

The King Supreme
It's all About Jesus Christ
Ambassadors For the Kingdom Series - Part 6
Phil 3:1-21
12/14/19-12/15-19

Introduction

- **Our Relationship with God is precious.**
- **Fight to keep Christ your one true and deepest love.**
 - Fight distraction
 - Fight religiousness and legalism
 - Fight your flesh's desire to feed itself
 - Fight the Enemy, whom we call the Devil.
 - Fight the temptation to embrace the culture around you: Materialism, greed, pride, selfishness, etc.
- **Whatever TRUE Christianity costs you it's worth the price**

GIVE All That You Have to GAIN Him

- **Recap of our Series**
 - **Focus = what it looks like to actively live like an ambassador for the Kingdom of God.**
 - **Part 1** - We were encouraged in Part 1 - that we are **works in progress** and that God is not done with us yet. He's building us into greater representatives of the Kingdom every day.
 - **Part 2** - The second week we talked about how we are **better together** and that the Church is an incredible opportunity to be part of something greater that God is doing. We can do more together than apart.
 - **Part 3** - Taught us that we are **walking displays** for God and sometimes He chooses to use us for things that we don't really want, but we need to be okay with His plan and Him getting the glory, even if it doesn't mean we get our way.
 - **Part 4** - Pastor Matt Bach taught us that we are called to live **Humble** lives, **unified** in the service to King Jesus.
 - **Part 5** - Part five talked about how we are **live out loud** for the Kingdom of God so that people can see that God matters and catch a glimpse of what He's like by our lifestyle. We also learned that God calls us to live **thankful and unselfish lives.**
 - **Today =** We learn **how to shed** off the stuff that holds us back **and press forward** into what God is making us to be...

Lesson

- **Pharisee of Pharisees**

- **Paul Warns Against Religiosity**

- **Php 3:1-6** - *“Finally, my brothers [and sisters], rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. 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— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”*

- **Rejoice in the Lord** - That’s an important concept for Paul. He says it multiple times in this book as well as 1st Thessalonians. What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord and why is that so important? To rejoice means to be joyful and pumped up and thankful! It means that despite our circumstances we need to get our minds back on the Lord, how great He is and the wonderful things that He’s done and relish in it.
- **Who are the mutilators of the flesh** - what the heck is Paul talking about? He’s talking about circumcision for religious purposes. The point is that they are cutting their bodies believing that it will make them automatically righteous because they take on the external form of the Jewish people.
- **The Judaizer Group** - there was a group of people who demanded that everyone needed to be fully Jewish and Christian in order to be saved. This included doing all the Jewish stuff but yet have the internal life of a Christian. They said that if you weren’t circumcised that you weren’t likely saved. They demanded a religiousness, a legalism of sorts. These guys followed Paul around wherever he went and kept telling people that Paul’s version of Christianity was light and not good enough, nor holy and righteous enough. They said that he was watering it down and relying too much on feelings and faith while they knew the real way that God wanted it done. Apparently, this group (or a form of this group) had infiltrated the Philippian church.
- **Understanding the Jewish mark of circumcision** - I have to admit that circumcision as the mark of Jewish males, is weird to me. It

seems like a rather 'hidden, outward mark.' Who knows that but the more intimate around you? Also, it wasn't even a strictly Jewish thing, lots of people observed circumcision in that ancient world. So, what in the world?

- **What Circumcision Is and where it comes from** - Circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin of the penis (male reproductive organ). In Gen 17:1-14 we read that God made that procedure a part of the contract/covenant with Abraham and thereby his lineage the Jews. It was not started with Abraham. There are findings in archaeology that show it was done far early (cave paintings which predate written history, as well as Egyptian temple drawings from 4000 bc), and it was on every continent. A lot of the West Semitic peoples did it too (Ammonites, Edomites, Midianites, Moabites, and Phoenicians), but the Philistines didn't, thus the use of argument about that in the David and Goliath story (nor did Assyrians and Babylonians). Most cultures circumcised around puberty (Muslims did it, and still do, around 13 years old - Ishmael's age. Abraham was 99) as an idea of stepping into manhood. The Jews were the only ones to do it in infancy (8th day after birth - some believe that is because the mother's ritual uncleanness/impurity was no longer contagious). Flint knives were used in the early days and it was normally done by the father of the child, at which service the child would be named. But later that job was handed over to a trained practitioner (*mohel*). Non-Israelites were given the opportunity to take on this mark as well (Ex 12:43-49). It brought the Israelites into a contact/covenant of the blessing of God (blessing and cursing contract of the Old Covenant). Later difference cultures arose that didn't circumcise (notably the Greek & Roman empire) and who made fun of the Jews for doing so. (this created the circumcision group = Jews & uncircumcision group = Gentiles).
- **Why this mark?** - This significance of circumcision as a sign for the Jews is a bit unique. God had promised lineage to Abraham who didn't have any children. God did something miraculous through his loins (and his wife's) and the Jewish people multiplied from there. Thus the interaction with the reproductive organ. It also seems to hint at the idea of being born into sin and needing cleansing even from that original sin from Adam (before the child has chosen to sin). It was a statement of God's mercy before

anything was earned. Later we see that God was ultimately concerned with 'circumcision' (preparation, cleansing, surrender) of the heart, and not just of the body. Jesus carried that much further and so did Paul saying that in the end with the New Covenant, the physical act no longer carried any value, but only the inward one of surrender and relationship with Jesus Christ. I do have to add a strange side note: I do think that it's interesting that God put a high restriction on sexual issues for the Jewish people and that is the one time that you would know if someone was a Jew or not. In other words, it's difficult to be sneaky and do something sexual without other people knowing that you are a Jew and knowing that you are out of line.

- **The Role in the NT** - Circumcision is brought up a lot in the New Testament and was quite the issue in the early church. John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul are all recorded as having been circumcised. The early church followed right along with the Jewish customs that the majority of them shared (the church quickly became Gentile AND Jew, but initially it was primarily Jewish). Stephen refers to circumcision to make a point similar to Paul (inside vs. out). By the time that Gentiles came into the church en masse, some decisions had to be made about circumcision. Some argued that new believers had to become Jews first and then Christians, others said that wasn't necessary. When The Holy Spirit baptized the Gentiles, it was brought to the Jerusalem Council by Paul and Barnabas (the missionaries to the Gentiles, the 'uncircumcised'; Peter, James & John were to the 'circumcised' Jews). Peter argued that it wasn't necessary at the Council and that ruling stood for most (Acts 15:13-21). Judaizers disagreed and attacked where they could. Interestingly in Paul's ministry he had his protégé Timothy get circumcised as an adult since his mom was Jewish and it would open the door to the gospel, but refused to get Titus circumcised as an adult since he was a Gentile and it wasn't helpful to the gospel advancement at all. Paul vehemently argued that it wasn't necessary for salvation or Christian faith.
- **Random Side Notes** - only one Christian church (denomination, stream, etc.) retained the observance of ritual circumcision: The Abyssinian Orthodox Church of Ethiopia (3-8th day for infant male), prior to baptism. Also unusually is that

the liturgical year calls January 1st the Feast of the Circumcision to commemorate Christ's obedience to the law on our behalf, evidence by Himself getting circumcised (Lk 2:21). It originated in Spain/France (6th century) and adopted by Rome in 11th century.

- **The Bottom Line** - although circumcision was demanded of Jews in the Old Covenant, it is not required any more under the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. The point of it (similar to the sacrificial system) as a spiritual lesson was to highlight the need of internal cleansing, surrender and change. The inside is more important than the outside. The outside adherence without the internal transformation means nothing. (1 Cor 7:18-19; Rom 2:26-29; Acts 15:11; Rom 3:28-30; Rom 4:3; Gn 15:6; Rom 4:9-12; Gal 3:6-9; Col 2:11-12; Dt 30:6; Jer 31:31-34; Ez 36:25-27; Col 2:12; Rom 2:29)
- **What Paul is Saying** - The word used by Paul of circumcision is *peritome* which means, 'to cut around.' The word mutilating is *katatome*, which means 'to cut into pieces'. (see Gal 5:12 for Paul to continue to blast this group). He's saying that these false teachers (Judaizers) were taking something simple and making an abomination out of it. They were using a 'cutting' element to wreck spiritual lives. They were mutilating a healthy faith by their demands of religious adherence.
 - **The Abrahamic Covenant versus the New Covenant in Jesus** - when Jesus came and set aside parts of the Old Covenant (since He fulfilled them), like the sacrificial system, the Sabbath and Circumcision, it was hard for the Jews to receive after thousands of years of adherence. But all of those rules and systems were highlighting the need for a Savior. Once the Savior had come and took care of all of the needful things, the systems fall away. They are no longer necessary. In the New Covenant it's all about working out what Jesus already did for us. It's acknowledging and living in light of God reaching down to man and rescuing us, cleansing us, purifying us, saving us and bringing us into the family of God in a permanent state of grace. The old way looked forward to salvation, the new way looks back at the Savior.
- **Spirit Matters More Than Flesh** - the inside matters more than the outside in Christianity. The outside is important but it's simply evidence

of what's going on inside. In other words, it's not enough to look and act moral if your heart is not connected to God. But if you are truly connected to God it's going to have an external effect that's visible.

- **If it was Religiosity and External, Paul would win** – He highlights that if it was all about being religious and Jewish, he wins hands down. It's not like he's arguing for something that he doesn't know about or didn't live. He's so hardcore that he would be considered a Pharisee-level lifestyle past. He has all the **pedigree**, if that really mattered and made him more righteous. He's not arguing as a sloppy Gentile but as a strict Jew.
- **It Ain't Nothin...**
 - **Paul's Religious Past Brought Him Nothing to Advance True Faith**
 - **Php 3:7-8** – *“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...”*
 - **It didn't matter** – all that stuff, all that pedigree, all his “Jewishness” didn't make him any more righteous. Why? Because that's not what it's about.
 - **It actually put him behind** – considering what it's really all about, relationship and faith, he actually felt that his past set him back. Instead of simply learning a way to live (like the Gentiles kind of did), he had to **UNLEARN** a bunch of stuff and shed off that mindset in order to grasp what God was really trying to say.
 - **Anything He loses for Christ is worth it** – Paul continually explains that whatever he needs to let go of for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of knowing Christ more, he is willing to let go. He would rather lose everything and gain more of Jesus than have all the stuff, or hang on to all the stuff and lack in his relationship with Christ.
 - **What you'll be talking about in your groups this week** – What in your past should you let go of that is holding you back from growing in the Lord? What should you thank the Lord for and hang on to from your past that has really helped you in your faith? How much of your religious past has hindered or helped? In what ways?
 - **Don't Stop Believing**
 - **A Call to Press On While in Process**

- **Php 3:9-13a** - *“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— 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. 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. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.”*
 - **Where real righteousness comes from** - Christianity teaches that our attempts to earn our own righteousness are foolish and useless. The only righteousness that counts is the purest kind. We can only get that kind from Jesus Christ directly. He is pure and transfers His perfect righteousness to His people. We are acceptable because of His sacrifice. The cross makes us worthy and righteous. That doesn't mean that we don't try to do good things, it means that we don't follow a religious system (earning merit to go to heaven - man achieving heaven and reaching God), we follow a faith concept (receiving something from God - God reaches down to man). Our good works flow FROM God's work in our lives, not earning our way to heaven.
 - **Reminder of Faith versus Religion**
 - **Faith = Trust and Confidence** - instead of going out separately and trying to earn righteousness, we trust that what Christ did is REAL and SUFFICIENT. That's living by faith. We are putting all of our eggs in His basket.
 - **What you'll be talking about in your groups this week** - Clarifying how Christianity works...by faith alone, which is God's grace (unearned) to us. Our good works flow from our internal transformation. Etc. We are not to be in a performance system to earn God's love or earn our salvation. We live out of the overflow of what God is doing in us, because of His mercy. We believe this by faith and hang on to it trusting that Jesus is who He said He is and did what He said He did.
 - **I'm not perfect yet** - Paul admits that he's in process just like the rest of us. Yes, he's hardcore. Yes, he's giving his all. Yes, he's doing his best, but he's not perfect. That only comes when Jesus finishes His work with us at our death (or His 2nd coming).
- **Let It Go and Let's Go**
 - **A Mandate to Advance Forward**

- **Php 3:13b-16** - *“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. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”*
 - **Proper Posture: Forgetting the past and straining forward** - It's not about saying that what we did in the past doesn't matter, it's led us to right here, right now. Nor is it saying that we shouldn't be held accountable for the bad stuff that we've done. What he's saying is that whatever attempts we've made to earn our way to God didn't matter and we need to let that all go and press into the RIGHT WAY that Jesus lays out for us: Faith, trust, love. That's all that matters. We don't bother trying to rework the old, we lean into the new.
 - **Don't lose ground** - don't give in to the distraction and pressures around us. Keep the gospel simple and clear in our hearts.
- **Walking on the Clouds**
 - **Join Paul's Example of Living Heavenly Minded**
 - **Php 3:17-21** - *“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”*
 - **Imitate Me & other role models** - It's really important to have Christian role models. We need people that we can look at to see the steps and increments about how real Christian life looks. We don't have enough information about Jesus Christ and His day to day to see how He walked in the normal times, so that He would be able to operate in the extraordinary times. But we have those around us who are pursuing God with all they have and making good decisions. Those are the people that we follow AS THEY FOLLOW CHRIST. We don't take our eyes off Jesus in order to follow someone else. We keep Jesus in sight at all times and see how other people are working it out. It's like climbing a mountain and Jesus is way up there. We are still following His path, but we need the climbers in the middle that show how to get up that one narrow pass, or how to get a good foothold on that one slippery area.

- **The bad leaders out there - watch out for them.** Be careful of who you your role models are. There's a lot of people in ministry that are in it for the wrong reason. There's a lot of people who say they are Christians but aren't really interested in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Remember, our goal is to follow Christ, insofar as a human being is helping us do that, great. If they are not, then it's unhelpful. But be careful who you follow as a role model. If you follow the role model of someone mean you will tend to become mean. If you follow a role model that is someone who is a legalist, you will find those tendencies cropping up in your life.
 - **Their god is their belly** - These particular leaders that Paul is referring to seem to be led by their cravings. I can only assume that when he talks about their god being their belly, he's talking about selfishness and gluttony of some sort. Maybe I'm wrong about that, but that's what it seems to be to me.
 - **They glory in their shame** - What they should be embarrassed about (not being legit), they are proud of. They are proud of their ministries and what it's accomplishing. They are proud of their attention and fame they get from the way they do things. They are proud of the money that is coming in to support their weak version of Christianity. Why? Because they have an earthly mindset and what they are doing is furthering them in this life so they are proud of it. But if this life isn't the only thing and not the most important thing then they shouldn't be proud of that at all.
- **Our citizenship is in heaven - "from it, we wait"** - But we don't live here, with an earthly mindset, we live with a heavenly mindset. That means that we count the spiritual things more important than the temporal, physical things. It means that we advance God's kingdom, not our own. It means that what the Bible says is important is more valuable than what society says is important. Up in that mindset, we wait for the Lord to get His plan done. We wait for everything to be revealed as it will be. We wait for God's 'well done, good and faithful servant' to us. We don't get distracted by the silliness of this world and some garbage done in Jesus' name.
- **Awaiting the Savior to Transform our bodies** - And indeed we wait for the transformation of our earthly bodies into our permanent bodies that will be equipped and prepared to live in heaven (new heavens and new earth). We wait in our frustration and limitation, in our struggle, now, for

the Lord to finish what He started in us. It's tough now but the story isn't over and when its' over it's going to be glorious.

Conclusion

- Keep it simple: Keep your focus on Christ alone.
- Don't get distracted.
- Don't trust in religious works, keep faith pure.
- God's working on us and one day it will all make sense and come together.