

LSB Philippians 3:1 - 3

1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil workers! Beware of the mutilation! 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

We begin the third chapter in Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi this morning. And at first glance, a first cursory surface look at these 3 verses, you might be thinking there's nothing here that's difficult or even very interesting from an interpretive standpoint.

My hope is that with a deeper contemplation you may find great depth and confidence building truth in what Paul says here.

The authors of the New Testament spend a huge percentage of their time, effort, and words in the area of what we call apologetics. Let me give you the dictionary definition of apologetics.

Apologetics is the reasoned defense and explanation of Christian beliefs and practices. It involves providing arguments and evidence to support Christian doctrines and address objections or challenges to those doctrines.

Apologetics, derived from the Greek word "apologia," means "defense" or "explanation". In the context of Christianity, it refers to the reasoned defense of Christian beliefs and practices. We might say "arguments for the truth"

In some sense, all of the New Testament scriptures are apologia. The four Gospel writers tell the story of Jesus, who He claimed to be, what evidence supports His claims, and what happened when the religion He opposed murdered Him. He rose from the dead. Perhaps the greatest apologia or

apologetic of any that can ever be offered.

The gospel writers make no bones about their apologetic approach. John finishes his apologia by stating his purpose blatantly; *30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.* John 20:30,31

Verse 31 is a better definition of an apologetic argument than the dictionary one that I read to you. *But these are written so that you may believe*

Point and counterpoint. Satan's method to prevent the gospel from efficaciously saving people is to mis-inform. Satan twists the gospel message so that it loses it's power to effectively quicken dead people to life.

We all have built into us some latent desire to worship something or someone and then within that worship to feel that we're somehow acceptable and pleasing to our idea of who or what God is.

We were designed to be worshippers by our designer. But in our fallen sinful state, pride enters that equation and religion becomes more of a display of pride in our religious accomplishments than worship from unworthy broken beings to a Holy God.

So Satan builds false religions, some of which are in la la land, just people doing crazy stuff that their brains have made up, but other false religions that parallel very closely with God's revelation.

The new testament writers had one goal. Truth. As Paul so elequently put it; Holding forth the truth. And Satan has one goal. Limit and despoil the truth. Lies. False gospels. Fake truth. And most dangerous of all, almost truth.

Take the true gospel and add things to it that destroy it's life giving

simplicity, or take things away from it that likewise render it powerless to quicken spiritual death to spiritual life.

In the book of Acts, we have the record of truth blazing all over the known world as the Holy Spirit uses the church to spread the powerful gospel. We begin in Jerusalem and end with Paul in prison in Rome. The gospel spread like wildfire throughout asia minor and through Greece and into Italy.

But Satan sends people with fire hoses to put the fires out, if possible, everywhere Paul went. Satan does his damage control really well. Everywhere Paul went, Satan's people follow and their message is simple.

And Satan's counterpoint message goes something like this; Jesus is everything Paul said He is, but Paul didn't get the full memo. His gospel is lacking the full truth you actually need to be christians. Jesus did die for your sins and rise from the dead, but you need to do stuff to access His salvation.

These emisarries of Satan were jews who claimed to be christians. But they followed Paul everywhere he went and upset the new churches by telling the new believers that their faith in Christ's completed work alone for their salvation was not enough. Incomplete.

They taught that you must become a jew first, and then Jesus can save you. That included circumcision for any male. Then you need to follow all of Moses ceremonial laws. Sabbath day, all of it. Then Jesus will save you.

They worked to eliminate the simple good news that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, by grace, alone. They taught falsely that salvation is by faith plus works. And much of our new testament is apologetic writings to correct the damage done by Satan introducing nonsense that upsets God's elect and drains the power out of the gospel.

So Paul begins chapter 3 as if it's going to be some stacatto quick last exhortations and then in true Paul fashion, he goes on for 2 more chapters.

For our purposes this morning I'm going to offer some parallel apologetic, arguments that address a parallel situation in our current world that is almost identical to what Paul fought against. It turns out Satan doesn't have many original ideas, he just keeps changing the names on his old ones.

Josh mentioned the new Pope last week and I'm going to speak of him with much less sympathy this week. Roman catholicism is nothing but what Paul fought against first in Galatia, and then throughout his ministry.

It's the exact same system. Very Jesus friendly, Jesus this and Jesus that, and His mother we like a lot too, but you are not saved by faith in Jesus alone. You have to do stuff.

The parallels with the judaizers that dogged Paul around the known world and the Papist church today are stark. It's the same thing with different names.

Both systems have initiation rituals that get you "in". For the judaizers it was circumcision. That's your initiation into Judaism so Jesus can save you. For the Papists, it is baptismal regeneration. You join the catholic church by being sprinkled in a baptism ritual.

Both systems then have ongoing continuation rituals that must be observed.

For the judaizers it was adherence to the full jewish ceremonial law of Moses, including all of the bizarre by that point sabbath rituals. For the Roman church you are required to continually adhere to sacramental works. Confessions to a so-called priest. And the mass where the elements actually by transubstantiation become Jesus body and Jesus blood.

You continually work to achieve enough righteous merit to be acceptable to go to heaven. Work work work. Human effort to achieve enough merit to be acceptable to God, both in christianized judaism and in Roman Papal Catholicism. Identical systems, 2000 years apart.

Be angry with me if you must, but Roman Catholicism is identical to the judaistic christianity introduced by the judaizers everywhere Paul went. The names are changed but it's the identical empty fake hollowed out faith that requires that you must work for merit to be accepted by God. Which effectively cancels out faith.

If you're doing the work, who needs faith. It becomes faith in a works of righteousness system that you're doing. Faith in your own meritorious works. Paul tells the Romans; 11:6 *And if it is by grace, then it is no longer by works. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace.*

True grace, unmerited favor by God's sovereign choice, is mutually exclusive from works. It's either one or the other. You can't play words games and be working your way to heaven by meritorious works and say it is grace. That's nonsense.

I believe, because of where I judge that we are at in the big picture of biblical prophecy, that this current pope could very well be THE antichrist. I'm a pope watcher from the standpoint of biblical prophecy, particularly in Daniel chapter 9.

26 Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are decreed. 27 And he (that prince who is to come) will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will make sacrifice and grain offering cease; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

We know very well who the people that destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD are. Right? It was Rome. So who is the prince of Rome? We believe it will be a pope. And then it goes on to describe activities that we know from other

prophecy are accomplished by the final anti christ. I believe that individual when he comes on the scene will be a pope in the Roman catholic church.

I will not argue that there may be some semi ignorant roman catholics who are actually true believers. But if they are it's in spite of romanism, not because of it. The pope is the chief leader of a satanic movement that nullifies true christianity. Just as the judaizers nullified the primitive church as they followed Paul around.

Let me insert here that I listened to what the new pope said about marriage and family and it was concise and excellent. He upheld scripture courageously and spoke against anything other than marriage of one man one woman and fruitful families from those unions. Credit where credit is due.

Satan cancels the truth using false teachers and false religions. And as we move along in our scripture this morning, I promise, you'll see how what I've just said fits. My apologetic will make sense.

I Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

Here we need to do a word study, because the word for rejoice is fundamentally linked to the reason and source of our christian joy.

The word means wellness and cheer. xaírō literally means ("glad for grace") wellness or gladness directly linked to the source which is grace.

There are three greek words with the same root letters, all of which are related to the same source. xará ("joy") and 5485 /xáris ("grace") are cognate with 5463 /xaírō ("to rejoice"), i.e. all share the same root and therefore the same core (fundamental) meaning.

We rejoice because of God's grace towards us. Our rejoicing is based in God's unmerited favor in saving us, outside of anything of merit we did.

God chose us before the foundations of the world. He knew us. In the fullness of time He quickened us from spiritual death in sin to spiritual life purchased for us by His own blood, not because of any meritorious works we did. He chose us, He saved us, and He reveals that in our next life with Him we will be together with Him forever in eternal riches and joy. And in this present life, He gives us His indwelling Spirit to give us fullness of joy and peace and wellbeing, even in this life.

The source for all three words with the same root letters, grace, joy, and rejoicing is God's indwelling Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22 tells us *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,*

Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christ in you the source of joy and rejoicing. Col. 1:27 says it; *“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

So, when Paul begins this section with the words; *I Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.* he isn't saying it would be a good idea if you do this, or I'm hopeful this is happening for you. The verb tense for rejoice is present imperative active.

It's not a nice placebo. It's an order. Rejoice in the Lord. And it's also self contained. If you are walking in a state of what Paul terms, in the Lord, sins forgiven, Holy Spirit dwelling in you and with you, rejoicing is automatic. It's just part of walking with God.

So then, we could argue that if you're not rejoicing because of God's indwelling presence giving you love, joy, peace and all the rest of the things in that list, why not. Rejoicing is an order. It's an imperative. And it's a package deal. If God dwells in my heart, it's a fruit of His presence. It's automatic.

Listen, man made fake religious systems have no joy. There's no reason to rejoice over riches and wellness and grace that God has poured out upon

you, because He hasn't.

The sole difference between real believers and fake believers is this deep inner joy that God pours out in our hearts through His indwelling presence in us. Real believers have a connection to the joy source. Fake believers have no real connection and they are grinding out the works of merit with no witness living inside them.

So Paul says, *I Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.* And then he logically follows with his reasoning. *To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.*

Inner joy through a living connection to God and Jesus because of His indwelling Holy Spirit, alive in me, is a safeguard for me.

Listen, eternal security is sourced right here. I know I'm real because I have the joy source living in me and with me. No matter what this world throws at me, I've got something no one can take away. Christ in me.

That's why Paul tells the Corinthians at the end of the second letter to them; *5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?* 2 Cor. 13:5

Beloved, we could reverse the logic that Paul is stating to the philippians and say, if you're not rejoicing, why not? Because if you are true believers who are indwelt with the presence of God's Holy Spirit, rejoicing is there. It's like a package deal. If you're not rejoicing, why not? Maybe you need to take a spiritual inventory.

Paul then takes off on this idea of a safeguard. Because joy is normative for healthy christians. You can't walk in the Spirit and not have a deep sense of joy. So if that deep wellness is missing, it's important to ask why.

And the most common reason is that christians can fall under the spell of

false teaching. And false religion always kills joy. Show me a joyful catholic. Lighting candles. Saying their rosary. Praying to Mary. Putting their money in the coffers. Hoping they're doing enough that they won't have to spend too much time in purgatory's flames working off their remaining residual sins. A non scriptural non reality. There's no reason to rejoice in that system.

Likewise the early believers in Paul's day, who were beginning to buy into the judaizers fake religion of a mish mash of jewish laws keeping and circumcisions and ceremonial rituals in order to merit Christ's forgiveness forfeited joy for prideful meritorious works.

Our joy is based in grace. God purchased everything for us. Unmerited favor of a God who chose us to pour out wealth and blessings. And I don't mean this worlds wealth. I mean the wealth of inner peace and joy.

Joy is a safeguard. And Paul doesn't mince words when he speaks of the false religionists who Satan sends in to spoil real joy.

Make no mistake. If God has a list of who He is most angry with in preparing the fires of hell, the first person on that list after Satan has to be the person at the forefront of fake religion. Hello, Pope Leo XIV. Paul's language here bespeaks that truth.

2 Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil workers! Beware of the mutilation!

This is spectacularly offensive language against spectacular sinners. Paul is addressing the false teachers who come into the church using all the same vernacular and they sound so good, but they dismantle the simple truths that can bring life, and they cause spiritual death.

False teachers are like cancer cells. Infect. Spread. Kill. Danger.

The first word Paul employs, dogs, is one that arouses fear for it's original

hearers. In the ancient world, this word is not the one for a nice little pet doggie. These dogs, plural, are more like we would react to something like a pack of wolves.

In the ancient world, large dogs would pack up and work together to kill their prey. These are dangerous wild dogs. Curs. They present a danger to weak humans. In some instances they might even attack a small child. You don't leave your babies defenseless against a pack of wild dogs.

In the early church this word for a dangerous pack of dogs is code for false teachers who will enter a weak congregation and rip and tear the baby christians to pieces. This Paul says, beware of the dogs. Paul compares false teachers to the danger of wild hungry dogs who rip and tear their prey to pieces. Peter also calls false teachers dogs. Peter says a dog returns to it's own vomit. Not a pretty picture either way.

Then Paul says; *Beware of the evil workers!* Jesus told us you can tell a tree by it's fruit. Evil workers destroy grace. They destroy the source of joy, if possible. Their fruit is slavery to a works system that brings no joy, no grace, no salvation. The resulting fruit of evil workers is a system of self merit that only results in the pride that God hates.

The pharisees would parade themselves around in prideful pompous display for all to see their phony righteousness. The cardinals are on display and the world loves to see the vestments and false crowns. It's a show.

Then Paul says something that needs to be explained in order to understand what he's referring to.

Beware of the mutilation! Paul considered the false religion that required circumcision as an entry point initiation, a physical mutilation. This is a direct attack on the false system that required a physical alteration in order to be saved.

His language is absolutely vehement. These descriptions of false teachers

who create phony fake religions that only lead people to hell are the most severe language in the whole Bible.

And Paul stands in good company. Jesus was nice to everyone, with the exception of the leaders of the false religion in Israel. To them Jesus pronounces woe upon woe upon woe.

It's one thing to be caught up in a false religion. It's another thing to work to spread the cancer to as many cells as possible. False teachers multiply death and hell. The Bible holds out it's most severe language for those who are under the employ of Satan to undo the truth and spread the infection of false religion through false teaching.

Hitler will have an easier time in hell than the folks who destroy God's truth with false teaching. Those who abandon God's grace for a works righteousness and tell others to do likewise. Beware.

Then finally Paul gives us a description of true religion which is based in a relationship. A picture of the real to counterbalance the fake. Like the numismatic experts who are trained to study real money until their eyes hurt, so that when the fake shows up, they know it immediately.

3 For we are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Paul launches with the word that describes the initiation into a false religious system.

We are the true circumcision, by adoption. It isn't a physical thing, it's a heart thing. Circumcision in ancient judaism was what separated the jews unto God, from all the other nations in the world.

It was a mark, designed and ordered by God that said this is my chosen people. They have this mark that separates them out of the rest of the world.

Paul says, the church is the true circumcision. Set apart unto God, not by a physical alteration, but by a heart alteration. Regeneration by the quickening from death to life by God's Holy Spirit when we are saved.

It's obscure to us in the 21st century, but it's worth taking the pains to understand. The false teachers were following Paul wherever he went and proclaiming, you have to be circumcised in order to be set apart unto God. You have to do this physical thing that turns you into someone who is then owned by God. Sorry ladies, guess you're left out.

But Paul runs with that idea, and he tells us, it isn't a physical cutting accomplished by human will, it's a heart change that makes us circumcised, or set apart unto God.

3 For we are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Phony circumcision or spiritual circumcision. And Paul gives us 3 characteristics of true religion. Real christians all have these 3 characteristics. Every single real regenerated christian will exhibit these three things. Without fail.

In fact if you don't have these things which are part and parcel of the package deal of true regeneration from death to life, spiritually, you might want to go back to 2 Cor. 13:5 and take that test. Real christians have these three tells. Fake christians do not.

3 For we are the circumcision, who (1) worship in the Spirit of God and (2) boast in Christ Jesus and (3) put no confidence in the flesh,

We worship in the Spirit of God. Beloved, I meet so called christians every day who have no need or desire to worship God. Sunday is for washing the car. Sunday is for watching TV. Sunday is for whatever it is that you feel like doing, except going to church.

Listen, sin is like cancer, and studying this book deeply is like a radiation treatment aimed directly at your cancer. I get why people would rather wash the car. I'm quite sure it's no fun to listen to me. Painfully aware of that.

But something about Spirit indwelt people that makes them crave this book. It isn't always fun, perhaps, in the moment. But it is. The Holy Spirit takes this book, and opens up your hearts, and little by little, the irradiation of God's book on your old sinful desires is working.

People who have God living inside their hearts have an insatiable appetite to worship God. Even if you have to listen to me. It's there, and it keeps you coming back, again and again.

People who come a few times and have no appetite for the deep things of this book, and then don't come back, my mind defaults to, this verse. If they have the Spirit, they will have a desire to worship, and they will be faithful to meet and worship together with us. Or not.

For we are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God All of these unique qualities of true regenerated christians are characteristics of the true as opposed to the false. The real as opposed to the fake.

We worship in the Spirit. False christians are devoid of the Spirit. They have to put vestments on and parade around and chant and bob up and down and genuflect and do all kinds of displays to show they're "worshipping" in scare quotes. We simply worship in the Spirit. From the inner heart that has a connection to God through His Spirit, comes true worship as opposed to fake worship.

3 For we are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

True christians boast. But we understand we bring nothing to the boasting.

Anything that is accomplished for the glory of God, in this place, any lasting fruit, isn't something I can ever boast about. Because I'm painfully aware, if anything worthy of God happened, I didn't do it. Jesus did it.

We boast about what Jesus has accomplished. In us! And through us!

We boast because we've read the ending to the story, and we woke up one day on the team that's going to win. We belong to the person who is going to burst out of heaven on a white horse and retake this planet, and depose Satan to prison for a thousand years, and rule here in unspeakable glory! And we get to be with Him for all of it!

We boast because He valued us enough to purchase us by dying in our place, taking our punishment, and giving to us His glistening righteousness in place of our sin.

We boast because even here, even in Tonopah Nevada, with our little scraggly congregation, He is at work adding territory incrementally to His glorious kingdom. Even if that's a hard sell this particular morning.

False religion by comparison boasts about their works. They boast in their meritorious works of righteousness. They boast in their own good works, not in what Christ accomplished for them.

And finally, the most important comparative of true religion to false religion. We put no confidence in the flesh.

It has been stated, brilliantly, and it's absolutely positively true, that there are only 2 religions in the world. Only 2, categorically.

The religion of human achievement, and the religion of divine accomplishment. I'm going to say that again. Listen this time.

It has been stated, brilliantly, and it's absolutely positively true, that there are only 2 religions in the world. Only 2, categorically. The religion of

human achievement, and the religion of divine accomplishment.

Every other religion outside of christianity and all of the false religion that says that it IS christianity, all of the cults, the Papal church, all of them are designed around human achievement. Works righteousness.

Only protestant christianity and only a small portion of that understands and relies on divine accomplishment. God did it all. I accomplished nothing. Even the faith to believe was a gift.

And in that truth, my heart bursts with love and joy and gratitude. He chose me before the foundations of the earth. He knew me before I was ever a twinkle in anyone's eye. He purposed to save me from the sin I was born into. He quickened me from death to life 4 days after my 18th birthday. He gave me His Holy Spirit to dwell in me and with me for my entire lifetime, since that day. He promises me, all that I've gotten so far is just the engagement ring. The wedding in the future is beyond my wildest imagination. He has told me He will call me home some day soon, and I will see His magnificent face. And as David said, *and I will dwell in the house of the Lord, forever.*

All of that He accomplished for me. I did none of it. And in Him I *will* boast.