

August 8th, 2021, Killing Pride for Gospel Purity Kent A. Tollakson

Philippians 3 – 4:1

Good morning everyone. It's an honor and a privilege to be with you this morning. Welcome to anyone who may be viewing this online. I'm excited, mainly because I just cut my hair and used a different clipper setting, so I'm sure the 16th of an inch difference in hair length is a bit shocking for all of you...please don't let it be a distraction!.. always good to start off with a bad joke...

Please open your Bibles to Philippians Chapter 3.

Philippians is a book in the NT, located between Ephesians and Colossians near the end of your Bible. If you don't own a bible – please take one of those we have in the pews – our gift to you!

This will be the 5th message as I work through this book.

I have been praying for God to use me today – to bring praise and honor to His name as well as help anyone who hears this to grow in their faith.

And I mean that, I have been praying that all of you would “*see and savor the reality of the text*” that's something John Piper said, I love that – to see and savor the text, may God bless us with that reality this morning!

Now the apostle Paul wrote this book while in a Roman prison. Paul chose prison to protest false accusations of stirring up trouble in Jerusalem for his faith in Jesus. But while in prison Paul is writing how thankful he is for being able to proclaim the Gospel in Rome. He's also writing to give thanks and praise to the believers in Philippi - his first church plant in Europe.

They have been supporting Paul very well, for many years. I see Paul making three points to “see and savor” in today's text.

1. We should always find encouragement in Jesus – in the Gospel – and Paul says this with the simple cheer “REJOICE IN THE LORD”.
2. Paul WARNS us against becoming enemies of Jesus if we add requirements to the Gospel.
3. Paul presents us with ways to fight the good fight of faith in how we think and what we do.

So - Let's begin.... #1 – *Rejoice in the Lord!!!*

Look at the start of Philippians 3 with me.

Verse 1 - Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Does anyone else find it funny that Paul starts off with the word “FINALLY” and proceeds to write 2 full chapters! That’s a preacher for you!

Funny, but. More importantly the Greek word translated FINALLY, has a meaning of “here is an additional point” or “here is what is most important”.

So - First Paul wants us to benefit from being joyful in the Lord – and we can be joyful in the Lord when we remember that in faith and faith alone the Lord forgives us & the Lord is with us, He never leaves us or forsakes us, He loves us perfectly. That is wonderful! We should rejoice! Paul is working at encouraging the Philippians and us, much like Eric was working at encouraging us last week to come together because we NEED EACH OTHER to deal with hardships in life.

Paul “does not mind repeating” this encouragement because, it is safe for them!

The question is.....Safe from what?

2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

This brings up the second point #2 Paul’s warning against adding requirements to the Gospel.

Paul was warning the Philippians about a problem being stirred up by believers in God, so this is a CHURCH FAMILY ISSUE! This isn’t unbelievers attacking the church, this was Jewish people, who had accepted Christ, (Judaizer’s) saying, JEWS are God’s chosen people – and if you want to really be in the family of God, you need to do what God told Abraham to do, circumcise all males who believe! Ummm,

Have you ever had a moment when recognized “CRAZY” is part of your family -?

but you realize - this is the way they are - and you need to

“Relax and accept the crazy” ...you know what I mean?

Well, this was not one of those times for Paul.

Paul knew this was some crazy that could not be accepted!

Paul knew Jesus provides a “new and better covenant” as see it in Luke, Chapter 22:20 *“(he took) the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” – His blood, not the wine.*

Paul knew that adding anything to “FAITH” in Jesus was deadly wrong.

He attacks these Judaizer’s, saying,

4 *If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:*

And then Paul goes on to list 7 reasons why he is more worthy. And these are good things...not bad.... take note of that.

1. *5circumcised on the 8th day* – Paul addresses the main topic of the moment, circumcision, and he makes sure everyone knows – he had Godly parents who followed this rule to perfection....
2. *...of the People of Israel...* He is a full blood Jew, his family tree could be traced back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was something to take pride in as Jew.
3. *...of the tribe of Benjamin...* – Benjamin, the second son of Isaac and Rachel. The descendants of Benjamin formed one of the elite tribes of Israel – producing the first king. And this was the only tribe to join Juda in loyalty to the Davidic dynasty when the other ten tribes split off and formed the northern kingdom. The northern tribes never had godly kings; the southern tribes had plenty of problems but at least a few good kings. Jews who knew this history recognized that being from the tribe of Juda or Benjamin was special and something you could take pride in.
4. *... a Hebrew of Hebrews ...* – this is a reference to Paul’s faithfulness to learn the Hebrew language and follow Hebrew customs, that were appropriate, no matter where he traveled in his life. Paul’s efforts to stay faithful and obedient to Hebrew customs would have gained him honor from other Jews.
5. *...as to knowing the Law, a Pharisee...* in other words, he knew the Jewish laws as well as a college professor, which gained him respect and a career as a Pharisee.
6. *6As for zeal (or passion) for God, a persecutor of the church....* Zeal for God is a good thing. This good thing went bad, he’s admitting that...he was so passionate that he persecuted those who followed Jesus Christ because he thought they were wrong about Jesus being the Messiah.
7. *...as for following the law – “blameless”.* Paul’s life displayed an effort of perfect obedience to Gods law. This was an impressive effort that would have been praised by others.

Paul did not sin being born a Jew, he didn’t sin by being born into the tribe of Benjamin, and He didn’t sin by getting circumcised as a baby. It was good for Paul to be born into a family of faith. And Paul worked hard to stay true to his family customs, learn the word of God, and follow Gods desires, only one thing becoming sinful. But Jesus woke Paul up to seeing the bad that came out of all that good. And Paul altered his way or thinking about them. Look at verses 7-8

7...whatever gain I had, I counted as loss [past tense] for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss [present tense] because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things [present tense] and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, 9 and be found in him, not

having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith

He considered all his efforts as “*rubbish*”, underline that word. The Greek word for rubbish here, translates accurately as – dung or sewage. Think of that. Paul changed his way of thinking about stuff, stuff that brought him honor, knowing all those good things were as valuable as a bucket of sewage in comparison to “*knowing Christ Jesus as His Lord*”

Knowing Christ Jesus, knowing is a big word here, verse 8, underline that word.... the root of this Greek word is *Gee-no-sko*, which means to ‘to come to know through personal experience’! Nothing is as valuable as knowing Jesus, everything else is sewage in comparison. Jesus loves you; the God of the universe loves you and He wants to have that relationship with you!

Paul knew that real faith was brought to us through an unseen circumcision by the Spirit of God, verse 3. You don’t earn salvation; you don’t use circumcision or any other ‘work’ to gain it. You just believe and receive a saving relationship with Jesus and enjoy His absolute perfect love! Isn’t that incredible.

But what is the benefit of this mindset? The benefit for Paul, and us, is that thinking about our own work as nothing in comparison to Jesus kills off PRIDE. He says next, “*not having a righteousness of my own – but that which comes through Christ and depends on faith*”. What’s the opposite of this? What if Paul did the opposite of considering everything rubbish? His thoughts may have gone something like this - ‘I keep a score card of all the good I have done so that I can brag about my good work and compare myself to others – I do all of this on my own, I don’t need Jesus to clean me up and I know what truth is by myself.’

That sounds pretty bad doesn’t it. Yikes. That’s what pride does.

Here is a quick story from the the Naval institute, which I have changed and shortened, to illustrate how deadly pride can be. (Max Lucado included this story in a book, *In the Eye of the Storm*) Word Publishing, 1991, Page 153.

Two battleships at sea on maneuvers were experiencing poor visibility and patchy fog.

Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing reported, "Light, bearing on the starboard bow."

The captain asked - "Is it steady or moving astern?"

The lookout answered, "Steady, Captain," which meant we were on a dangerous collision course with that ship.

The captain sent out a warning message, saying: "We are on a collision course, I advise you to change course twenty degrees."

A reply came back, "I advise you to change course twenty degrees."

The captain sent a second message to the light: "I'm a captain, change YOUR course twenty degrees."

(The reply this time was humble but direct) ... "I'm a seaman second-class, "But YOU need to change course twenty degrees."

Now the captain is furious. He spat out, "Send them this message!: 'I'm a battleship. Change YOUR course twenty degrees right now!'"

The light replied, you may be a battleship, but "I'm a lighthouse."

The captain changed course. Pride kills, luckily in this case – truth 'of the light' won over the captain's pride, thinking he was in charge and knew better, and saved many lives.

Now, pride in circumcision is the topic of this section of text, and we should ask ourselves, does Paul's warning against circumcision being added onto the Gospel apply to us today? Do we hear about churches telling Christians they need to be circumcised to receive salvation? I don't think so – I sure hope it's not! Because we DO have problems, plenty of them. I have seen and heard of several.... here are a few.

#1. The gospel of Salvation through works.

I heard a priest proclaim, at a funeral for someone, that we could all take comfort knowing the person was saved and with Jesus because they had gone to confession and taken communion. Now, for anyone to go take part in confession and communion is great – it hints of that person believed in Jesus.... but this is what Paul is teaching against – we don't put any trust in those good things – those are sewage if we DON'T know, love, and follow Jesus.

It's also easy to see people putting trust in baptism as an infant instead of proclaiming and enjoying a relationship with Jesus.

I have heard people say that the only bible to read is the King James – that sends a dangerous message that you only get God right if you work at your faith with the right words or do religion the right way. This is hard - we all struggle with doing things the "right way" and it spills over into important topics of the day. Right now, politics and health care are VERY difficult – but we need to be careful that we aren't sending the wrong message, because we have so many strong opinions about politics and health care, we can send a message without actually saying it

outright that 'You have real faith, or real devotion to Jesus if you vote this way or that way.... or you have real faith, or you're a real Christian, if you get the covid shot or don't get the covid shot, etc. The choices we make for who to vote for and what to do with health care are VERY important, they just don't determine our salvation based off whatever those choices end up being! We should represent Jesus well as we deal with these issues – I'm fighting to do this better right along with you. It's hard, but here is another false gospel...

#2. The Prosperity gospel

The prosperity gospel teaches that faith in Jesus will bring us health, happiness, and wealth. But to receive these blessings we must 1. Have a strong faith and 2. Give financially and 3. do the right things. If you do these 3 things well – you will be free of suffering. If your suffering, then you must be 1. Not having a strong enough faith. 2. Not giving enough money. Or 3. Not doing good things.

These are odd additions to the Gospel, since Jesus was poor, homeless, betrayed, persecuted, and ...yeah.... died a horrible death for other people's crimes.

#3. The Self-Help Gospel

A self-help movement is also easy to find and is like the prosperity message. The message is that faith in Jesus is the door you walk through to begin using God to become a better version of yourself. Does God have a better way to live? Yes. Does God provide joy – absolutely. But be careful! This message adds using God instead of God loving and using you.

#4. The Miracle / Healing gospel

I do believe in miracles. I do believe God heals people. I do believe these gifts still happen today. But the danger here is adding - if you have enough faith, and enough purity – then, you will be healed. I sat up till 3am at an Alliance men's retreat at Big Sandy talking to a guy who thought a pastor, at the conference, who asked for prayer for cancer had some pretty big sins he was keeping secret – because – if he was really saved and had more purity in his faith he wouldn't be sick with cancer. It's an ugly business when we add things on, when we have the wrong Gospel. I hope I helped that guy see the truth.

#5. The Social Justice gospel

There are churches that have stopped preaching the Gospel, because asking people to repent (that is part of the gospel – teach them to obey...) that's too divisive and it's easier to focus on social issues. This brings in people who want to focus on doing good more than addressing personal sin and holiness. They have replaced the Gospel message with "doing good to their fellow man." This effort is defended with verses like Isaiah 1:17 "bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" and others. We should be addressing social issues, for sure, but we

need to do so in a way that brings the real solution to a broken world – Jesus Christ. The foundation must be presenting the Gospel and discipling new believers. To help people in crisis now without helping them escape crisis when they die should be seen as loving people for a few seconds within an ocean of time as large as our imaginations can fathom. Its bad...really bad. Last.

#6. The Acceptance or Tolerance gospel

Many churches are using a core message of “God loves you unconditionally” and “God loves you just the way you are.” These churches confirm that message by accepting any lifestyle in an attempt to be loving and often go even further and encourage lifestyles contrary to Gods desires. This is a horrifically inaccurate teaching of who God is.

There are churches that openly accept the sins of sexual immorality and even encourage people to cultivate those behaviors. There are churches that accept the sinfulness of divorce for blatant non-biblical reasons. There are churches accept abortion and endorse it. There are “New Age” churches that deny God as the only place to find truth and mix pagan ideas and traditions of other religions into their worship services, but still use Christianity as a label.

Remember the story of the naval captain? Pride kills faith. God has lowered himself to being our servant in the lighthouse, He is the sending His light into the darkness of the world to save us, to warn us and to help us follow Him. We need to realize, that as much as we want God to change and God to move out of our way (our pride wants that), He is the perfect rock that will never move, He’s the perfect light showing us the way. Not us.

We need to enjoy how much He loves us and know that changing our sinful direction is what he is asking out of love and care for us.

I’m sure there are more false teachings – whatever I have forgotten I apologize, but these are very present right here in our community.

But next, God is trying to help us.

#3 How to fight the good fight of Faith.

Remember Paul, working at considering his accomplishment as rubbish, to kill his pride.....now verse 10

(So)— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Holy smokes is verse 10 packed. This is so very crucial. What is it to know the power of Jesus and His resurrection?

Four things here, First Paul is talking about knowing Jesus personally, because you can interact with Him, and experience Him. That's what Jesus offers, that's what Jesus wants! Think of it this way. You can know what ice cream is by knowing the definition of ice cream out of the dictionary. But a better way to know what ice cream is, to know how wonderful it is, is to taste it. AND the BEST way to know ice cream is to know the definition and taste it - Jesus wants you to know Him like that – to be with Him, to experience Him.

Second, Paul is telling us that we are empowered to fight the good fight of faith with the POWER that Jesus provides. Eph3:20 says “*..to Him who is able to do far more than we can ask or imagine, according to the POWER at work within us.*” Also, in Col 1:11 *...be strengthened with all POWER, according to His glorious might,...!*”

Third, Paul says knowing Jesus is to know the power of His resurrection!

How can I be resurrected? I'm not dead, am I? Well, in Eph2:1 we read that we are dead in our sin. We also read in John 3:16 that *God so loved the world that He gave his son Jesus, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.* And back in Eph 2:5 we read that ⁵*even when we were dead in our trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ* ⁶*and raised us up with him!*

Without Jesus we are dead.

With Jesus we know the power of His resurrection and that gives us life!

This means raised out of sin – now, raised into life - now – not just in heaven.

And we are commanded and empowered to repent and obey God – now.

The students who just came back from Big Sandy were given a verse for the week – it was 1Cor5:17 *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold the new has come.”* We are NEW. AND this new life brings a fight against sin. Rom6:12 & 14 says ¹²*Let sin no longer reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its passions...14For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”*

Fourth, I'm still in verse 10, Paul has shared that we know Jesus and want to fight sin....so that.. we are more able to *“share His suffering, becoming like Him in death. That by any means possible (we) attain the resurrection from the dead.”*

The last part of verse 10 and verse 11 are wonderful revelations to how practically true God's word is. To fight off our own sinfulness as well as the sinfulness of the world...that's a big job that is extremely challenging. It brings suffering and calls for us to use anything we can to fight sin. Jesus suffered as He fought sin each day and on the cross. We fight and suffer with our own sin everyday – *“all fall short of the glory of God”* Rom3:10. And we can suffer persecution

for our faith, *we are not better than our Lord, as they persecuted Him they will persecute us.* (Jn15:20).

But now Verses 12-brings me great joy. I recognize I don't do this very well. I'm far too focused on my own life, far too focused on MY success and My accomplishments. I don't fight my own sin or fight against the sins brought into our church as well as I could. I don't utilize everything God provides for me to fight sin as well as I could. And now Paul, who has been a Christian for around 25-30 years (and began his walk with Christ with far more bible knowledge than I have now....) is telling us that he is still a work in progress. Isn't that what he's saying. ¹² *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* That is very encouraging to me. Paul, 30 years in – the smartest Christian I have ever read, he's like man...this is hard. It is hard – so don't get so frustrated with people who disagree with you about non-gospel issues! Remember this mess is part of God's plan to make us like Himself – (all things work for our good to conform us into the image of Jesus, Rom8:28-29). So have grace for each other! Represent Jesus well!

And now Paul repeats his game plan to be more effective and successful as a Christian – he says, ¹³ *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Can you see that – Paul is repeating his effort to look at all his accomplishments as rubbish. He wants to be like Jesus, and he knows he needs to kill off pride to succeed. So, he forgets what lies behind, it's rubbish – forget it.

I have heard this scripture taught with a different focus. I've run into messages that say Paul is forgetting his past sin and looking forward. This is often given as counseling advice – 'forgive yourself so you enjoy a clear conscience and love yourself more, and as you love yourself better you will be able to love those around you more. Now, I am not going to be too harsh with that idea. It has its merits because we do function better when we know we are forgiven. The better teaching of that idea is to look to Jesus to give you forgiveness, not yourself. That's how Paul started this chapter – remember you are forgiven by Jesus and therefore "REJOICE IN THE LORD"!

But, because Paul has been pointing out how he considers good works from his life as rubbish to kill off pride– I believe the proper context for this text is Paul encouraging us to forget our good works to kill off our pride, so we are humble. Being humble is the best mindset for loving others. Don't relish in your good deeds. The gals that are going through Jennie Allen's "Get Out of My Head" small group study (on Rightnow media for anyone to enjoy) they may recognize that what I'm saying is what she says also – Jennie is quite clear that one of the most effective weapons of faith is humility and one of the worst traps is pride.

We need to stay humble and focus on the main goals of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

What is the upward call? What are the main goals? I think a pretty good list is.

1. To Love God & love others
 - a. Matt22:25-36, Mk12:30-31 (what are the greatest commandments – Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.)
2. How do you really love others as yourself...& Love others like Jesus?
 - a. Phil2:3-8 (do nothing out of rivalry or conceit (rivalry and conceit – those are pride issues, when you work to prove you know more than others, to BE RIGHT – that’s rivalry, when you push to point out how others are wrong in ways that don’t draw them into seeing Jesus, that’s conceit – its ugly) but in humility consider others more important than yourself. Be like Jesus and let go of your importance and be humble, serve others to the extreme like Jesus served you all the way to death!)
3. Make disciples and teach them (Matt28:19-20) go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, son, and holy spirit – teaching them to obey all I have commanded you.

Let’s focus on these core things....and focus less on the non-gospel issues.

Verse 15 – Paul urges the mature Christians to think this way, to press on to the upward call of God IN Christ Jesus. He also says that if you disagree with this, God will correct you! I love that. We should work harder at staying true to what we have attained, verse 16, – the gospel.

So, let’s hold true to the Gospel and let go of anything else that may be getting in the way of fulfilling the main goals of loving God, loving others like Jesus, & making disciples and teaching them!

To bring this to a close,

Verses 17 to the end and even into chapter verse 1 of Chapter 4 – Paul encourages us to follow his example. Paul knew he wasn’t perfect, but he also knew his life was being lived out in a way that other Christians could benefit from. Paul also hammers home the seriousness of this situation by making it clear that these people who add requirements and ideologies onto the Gospel were enemies of Christ! Paul communicates that these false teachers were getting swept up in church efforts that fed themselves (their god is their belly) and puffed up their pride (their glory is their shame) because they were thinking about earthy goals instead of heavenly ones.

Paul ends this part of his letter with echoes of his encouragement to “rejoice in the Lord” by reminding us of some core reasons to have joy.

#1. Our citizenship and salvation is set in heaven! #2. Christ is coming again. #3. When Jesus comes back we will receive heavenly bodies & enjoy heaven with Him. Therefore, #4. We should, *stand firm in the Lord*...Vs 1 or chapter 4.

Let us as a church rally around a true Gospel message. Remember – He is with us until the end of the age (Matt28:20). May we respond more each day and may God be glorified with new souls being won for heaven!

Let’s pray. Lord Help us take no pride in our efforts but remember we are called to be servants to others in love so that they may come to know you. Help us fight sin with everything you supply and reflect You in our efforts to grow. Help us save people lost within false gospel efforts by teaching and showing them the truth. This is difficult Lord, help us please, and thank you for your perfect love. Amen