad moralists. Instead of taking one of those two routes, gospel partners take a third route. They don't rely on the flesh at all.

[ 26 : 39 ] They don't rely on the flesh at all. So what happens is we stop seeing ourselves as individuals which is very hard in our culture but we stop seeing ourselves as individuals trying to pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps and stand or fall on our own merits.

Instead, what you and I are called to is a life of joyful dependence on the power of God's Spirit. A life of keeping in step with His Spirit. That's the only way that you and I can live a happy Christian life.

Joyful gospel partners worship and serve together by the power of God's Spirit. And second, in verse 3, we see that God's people don't glory in the flesh.

Instead, God's people glory in Christ Jesus. God's people glory in Christ Jesus. This is the work that the Holy Spirit does.

And this is so critical. This is so important because it's easy to think that, you know, look at who you are, that this becomes that navel-gazing, inward-focusing exercise where we're just sort of curved inward in this self-obsessed, distorted, twisted thinking.

- [ 27 : 56 ] This is what happens when people just become these morbid introspectors, just always looking at themselves and feeling bad about themselves and thinking about themselves. That's not what this means to look at who you are.

Instead, what happens is that the Holy Spirit takes our eyes to teach us who we are. He takes our eyes off of ourselves and fixes them on Jesus Christ. As we live by the Spirit, as we keep in step with the Spirit, what he does is he points to Jesus.

He causes us to behold Jesus, to look at him, to gaze at him so that we are transformed to become like Jesus. And so what happens is that as we live by the Spirit, as we keep in step with the Spirit, you and I, we don't even, we find that we're not even thinking or talking about ourselves as much anymore.

We would much rather talk and think about Jesus. The funny thing is we come to know who we are by thinking much less about ourselves and thinking much more about Jesus Christ.

We love him. We long to see him face to face. We keep thinking back to what Jesus has done for us. We think back to how he humbled himself to become a man, how he died and how he rose again for our sake.

- [ 29 : 20 ] How even now he is interceding on our behalf. We look at his character. We look at the love that he has for his Father. We look at the power that he experiences as he is empowered by the Spirit.

And you and I are called to a life, this life of exuberant boasting in Christ Jesus. That's the only way that you and I can live a happy Christian life.

Joyful gospel partners, glory in Christ Jesus. Then third and finally in verse three, God's people put no confidence in the flesh.

Instead, the confidence of God's people is somewhere else. It's not in the flesh. In verse nine, Paul says, our confidence is in the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

What you and I do is that we plant ourselves on the bedrock of Christ's righteousness. We plant ourselves on the death that he died for our sake.

- [ 30 : 31 ] Because Jesus Christ was our champion. He is the perfect man. He fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the law.

So salvation, it doesn't require from you perfect obedience. It doesn't require from you the right ethnic identity. It isn't merely for the righteous one percent.

God's salvation only requires trust and the saving work of Jesus Christ, God's Messiah. God's salvation. And so you and I are called to a life of confidence, a life of joy in the finished work of Christ Jesus.

That's the only way that you and I can live a happy Christian life. Joyful gospel partners put all their confidence in Christ and no confidence in the flesh. And this is one of several key ways that Christianity stands apart from all other religions of the world.

because the gospel of Jesus Christ is not a message of self-salvation. It isn't a message of how you can somehow escape the power of sin or you can escape suffering or you can escape evil spirits through your own good deeds or your own meditative practices or your own occult rituals.

- [ 31 : 45 ] The message of Christianity is this, that Jesus Christ has done it all for you. Jesus Christ already did all that for you. And it's popular to say that all the religions of the world are various roads that lead up the same mountain to God, right?



But the gospel says that you don't have to climb any of those roads. That's the false power of the flesh speaking. In fact, you can't climb any of those roads.

The gospel says that God came down from the mountaintop in the person of Jesus Christ. It is he who brings you joy through the saving work of the gospel. Brothers and sisters, we are partners in advancing this gospel throughout the world.

We are called to guard this joy and there are going to be joy robbers. There are going to be stealthy Grinches out there who will want to tell you and they'll want to tell me that our confidence, our pride, our effort should come from our flesh.

They will tell you and they will tell me that we can merit our own salvation from the penalty that our sin deserves. But if you believe the Grinches, if you buy into their message, you will wake up on Christmas morning to a house that's been ransacked of all its cheerful joy.

[ 33 : 01 ] Don't believe them. Instead, do this. Guard your joy by remembering who you are in Christ Jesus. This is how you will stand firm in the Lord.

Gospel partners guard their joy. Our Father, and I want