

Please turn in your copies of God's Word to Philippians chapter 3. This morning we continue our series in Philippians, recognizing the emphasis Paul is placing upon practical religion. The doctrinal has given way to the practical, something which we as believers today would do well to remember. Right doctrine must always lead to right practice. We will see this in our text today. Hear now the Word of the living and true God from Philippians chapter 3, and I will be reading the first three verses.

Read Philippians 3:1-3

Pray

It's always interesting to me when I come across an article online about counterfeit art being found. It blows my mind that someone can be so incredibly skilled that they can not only accurately mimic the style of a famed artist but also recreated some of the most famous pieces with such great accuracy that even art connoisseurs have difficulty recognizing a fake. You would think this would be a relatively rare occurrence because of all that is involved in making a forgery, but it might surprise you that the counterfeit art market is a \$6 billion per year enterprise. Throughout the years there have been counterfeits which have made their way into famed art galleries, millionaires' private collections, and even into some of the most well known and respected art museums. One such work is a marble statue known as the Getty Kouros which was purchased by the Getty Museum in 1985 for \$7 million, which would be nearly \$19 million today. This statue remains on display at the Getty Museum with a sign that reads, "Greek, about 530 B.C., or modern forgery." To this day there are still those who are convinced that this is an authentic work. It's amazing to me that people put this much effort into imitating the real thing just to con people, to deceive people. There are other things that people counterfeit as well, such as money, jewelry, and historical documents. And, friends, Christianity is not immune to the schemes of counterfeiters. Some are incredibly obvious like Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Branch Dividians. Those who are members of the visible Church are very likely to spot

these imitations from miles away. Yet others have much more of the truth in them, such as Romanism and Eastern Orthodoxy. These smell of authentic Christianity and have much more of the truth in them, but anyone with a discerning eye can spot the differences. And still others are much more insidious, much more deceptive, drawing away those who are within the true Church with their lies and perversions. They look so much like what Christianity is that there remains to this day a fight over their authenticity. They have become the Getty Kouros of Christianity. The Philippian Church was experiencing an influx of a vain imitation of the true religion among them, and Paul addresses this problem here in our text. Heed the words of Paul lest you too be deceived. The exhortation to you this morning is to embrace authentic Christianity and avoid all imitations. We will consider this by looking at three tests of authenticity: first, who you rejoice in; next, what to believe; and finally, how you worship.

The first test of authenticity in evaluating religion is to look at who you rejoice in. Paul very clearly tells the Philippian believers what authentic Christianity looks like in this regard, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.” He tells these believers that true authentic Christianity is characterized by rejoicing in the Lord. It is Jehovah alone who is to receive all glory in heaven and on earth. “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” (Galatians 6:14) This is nothing new that Paul is teaching the Philippians. Joy and rejoicing are one of the most common themes throughout this letter. We’ve already seen this emphasis on joy and rejoicing in the Lord earlier in his writing. Chapter 1 verse 18, “What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.” Verses 25 and 26, “And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.”

Chapter 2 verse 2, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” Verses 16-18, “Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.”

It is good for us often to hear the same truths, to revive the remembrance and strengthen the impression of things of importance. It is a vain curiosity to desire always to hear some new thing. Yet many in the modern Church are seeking out something new, something which captivates them because they have never heard it before. Friends, it is novelty which breeds imitations, counterfeits. I’ve said it before, and I still believe it holds true, that one of the most dangerous things a believer can do is get a PhD. I’m not against academia per se, but the problem with PhDs is they require new scholarship. I’ve seen way too many men get into a PhD program and develop what I call academic hubris, this thought that because they are now an academic they are an authority. No longer do they rejoice in the Lord, but instead they rejoice in their own academic work. The drive to remain relevant in the academic community then leads them to do new scholarship in a field that in turn develops into a false imitation of the faith they once professed. You end up with men denying that Adam was the first man, espousing theistic evolution, denying the providential preservation of the Word of God in exchange for German liberalism in the form of higher criticism. Sometimes we need to take a step back and simply be reminded of what we have been taught before. Stop seeking out new understandings, new interpretations, new insights into the faith, and return to the old paths which are set before you. Do not find your joy in any of these things, in academia, in scholarship, in new understandings, or even in yourself, but instead find your joy in the Lord and rejoice in Him.

Where is your joy found? Is it in Christ or the things of the world? Is it in Jehovah or the circumstances of this life. How many of you here root your joy in your circumstances? I'm sure every one of us does it from time to time. You derive your deepest happiness and contentment of the soul from the things, people, and situations around you. But haven't you found that when those circumstances prove difficult, your joy withers and dies like flowers in your yard, and in its place grows up the weeds of anxiety and despair, doubt and worry, frustration, and all manner of sin? Root your joy in Jesus Christ who sits enthroned above your troubles, reigns as Lord over them, and who is not subject to change because of them. Instead of being swept away by the currents and waves of a changing providence, place your joy on the immovable rock of Jesus Christ, and let the waves of a difficult providence do their worst! As you rest upon Him, your joy will be immovable, and the temptations to despair, worry, fear, and doubt will gain no purchase in your heart. Being reminded to rejoice in the Lord is important for the spiritual safety of our souls. Friends, authentic Christianity begins with who you rejoice in.

Then there is the second test of authenticity, what to believe. Paul recognizes that there are those who have crept into the Church and begun teaching false doctrines and heresies. If you are to embrace authentic Christianity you must know what to believe. Paul shows this by exposing the false teachers, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." He first uses the term dogs to describe these false teachers. Dogs during this time were these cute, cuddly, loyal pets like we have today. They were wild, dirty, profane, disease spreading creatures. In fact, this was a common word at the time that the Jews attributed to the Gentiles. These false teachers, likely the Judaizers spoken against in Galatians, are nothing but dogs. For the sake of filling their belly, they assailed true doctrine with their impure barking. Matthew Henry says, "The prophet calls the false prophets dumb dogs (Isa. 56:10), to which the apostle here seems to refer. Dogs, for their malice against the faithful professors of the gospel of Christ, barking at them and biting them."

He goes on to call them evil workers. These men under the pretext of building up the Church, they did nothing but ruin and destroy everything. Their lies and vain rituals were not works of good which glorified Jehovah, but were instead works of evil brought about in service to their father the devil.

Lastly, he calls them the concision, or perhaps some of your translations may say ‘mutilators of the flesh.’ The Judaizers were boasting that they were the circumcision, the true heirs of the promise to Abraham, and that if any were to become heirs of the promise they too just join in the party of the circumcision. They were adding the works of the ceremonial law to the Gospel of free grace, thus perverting it and making it no gospel at all. What’s interesting here is the play on words that Paul uses to describe these false teachers. He uses the very same word that the Greek version of the Old Testament uses of the self-mutilating prophets of Baal to describe these Judaizing false teachers who insist upon circumcision. He is saying that instead of becoming ceremonially pure by the cutting away of their foreskin, they have become ceremonially unable to enter into the public worship of God by the mutilation of their flesh. Those who pervert the Gospel by adding works unto it are no better than the pagans who mutilate their flesh in order to appease their false gods. And just as they have mutilated and torn asunder their flesh, these false teachers mutilate and tear asunder the Church of Christ and His Gospel.

The call to believers is to beware these false teachers. There may not be many within the Church who are insisting upon circumcision in order to receive the Gospel. There may not be many who insist upon an embracing of the Old Covenant ceremonial system in conjunction with teaching on Christ. But you would be surprised how many there actually are. There’s a movement that is sweeping through America right now called Torah observance which is nothing but this Judaizing heresy brought to life, and it’s even having some impact within Reformed circles. But that is one of those counterfeits which is easily seen and avoided, but make no mistake

there are much more insidious imitations which threaten the vitality of the Church. I've been asked by some why I call out Romanism and Federal Vision and the Church of Christ so much. The reason is because these are the most insidious imitations of authentic Christianity threatening the Church today. I have family members and friends who have been deceived by these false teachings and I'm sure you do as well. Calvin says, "Unquestionably, it is the part of a good pastor, not merely to supply the flock with pasture, and to rule the sheep by his guidance, but to drive away the wolves when threatening to make an attack upon the fold, and that not merely on one occasion, but so as to be constantly on the watch." Contending earnestly for the faith is a perpetual obligation placed upon the church, so we are being disobedient when, in the name of politeness or political correctness, we do not denounce false teachers and their false teaching. Brothers and sisters, if you are to embrace authentic Christianity you must know what to believe.

The last test of authentic Christianity is how you worship. Paul gives the positive example for how true believers are to worship the Lord, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." The contrast between the true believers and the false teachers continues to be highlighted here. Paul says that these false teachers are the concision, the mutilation, while Christians are the true circumcision. In Romans 9:6 Paul makes this teaching plain, "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel." Circumcision of the foreskin is not what makes one a child of Abraham, but circumcision of the heart. Romans 2:28-29, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." And this is not something new either, but is something that these Judaizers, if they truly did understand their own Scriptures, should have known. This teaching is clear in Deuteronomy 10:12-17, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his

ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked. For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward.”

And it is those who are the true circumcision, who have circumcised their hearts, who worship God in the spirit. True worship is not about the ceremonial or the ritual or, dare I say, the liturgical, but is instead spiritual. We have to do with the reality, while they rest in the symbols: we have to do with the substance, while they look to the shadows. This ought to call to mind Christ's encounter with the woman at the well where in John 4:24 He says, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” There is a right way in which worship of Jehovah must be done, and that is in spirit and in truth. I love how Charles Simeon puts it, “Persons may be, and often are, very zealous advocates for the external of religion, while they are altogether destitute of its life and power... The true Christian, on the contrary, though not always in the same frame, ‘worships God in the Spirit,’ that is, not only with the inmost affections of his soul, but through the direction and assistance of the Holy Ghost... He ‘pours out his soul before God,’ (Psalm 62:4) and ‘stirs up himself to lay hold on God,’ (Isaiah 64:7) and says, like Jacob, ‘I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.’ (Genesis 32:26)”

So friends, let me ask you, how do you worship? Do you worship in the spirit, rejoicing in Christ; or do you take confidence in the flesh? Has the Gospel of Jesus Christ so captivated you that you long for His worship, that you anticipate the Lord's Day with

eagerness each and every week? When Christians do not pray, when they shun prayer meetings, when they grow agitated and impatient with public worship, when they become intolerant of lingering in the presence of our Father — speaking with Him, praising Him, listening to Him — something is deeply, deeply wrong with their relationship to Him or their understanding of Him. He is your Father! He loves you! Why wouldn't you delight to linger in His presence and run to Him often and seek His counsel daily? This is why we ought to despise innovation in worship, because they take away from the simplicity of Spirit-filled worship as commanded by the Lord. Authentic Christianity has as a hallmark of it worship as regulated by the Word of God. We don't need instruments or man-made hymns or censers or advent candles or church calendars or man-made holy days. We ought to be conforming our worship after the pattern which the Spirit of Christ laid out in Scripture for us. It is the imitation, the counterfeits, which insist upon these things, perverting and polluting the purity of Christ's Church. Avoid them! Denounce them! Speak out against them! And embrace authentic Christianity in how you worship.

Brothers and sisters, sometimes imitations can be pleasing to the senses. Sometimes they can scratch and itching in your flesh and satisfy what your sinful hearts desire. And sometimes they do it in the most subtle of ways, deceiving the masses, and causing if it were possible even the elect to fall away. Do not be lulled into a false sense of security thinking that you are immune to the deceptions of the false teachers of our day. Be on guard. Be vigilant. Embrace authentic Christianity and avoid all imitations.