

Philippians
“Living above the Clouds”

III. Main Teaching: C. 3:1-21 Joy in spite of things

1. 3:1-11 Past

3:1-7

“Can’t get to heaven in a row boat”

I. Intro.

II. Vs. 1 The mark of spirituality

III. Vs. 2 The menace of religion

IV. Vs. 3 The measure of devotion

V. Vs. 4-7 The mistakes of man

I. Intro.

Last week we closed the 2nd item that will attempt to rip you off from joy in Christ, **PEOPLE**. We have already noted that Paul in the 1st chapter dealt with the first thing that will attempt to rip you off from your joy in Christ, CIRCUMSTANCES. The third category that will attempt to rip you off from your joy in Christ is, THINGS. The first **THING** that will rip you off from your joy in Christ may surprise you and is hidden in plain sight in the first 7 verses. These seven verses Paul warns against the “*dogs*” and “*evil workers*” the so called “*mutilation*” (verse 2) then moves to what true faith is; only to finish off with this personal autobiographical section, it is a little confusing to see what he is trying to convey as the number 1 THING that will try to rip you off of your joy in Christ. According to Paul the number 1 thing that will try to rip you off from your joy in Christ is the “thing” known as **RELIGION**! There was a lady that was arguing with a pastor about religion verses relationship when she said. “*I think that getting to heaven is*

like rowing a boat,” “One oar is faith, and the other is works. If you use both, you get there. If you use only one, you go around in circles.” Her pastor replied, “There is only one thing wrong with your illustration, nobody is going to heaven in a row boat!”

II. Vs. 1 The mark of spirituality

In outlining these seven verses I see four movements of two each as Paul describes two positive traits of true spirituality and two negative traits that describe religion as he alternates between the two.

- **Positive** Vs. 1 The mark of spirituality
- **Negative** Vs. 2 The menace of religion
- **Positive** Vs. 3 The measure of devotion
- **Negative** Vs. 4-7 The mistakes of man

Positive Vs. 1 **Mark of spirituality**: Starting a section with the word “*finally*” usually indicates that it is the beginning of the end. It seems as though it takes Paul along time to come to the conclusion (like man a pastor I know). But if we look the word up in the Greek we find that the word doesn’t mean in conclusion it means “*with regards to the rest of the matter*”. The answer to the problem no matter what it is that is trying to steal your joy is always “**Rejoice in the Lord!**” Paul knows that this phrase sounds a bit trite so he says, “*For me to write the same thing is not tedious, but for you it is safe.*” **Rejoice in the Lord**: Is the Christian equivalent of the Old Testament exclamation, *Hallelujah*. It is the mark of a spiritual life, a sign of the victorious Christian. The phrase is distinctively relational; in fact Paul uses it twice in this little letter here and 4:4! Paul had already defined obedience in 2:14 as without grumbling and complaining which are the signs of unbelief. Thus the sign of faith is rejoicing, “*God said it, I believe Him, time to rejoice!*” **Our rejoicing is not based upon our enjoying the difficulty, neither is it based upon**

God working the situation out according to our plans. *Our rejoicing is in the reality that ill respective of our challenge God will be glorified and this difficulty will make us more like Him!* The world's view of followers of Christ is no smile or joy. There are some Christians who are just like Eeyore of Winnie the Pooh that dismal donkey who always seems to find the cloud in the silver lining. The mark of a Christian is a smile of confidence, despite the circumstances. Not a forced one, but a genuine smile, sometimes through tears. It arises from a quiet trust, living out of our adequacy in the Lord despite living in the inadequacy of our flesh. We have within us One who is completely competent to meet every situation through us. It's the kind of rejoicing that caused David to write the 23rd Psalm saying, "*The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want!*"

III. Vs. 2 The menace of religion

Negative Vs. 2 **Menace of external religion:** Immediately Paul switches from the true mark of spirituality (*rejoicing in the Lord*) to **the mark of religion** which is dwelling on external evidences as a sign of spirituality. What religion gages spiritual health on outward things such as events or rituals as being the sign that one is right with God. Such outward reliance as a sign of spiritual health will inevitably destroy joy. When we are being ripped off of joy we will turn to the outwards sign of what makes us right and complain that it's not fair that this is happening to us because of all the things we are doing to be right with God. *Christian joy that cannot be taken comes not from what you do to maintain spirituality but from what the Lord has done to ensure your relationship to Him.* **Paul calls these peddlers of works three things:**

- i. ***Dogs:*** This isn't your house pets; instead the word refers to the wild, snarling animal that sifts through the trash for its meals. Paul calls them this because they continued

- to “hound” believers to get them to leave the home of a relationship with God for the streets of religion.
- ii. ***Evil workers***: They were called this because of their overzealous work in trying to get people to leave relationship for religion. The harder they worked the bigger their claim on blessings from God, so they went door to door ready to convert folks to religion.
 - iii. ***The mutilation***: They had a special mark called circumcision which they had picked up from the law only they made it the only sign of spirituality. Paul doesn’t use the word for circumcision instead he uses a play on words as he calls them “*flesh cutters*” referring to them as those who cut themselves making marks on their flesh that have no real meaning.

Religion has an appeal to people because it has a show of devotion that by our own

hard work and effort we have become worthy of acceptance before God. It appeals to

our egos as we can separate ourselves from the person next to us as being less worthy as we have done more to earn God’s blessings. It destroys rejoicing because we are in competition against others for that illusive prize of joy and only harder work will give us has any possibility of achieving the reward we so long for.

IV. Vs. 3 The measure of devotion

Positive Vs. 3 **Measure of true devotion**: In contrast to religions threefold description

Paul offers ***three marks of the spirituality of relationship. Worship is the partaking of***

Jesus; as we take in all of who He is and use who He is as the basis of who we are

throughout the day! Fellowship, singing praise and studying the Word can and should

cause us to take in all of who He is but those things on their own aren’t worship and must

never be worshipped. They are just tools to lead us into taking in more of who Jesus is so

we can see who we are throughout the day. Religion happens when we worship the

tools, the instrument, instead of the Person of Christ! Immediately you notice that the

three marks of true devotion are the **exact opposite** of the **three traits of religion.**

- a. ***Worship God in Spirit***: True devotion doesn't glory in our activity and effort we glory in Christ's effort and activity. True worship has only one source, one center of glory **Jesus**; He alone is who we glory in. We don't worship in our activity, our denomination, theology or ritual.
- b. ***Rejoice in Christ Jesus***: Jesus is our one and only source of joy! There is nothing in our worship that is distinctively ours that would give us some mark of privilege over someone else.
- c. ***Have no confidence in the flesh***: The last trait of true worship is that we put no confidence in our self-effort. All of humanity wants to be "*special*" and looks to the flesh and effort to distinguish this. True worship isn't about self-confidence it's about placing all of our confidence in Christ.

V. Vs. 4-7 The mistakes of man

Negative Vs. 4-6 Mistakes of Paul: Here we come to this autobiographical passage where Paul uses his own history not as a badge of honor as he use to but rather as the mistakes of religion. Nothing in his background, training, talents, accomplishments, the time he spent in prayer, the number of chapters of scripture he read, the number of verses he memorized. Paul had no confidence in the power of his eloquence to persuade people or his devotion. The only one in whom Paul had confidence in was Jesus Christ. There was a time prior to his relationship with Jesus he took pride in four things of his religion:

- a. Vs. 5a ***His ancestry***: "*Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin*".
- b. Vs. 5b ***His orthodoxy***: "*A Hebrew of Hebrews; concerning the law a Pharisee*."
- c. Vs. 6a ***His activity***: "*Concerning zeal, persecuting the church*."
- d. Vs. 6b ***His morality***: "*Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless*."

Vs. 7 In each and every case Paul said that this was how he felt prior to knowing Christ as he uses this in the past tense. Most folks feel as though all of these areas were changed in one day as Paul road to Damascus but I think that only one changed that day and that was with regards to his activity in persecuting the church. Looking at his own words in other letters it appears that the other four areas took time for him to understand that he

had only replaced the religion of Judaism with the religion of Christianity as he was still worshipping his own effort. Paul had been confident in his flesh prior to his conversion and he had been confident in his flesh after his conversion. According to 2 Corinthian chapter 4 it wasn't until 14 years after his conversion that he began to understand what true worship and spirituality was. In 2 Corinthians 11:30 Paul writes "*If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.*" Then in the 12th chapter of that same letter in verse 10 he writes "*Therefore I take pleasure, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" The things that caused him to be weak and dependent upon the Lord were now the things that he was most thankful for. Paul stepped out of religion and into a relationship and in so doing discovered the secret of the Christian life that only in dying to self, do you find lasting joy and peace. Paul swore off religion as worship and started worshipping only the work and effort of Jesus.