

Protected by Joy

Aiming Higher . . . Pressing Onward, Part 1

Philippians 3:1-3

I found some interesting statistics on annual spending by Americans within a one year period.

Last year Americans spent:

- \$550 million on pretzels;
- \$1.4 billion on over-the-Counter Teeth Whiteners;
- \$50 billion in pet care – in fact, \$310 million was spent this past year on Pet Halloween Costumes;
- \$500 million was spent last year on golf balls – we’re always losing them, right?
- \$2 billion was spent in this country last year on tattoos;
- \$66 million was spent last year by people removing tattoos – that ought to be a clue.
- \$5 billion was spent worldwide on ring tones – just in case you thought your kids were the only ones buying them
- \$16 billion was spent on chocolate candy
- But only \$800 million on Twinkies – because everybody knows they’re not as good for you as chocolate candy.

That’s a lot of money for a lot of stuff we could argue isn’t good at all . . . or at least not all that necessary . . . I’ve just rattled off \$55 billion worth of stuff.

But all those figures pale quite a bit when you consider the costs for defense; the money spent protecting us within our borders and around the world:

- National Defense is more than \$750 billion dollars annually;
- an additional \$27 billion is dedicated to Law Enforcement

- another \$15 billion for Homeland Security
- and \$11 billion for international security and criminal justice assistance.
- Americans will also purchase and install some sort of security system in their home or apartment to the tune of \$30 billion a year.

And not a complaint will be heard – why?

Because of all the things you can spend money on – I mean, you can obviously argue the value of tattoos, ring tones and chocolate – well, maybe not chocolate – the truth is, protecting yourself and your loved ones and your country are worthy investments.

In fact, the axiom is true that the best offense is a good – what? – defense.

That’s true for countries and it happens to be true for Christians.

In fact, as Paul begins his next comments to the Philippian believers – and I invite your attention to his letter where we arrive at **chapter 3** today – evidently, defensive strategies are on the mind of the Apostle.

Philippians chapter 3:1. You’ll notice that chapter 3 opens with the words, ***Finally, my brethren.***

I couldn’t help but chuckle at first because Paul sounded like so many preachers. He says, “Finally” but then goes on for 2 more chapters.

What’s wrong with that?!

Kent Hughes added in his commentary the story of the little boy who whispered to his father in church, “Daddy, what does the pastor mean when he says, “Finally”; to which his father responded, “Absolutely nothing, son.”¹

I didn't think that was funny either. In fact, this is proof that I am following an apostolic precedent.

Well, actually, the word Paul uses is a word (το λοιπον) that doesn't mean he's run out of things to say, but that he's signaling to his readers that he's about to move on to other matters.ⁱⁱ

You could translate it, "Furthermore . . . or, "Now then".

Before Paul moves on, he repeats one critical issue at hand. Notice again – *verse 1 – Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.*

He's commanded it in *chapter 2:17-18* and later on he'll command it again in *chapter 4:4*.

Paul uses this verb as an imperative – in other words, you could put an exclamation after the phrase. It's a command – *rejoice in the Lord*. You could also write after it in your margin – Just do it.

Do it!

Rejoicing is a command.

- Expressing joy then is not the result of an emotion – because you can't command someone to feel a certain way; you can't command emotion;
- joy then isn't a temperamental characteristic because you can't rewire someone by simply commanding it;
- joy then isn't related to circumstances or health or bank accounts – because you can't control circumstances and health and bank accounts just because you want to.

To *rejoice in the Lord* means to look to Him alone as your depository of joy. To rejoice in the Lord means that you find in the Lord your source of joy; He is the highest object of your joy; He is the treasure and fellowship of joy.ⁱⁱⁱ

But Paul goes on to add – notice – *to write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard to you.*

In other words, I've already commanded you to rejoice, but you need to understand that rejoicing is literally your safeguard and so I want to repeat it again for your safety.

A joyful Christian actually has a defense system built around his mind and heart.

On author commented on this command and wrote that the believer simply can't be complaining and at the same time rejoicing in the Lord.^{iv}

It's simply impossible to do both at the same time.

And another reason a joyful spirit protects you is because it's also impossible to be finding your joy in the Lord and at the same time trying to find joy in sin.

It's impossible to do both.

Which is why Paul says here that rejoicing in Christ is your *safeguard*.

The word Paul uses here for *safeguard* (ασφαλης) comes from a word that literally means to keep from tripping up or stumbling or losing your stability.^v

Imagine, rejoicing in the Lord can do all of that and more!

Matthew Henry, the Puritan expositor of the 1600's put it this way when he wrote, "The joy of the Lord is a divine armor against the assaults of our spiritual enemies and puts our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks . . . the taste of joy in our mouths makes the tempter's offerings seem bland by comparison."^{vi}

Joy is our protector. *Rejoicing in the Lord* is a spiritual defense system . . . it is an activity we choose to do.

Paul writes here, "Let me repeat myself – obey this command – rejoice in the Lord."

This is what we choose!

Now Paul moves on to tell us who we must avoid.

Paul wants our defense radar systems to pick up on – to send out warning signs regarding certain individuals.

This is what we choose . . . now – this is who we avoid; notice *verse 2. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.*

Did you notice three times Paul used the word "beware. It's actually another command (βλεπω) with an exclamation point.

It means to watch out – to continually be on the lookout.^{vii}

In other words, you are wearing your bullet proof vest labeled rejoicing in the Lord – and then you're more alert than ever, looking all around for dangerous enemies that will steal your joy.

Just who are they?

Paul describes them with three rather blunt, insulting, derisive terms that he really doesn't want the believer to forget.

In fact, there are some who believe Paul was really out of line to speak in such derogatory terms . . . I mean, he wasn't really being all that nice.

Paul actually makes use of alliteration to make it even easier to remember these description; all three titles, so to speak, because they all begin with the letter k – the Greek kappa –

- beware of kunas (κυνας),
- beware of kakous ergatos (κακους εργατας)
- and beware of katatomen (κατατομην)

Three rapid fire, blunt, and offensive terms for the enemies of grace.

And it isn't that Paul is slinging mud or calling names – he's gravely concerned about the safety of the Philippian church and knows that these false teachers are dangerous.

And so Paul doesn't mince words or beast around the bush.

Notice again his first description – *beware of the dogs*.

He's obviously not talking about our youngest daughter's dog Pixie. There's nothing to beware. Even the name Pixie lets you know she's not ferocious – there would be no need to put up a Beware of Dog sign whenever we keep Pixie for our daughter.

Although one day we kept her in the backyard fence where she whined and howled for a couple of hours and a neighbor actually came over and complained that we weren't keeping her happy. He said, "You need to do something because your dog isn't very happy."

I'll get right on that!

When Paul writes 'beware of the dogs', you need to understand that first century people didn't have pets like we do today. They couldn't have imagined a pet dog or some less deserving creature than a dog – some come to mind.

In Paul's day, dogs were more like coyotes – they were scavengers who roamed in packs and prowled around feeding on the refuse of the streets or at the town garbage heaps. They were dangerous and could be vicious.^{viii}

In the Old Testament, a *dog* came to represent all that was unclean and filthy (*Exodus 22:3; 1 Kings 14:11*); the term "dog" was used as a derogatory term for someone evil and dangerous.

Isaiah the prophet wrote that false prophets were greedy unsatisfied dogs (*Isaiah 56:10*).

You can go all the way to the end of the New Testament, in the very last chapter, the term dog appears as a general term for the unrepentant,

obstinate, evil unbeliever unable to enter heaven (*Revelation 22:15*).

These Jewish false teachers Paul warns the church of were fond of calling unbelievers – especially Gentile unbelievers – dogs; but now, Paul reverses the innuendo so that the Jewish false teachers are the unclean dogs because they pervert the gospel of Christ.^{ix}

So in Paul's dictionary, a dog is someone who will harm you spiritually . . . you are simply their next victim as they continue to feed their own appetites and desires and evil intentions. Watch out for the dogs.

Not only are there those who will spiritually harm you, there are those who will spiritually mislead you.

Paul calls them next here in *verse 2, evil workers*.

That would have been terribly offensive to these Jewish leaders who prided themselves on doing righteous deeds and living righteous lives.

By the time of Paul, the nation was in the spiritual grip of leaders called Pharisees.^x

And the Pharisees had codified and expanded and itemized the Law of Moses into 365 negative commandments and 250 positive commandments and volumes of commentary on every conceivable subject.

The problem is the law never produces righteousness – rightness before God; the law only reveals how unrighteous we are.

Even today we have thousands of laws simply because people are unwilling to obey 10 commandments.

Paul writes to the Galatian believers that the law is like a tutor – an educator – which leads us to understand our total inability to please God and our total need for salvation through Christ alone (*Galatians 3:24-25*).

So these false teachers were actually diminishing and outright denying the sufficient work of Christ – and elevating human piety and effort which only leads to more pride and more evil.

Jesus himself minced no words when he said to them in *Matthew 23:15 – Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees . . . because you travel around on sea and land to make one convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are – woe to you, blind guides*.

Instead of leading people closer to God they were driving people away from God.

Warren Wiersbe wrote of a woman who was arguing with her pastor about the matter of faith of works as both necessary for salvation. She said to him, “I think that getting to heaven is like rowing a boat – one oar is faith and the other oar is works. And if you use both, you’ll get to heaven. If you use only one oar, you’ll only go around in circles.” The pastor replied, “There is one major problem with your illustration – nobody is going to heaven in a rowboat.”^{xi}

Yes, the believer does good things – not so he can go to heaven, but because he is going to heaven – and good works glorify His heavenly Father (**Matthew 5:16**).

Paul effectively says to the Philippians – beware anyone who misleads you into believing the gospel of grace is actually the gospel of works.

A gospel of witnessing longer, sinning less often, praying more often, doing better, working harder . . . more, more and even more and then perhaps God will love you and accept you if you do still more.

No, the truth is, we are sinners, saved by grace through faith in Christ and accepted in the beloved because of the work of Christ on our behalf (**Ephesians 2:8 and 1:6**)

Beware of the dogs – they will spiritually harm you;

Beware of the evil workers – they will spiritually mislead you

One more – Paul writes in **verse 2, beware of the false circumcision**.

Keep in mind Paul isn’t talking about 3 different groups of people – he’s talking about the same group of Jewish false teachers in three different ways.^{xii}

And in this last description, by calling them the false circumcision, Paul literally destroys their sense of pride and their trust in their own man-made relationship with God.

Circumcision was essential to the Jewish people – beginning with Abraham. It was the distinguishing mark of God’s covenant. Over time the Jews would refer to one another as “the circumcised.” Every Jewish boy was circumcised on their 8th day.

Circumcision was intended by God to graphically illustrate man’s depravity; for man passes along his fallen sinful nature through the act of procreation – passing along a fallen sinful nature to the next generation (Psalm 51:5; 58:3). So circumcision was primarily a symbol, picturing man’s need to be cleansed from sin at the deepest root of his being.^{xiii}

Over the centuries, the Jewish people lost the meaning of this mark which pointed to the need for ultimate cleansing and instead they merely kept the ceremony alive.

And, of course, the mark was set aside in this dispensation of grace. Now in the church age – the seal of the gospel is for both Jew and Gentile the indwelling Holy Spirit.

But these early Jewish false teachers were attempting to make every Gentile go through the ceremony of circumcision in order to guarantee their covenant with God.

And Paul very graphically sets the record straight here. He refers to them, not with the normal word **for circumcision** here in **verse 2**, but with a slightly different word that means physical mutilation.

He effectively calls these false teachers mutilators – *Beware those who mutilate your flesh*.

This was the same word used of the false prophets of Baal who cut their flesh and mutilated their bodies in order to gain the attention of their false god, Baal (**I Kings 18**).^{xiv}

This is shocking language here – Paul is effectively saying that physical circumcision was as spiritually meaningless as the ritual mutilation in pagan religions.^{xv}

You see, now, because of the sacrifice of Christ and His finished work on our behalf, salvation comes through faith in Christ alone.

No physical mark, no symbol, no act, no ritual, no ceremony can ever change the heart or transform the heart anyway – they all pointed to Christ’s sacrifice.

Paul is warning the church of the ceremonialists.

The **dogs** will spiritually harm you.

The **evil workers** will spiritually mislead you.

And these **ceremonialists** will spiritually burden you.

If I could boil down the core of these false teachers into one statement for you today, it would be this: false religion and false teachers simply add a plus sign after the name of Jesus.^{xvi}

It isn’t Jesus alone, it is Jesus plus.

That’s legalism at its core. It steals your joy by suggesting that God’s love and favor have to be earned and you’d better do more and you’d better be better.

God will never be pleased with you unless your hand accomplishes something that can be added to the cross of His Son.

- Jesus plus baptism.

- Jesus plus church membership
- Jesus plus tithing
- Jesus plus Sabbath worship
- Jesus plus tithing
- Jesus plus pilgrimages
- Jesus plus prayers

Then . . . maybe . . . God will be satisfied with you – which implies God the Father isn't satisfied with His Son.

Ceremonialists will spiritually burden you.

And they never have pity on people. Legalism makes someone's opinion your obligation; it makes someone's tradition your burden.^{xvii}

Paul says to these believers – and to us – in *verse 3. we are the true circumcision* – that is, we've been cleansed to our inner core – not by some surgery, but by the sacrifice of our Savior.

So this is what we do – *we rejoice in the Lord* – we find in Him our satisfaction.

So this is who we avoid – those who deny Jesus is enough:

- They are dangerous scavenging diseased dogs
- They are workers who lead to even more evil
- They are mutilators who add the works of our hands to the all-sufficient work of Christ.

Now Paul reminds them – **this is who we are.**

Notice verse 3b; we worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

1. We are those who worship God first.

We aren't making it up. We aren't the focus of our worship; and worship isn't about our experience.

We hear so much today about the worship experience. The trouble is, it often majors on experience and has little to do with worship.

Worshipping in the Spirit of God is not something you do in an hour; it's something you do in your heart. Worship is a matter of the heart and life surrendered to the priority of God.

You can't come in here and say, "Okay, I'm in my Sunday best – it's Sunday morning – so let's worship – Lord give me a sense of Your presence.

Not a chance! Beloved, your public worship on Sunday is directly related to your personal worship on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday and Saturday.

Why? Because worship is a way of life – a heart devoted to the Spirit of God who energizes our worship and directs and enhances and creates genuine worship which is fellowship with and the adoration of God.

This is who we are – we are those who worship God first.

2. We are those who brag about Jesus Christ most.

Notice again, *we glory in Christ Jesus.*

The word for glory is a word that describes boasting with joy about what a person is most proud of.^{xviii}

We are people who understand that when you strip everything away, the only thing we have to boast about is our salvation – the only person we have to boast in, is Christ.

When the disciples were sent on an early mission of healing and casting out demons and preaching, in *Luke 10*, and they came back and said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." In other words, you should have seen the crusades we held and the conversions we witnessed and the miracles we performed. Lord it was really something amazing!

And Jesus used that moment as a significant teaching moment as he responded to them, no doubt with patient grace – "Men, don't rejoice so much in all of that – if you really want something to truly rejoice over – rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

In other words, Jesus said, "The core of your rejoicing is not so much in what you did for Me, but that you belong to Me.

We are those who worship God first;

We are those who brag about Jesus Christ most;

3. We are those who trust in ourselves least.

Paul writes at the end of verse 3, *we put no confidence in the flesh.*

Listen, the Christian, more than anybody else on the planet understands the fallen-ness of our nature.

Like the Puritan prayed centuries ago, we are aware of the dark beast within us all.

And like Paul cry, "*O wretched man that I am . . . who will set me free from this body of death.*"

***Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
(Romans 7:24-25)***

In other words, I am a wretched sinner, but I have been set free from the penalty of sin and I will one day be set free from the presence of sin – namely, myself – delivered forever from this body of death by Jesus Christ our Lord.

And in the meantime, we trust in our flesh the least.

Benjamin Franklin developed a rigid system of self-improvement. He rejected the gospel, in fact, was often witnessed to personally by George Whitefield, the powerful preacher who led thousands of people to Christ through his outdoor preaching. Benjamin Franklin supported Whitefield’s orphanages; it was Franklin who once estimated how far Whitefield’s voice carried outdoors as he preached to nearly 30,000 people.

But he was all about personal betterment and morality. In fact, he developed a system of 13 virtues. Among them:

- Frugality: “Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; that is, waste nothing.
- Another virtue was Industry: “Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.”
- Tranquility: “Be not disturbed at trifles or accidents common or unavoidable.” And so on.

He set up a book with a page for each virtue, lining a column in which to record “defects.” He would choose a different virtue to work on each week and he would daily note every mistake. Then

he would start over every 13 weeks in order to cycle through the list of 13 virtues four times a year.

For decades, Benjamin Franklin carried his little book of virtues with him, striving for a clean 13-week cycle. But he found that whenever he made progress it simply led him to be proud.^{xix}

When George Whitefield died, Benjamin Franklin wrote to a friend, “Mr. Whitefield used to pray for my conversion, but never had the satisfaction of believing that his prayers were answered.”^{xx}

Franklin would reject Christ to the day he died.

He would have made a fantastic Pharisee. A religion based on self-improvement and the works of he hands.

By the way, that’s the world we live in today – willing to work on self-improvement so long as it doesn’t make us sinners in helpless need of a Savior.

Paul effectively reminds the believers in Philippi that Christianity is just that: a composition of sinners who place no confidence in their flesh.

And we glory in the work of Christ Jesus and we worship in the Spirit of God as we rejoice in the Lord.

And this is our testimony of joy:

*My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device or creed;
I trust the ever living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.*

*I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/31/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians* (Crossway Books, 2007), p. 121

ⁱⁱ Adapted from Steven E. Runge, *Philippians: A Visual and Textual Guide* (Lexham Press, 2014), p. 71

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from G. Walter Hansen, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Philippians* (Apollos, 2009), p. 214

^{iv} Runge, p. 72

^v Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 555

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- vi Quoted by Hughes, p. 122
- vii Rienecker & Rogers, p. 556
- viii William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 53
- ix Barclay, p. 54
- x J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Joy of Living: A Study of Philippians* (Lamplighter Books, 1973), p. 123
- xi Warren W. Wiersbe, *Philippians: Be Joyful* (Victor Books, 1978), p. 84
- xii Sam Gordon, *Philippians: An Odyssey of Joy* (Ambassador, 2004), p. 108
- xiii Adapted from John MacArthur, *Philippians* (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 218
- xiv Hughes, p. 124
- xv Adapted from John MacArthur, *Philippians* (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 219
- xvi Adapted from Motyer, p. 152
- xvii Gordon, p. 110
- xviii MacArthur, p. 222
- xix Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing about Grace* (Zondervan, 1997), p. 34
- xx Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: Volume 2* (Cornerstone Books, 1979), p. 453