

“The Characteristics of True Israel”
Philippians 3:1-3
(Preached at Trinity, February 19, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 1** Paul described the heart of a teacher. He tells the Philippian church that he considered it no imposition to teach them, even if at times he had to repeat the same doctrines over and over. It was essential for them to hear; it was for their protection for false teachers are always lurking about.
2. In **Verses 2-3** Paul describes one of the most dangerous heresies of his day. These heretics were known as Judaizers. They presented a perverted form of the Gospel insisting that Gentiles coming to Christ must first be circumcised. They claimed to be the true people of God, those circumcised according to the Mosaic Law. Paul declares that Christians who have trusted Christ by faith alone, both Jew and Gentile, are the true circumcision.
Philippians 3:3 NAU - "we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh"
3. Paul was declaring that Christians are actually the true Israel. Paul taught this consistently:
Romans 2:28-29 NAU - "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."
Galatians 3:7-9 NAS - "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."
4. The New Testament makes it clear God has but one covenant people
There is no division between Jew and Gentile today. The true sons of Abraham are the children of faith. Jews and Gentiles in Christ are a part of a single fold.
John 10:14-16 NAU - "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd."
5. In **Verse 3** Paul gives three characteristics of the true Jew, the true Israelite, those who are the true circumcision. This describes those of us who have trusted Christ.
 - (1) They worship God in the Spirit
 - (2) They glory in Christ
 - (3) They put no confidence in the flesh

I. True Israel worships God in the Spirit

A. Christians are the true worshippers of God.

1. We have been awakened to the glories of our Creator. We have been forgiven and reconciled. God is our God and we are His people.
Jeremiah 32:38-40 NAU - "They shall be My people, and I will be their God; ³⁹ and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for *the good of* their children after them. ⁴⁰ "I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me."
2. We have been united with Christ and indwelled with His Spirit. Our lives have been captivated by our Creator. We live for Him.

B. Christian worship is the grand display of the Old Covenant promises.

Jesus made a profound statement to the woman at the well.

- 1 Her mind was confined to carnal expressions of worship—worship confined to the physical connection to a particular people and confined to a particular location. She was expressing the continuing feud between the Samaritans and the Jews. She presumed that Samaritan worship on Mount Gerizim was the only true worship of God.

John 4:20 NAU - "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

2. Jesus corrected her false worship. First of all, He corrected her presumption that being a Samaritan guaranteed accepted worship. What He tells her was shocking:

John 4:22 NAU - "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews."

Jesus was telling this Samaritan woman that the Jews held the key to salvation. What He was saying was Jewish worship in Jerusalem was proper because of what it pointed to. All of the promises pointed to Christ. It wasn't the Temple that made it accepted. The Temple would soon be destroyed. The true sacrifice would be offered up by God's true Temple – Jesus Christ.

3. Jesus was saying that true worship can only come through Him.

a. Then He adds:

John 4:23-24 NAU - "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

b. True worship is a matter of the heart. It demands the indwelling Spirit who leads unto all truth.

C. But there is something important for us to see in Paul's use of words here.

1. Paul is using a word that's not easy to translate. It literally refers to liturgical service—thus, worship.
2. For Christians, it implies an all-encompassing life of worship. True Israel lives before Christ. Filled with the Holy Spirit, their hearts are enflamed with Christ. This leads to a life of spiritual service.

3. This word is often translated with an eye upon religious service.
Romans 1:9 NAU - "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the gospel* of His Son, is my witness *as to how unceasingly I make mention of you,*"
2 Timothy 1:3 NAS - "I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day,"
Hebrews 12:28 NAU - "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe"
4. Paul uses the noun form of the word in **Romans 12**
Romans 12:1-2 NAU - "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.* ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
5. The Christian has given himself over to the spiritual service of worship. It has consumed his life.
 This worship is a spiritual activity, only possible through Christ our Mediator, and only possible under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
6. It affects our entire life. Paul expressed this in **Chapter 1**
Philippians 1:27 NAU - "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel"
 - a. It is a life of service to Christ.
 - b. It is a life looking out for the interests of others as modeled by Christ.

II. The true Israel glories in Christ

- A. The true child of God, the true Israel has had his affections kindled towards Christ.
 1. Paul is fond of this word. He uses it over 50 times. To glory means to boast.
 Human beings find much of which to boast – but it is all vanity
 We boast in our abilities, our achievements, our possessions, our families.
 Our minds and affections are continually drawn to the things of this world.
 2. The Christian glories in Christ.
Jeremiah 9:24 NAU - "but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,"
1 Corinthians 1:31 NAS - "just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."
2 Corinthians 10:17 NAS - "But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord."

- B. It is the Holy Spirit that stirs our hearts in affection for Christ
1. Perhaps the greatest work of the Holy Spirit is glorifying Christ
It is the Holy Spirit that makes Christ glorious to you.
John 16:13-14 NAU - "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you."
 2. The Holy Spirit enables us to comprehend the love of Christ which allows us to taste of the fullness of God.
Ephesians 3:16-19 NAU - "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."
- C. Your attitude towards Christ is the clearest indication of your spiritual condition
1. What you are is defined by whom you follow, whom you serve.
The Christian by the Holy Spirit is able to call Christ Lord
1 Corinthians 12:3 NAU - "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit."
 2. Calling Jesus Lord is not just an outward profession. It involves the entire life.
 - a. Jesus warned of those at the day of judgment who had only professed Jesus with their lips
Matthew 7:21 NAU - "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*."
 - b. To call Jesus Lord is to recognize His Sovereign authority – His Lordship
 3. Bowing before Jesus as Lord is at the heart of Christian worship. This is what worshipping in the Spirit looks like.
Revelation 4:10-11 NAU - "the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."
Revelation 5:12 NAU - "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."
- D. There is no higher glorying in Christ than trusting in His person and work alone
1. The Judaizers gloried in the flesh. True Israel looks to Christ alone
 2. This is at the heart of the third characteristic:
"and put no confidence in the flesh"

3. Glorifying in Christ means resting in Him, finding peace and comfort in Him. Glorifying in Christ is a life that has found Christ sufficient. Nothing else brings us satisfaction like Him.

III. They put no confidence in the flesh

This is the flip-side of the second characteristic

Rather than boasting in the flesh we boast in Christ.

A. What does it mean to boast in the flesh

1. This would include all of our earthly life—All that we have filled our lives with since we've been born. But Paul is being very specific here.
2. The Judaizers were proud of their Jewish tradition, their heritage..
 - a. They were proud of being the physical offspring of Abraham.
John 8:31-33 NAU - "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³ They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free '?"
 - b. They were proud of their circumcision. To them, this was at the heart of their relationship with God. It defined them as the people of God. But it had become merely an external mark.
3. In the following verses Paul will argue that if anyone had cause to boast in fleshly religion he did. He refers to himself as a "Hebrew of Hebrews."

B. Many still boast in the flesh

1. There are endless religions, each claiming to outdo the other as the true way to God—each one with their rules to follow to make one acceptable to God.
2. Our natural religious inclination is to try to earn our salvation. We think that if we do enough good God will be indebted to us.
3. If you ask most people why they think they should be allowed into heaven they will give a works-based answer.
4. Do you believe your actions affect God's favor, that you can earn His approval.
5. Scripture will not allow any confidence in our own efforts
Ephesians 2:8-9 NAU - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."
6. For the Christian, our only boast is in Christ—His person and work. His death, His atoning sacrifice

Conclusion:

1. Are you the true circumcision, the true Israel? Has God changed your heart in such a way as to boast only in Christ. Has Jesus Christ captured your heart. Are your affections kindled towards Him?
2. The problem with the Judaizers is they were blending God's grace with their own self-efforts and trusting in these works. There are many who call themselves Christians who are doing this very thing. They are not resting in Christ alone.
3. If you are placing your confidence anywhere but upon Christ you are resting upon sinking sand. Look to Jesus alone. Trust in Him alone. He alone is sufficient.