

INTRODUCTION

One of my earliest memories is from when I was about four or five. I was living in Dothan, Alabama and attending Sunday School every week. I'd been going to church as long as I could remember and I loved my Sunday School teacher. She was my favorite and it was her birthday. I said something to my mother and she had the idea to buy a birthday present for my teacher and for me to deliver it to her. So we did. We pulled up to my teacher's house and mom stayed in the car. You know how a four- or five-year-old boy doesn't *walk* anywhere. I was running at top speed with my eyes glued to the front door. I didn't see the large dog hidden in the bushes, waiting for someone to pounce on. He chose me. It was a terrifying experience as you can imagine. I don't remember all that he did to me, I do know that I was knocked unconscious by the attack, because the next thing I knew I was in bed with my parents and Sunday School teacher looking down at me asking me if I was alright.

Since that time, I've had a fear of big, mean, dogs. Any time I go visiting someone's house to invite them to church, I always look around to make sure there's no dog around. That's what Paul the Apostle writes to the church at Philippi.

Philippians 3:1-9. "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

In this passage of scripture, Paul goes through three different thoughts to bring us to the climax about the centrality of Jesus.

I. COUNTERFEITS WHO DESTROY

Paul uses three words to describe counterfeit Christians: dogs, evil workers and mutilators of the flesh. Who is he writing about? Paul started the church in Philippi and preached a gospel you might call "Christ + nothing = salvation," in other words, faith in Jesus is all you need. There were a lot of people who came to know Christ in that church; there were a lot of baby Christians. But Paul had to leave.

There was a group of Jews who followed Paul around and infiltrated the churches he founded. They tried to mislead and deceive those new Christians. Members of this group would approach a new believer and call them aside.

"Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Sure."

"Do you know the apostle Paul?"

"Sure I know Paul. I heard him preach."

"Paul said all you have to do is put your faith in Jesus Christ to be saved. Is that right?"

"That's right. That's what I believe."

"Wait a minute, there's more. You're not hearing all that there is. You have got to be circumcised. It says so in the Old Testament. Not only that, you have to obey all the laws of the Jews. You can't eat pork or catfish or certain birds. Not only that, you've got to obey all the Jewish ceremonies."

At that point, the young Christians were saying, "Wait a minute. I just believed in Jesus." And they were confused because these legalistic Judaizers were saying there was more to salvation than just believing in Jesus. This made Paul angry when he heard about it; he said they were like dogs. Paul wasn't talking about the kind of sweet little pet lap dogs most of us think about. The majority of dogs in biblical times were mangy, vicious packs of wild scavengers who roamed around feeding on scraps and fighting. Like dogs, the Jewish legalists banded together and tried to destroy the churches Paul founded by isolating the new Christians from the crowd.

Paul literally hits them below the belt when he says they like to talk about circumcision, but they are just mutilators. Paul warned the church to watch out for these counterfeits who desired to infiltrate the church.

Today, there are certain people in almost every church that believe faith in Jesus Christ isn't enough; you've got to do it *their* way: Be baptized a certain way, believe a certain group of beliefs, attend certain meetings, can't smoke, can't drink, can't chew, can't go with guys that do. They have a long list of rules. Be careful. As in every New Testament church I know of, I believe Satan has planted counterfeit Christians in our midst for the sole purpose to destroy the fellowship of the church. The Bible says that is Satan's strategy.

In the parable of the weeds in the book of Matthew, Jesus gives a specific interpretation of the devil's intent. "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 'An enemy did this,' he replied...The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels." (Matthew 13:24-28, 37-39)

There is a lot of great seed in this church, but the devil loves to come into any church and plant counterfeit Christians who look like Christians, talk like Christians, act like Christians but they're planted there by the devil. These people may not even know it. They're not sitting there thinking, "I'm one of them. I'm working for the devil." They may think they're very sincere but Jesus says they're like weeds and we want to go through with a sickle and cut down all the weeds. But Jesus says to let them grow together and God will take care of the rest at the harvest. We just need to recognize they're there.

A. An authentic Christian has a desire for worship

“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God...” How do you recognize a counterfeit Christian? The Bible doesn’t say how to recognize them, but it DOES say how to recognize an authentic Christian. Philippians 3:3 lists the signs to help us identify authentic Christians. Bank tellers are trained to recognize counterfeit bills by learning what the real money looks like. They become so familiar with the real thing, that when any counterfeit comes along, they recognize it. That’s the same thing the Bible says here. Paul tells us how to recognize a real Christian.

True believers desire to worship God in Spirit and in truth. Counterfeit Christians don’t like to worship. Their hearts do not cry out to worship. True believers enjoy gathering on the Lord’s Day. But a lot of people come just out of a sense of obligation, and the best thing these folks get from church is when they can leave. But a true believer is not only involved in corporate worship but in private worship as well, whether it’s listening to praise music alone in their car or with friends. A counterfeit Christian feels real uncomfortable doing that sort of thing.

B. An authentic Christian has a devotion to Jesus

“We who glory in Christ Jesus.” A true believer doesn’t brag about anything they’ve done. Instead, they brag about what Jesus Christ has done in their lives. Some people who call themselves Christians never really mention Jesus’ names. Paul says true believers boast about Jesus.

When I was a youth minister, we went on all-night campouts. You get in a bunkhouse with a bunch of teenage boys and they don’t want to go to sleep. The lights would be off and it would be past bedtime, but there would be talking and laughing about what every youth group guy used to say back in the 1970s: “Goodnight, John Boy.” “Good night, Elizabeth.” They’d get quiet for a minute then someone would say something and it would start again. I soon discovered a great way to get everybody quiet. I would get up, turn on the lights and say, “Okay guys, you want to talk. Let’s talk about Jesus.” It got quiet in a hurry. If that wasn’t so sad it would be funny.

Do you like to talk about the Lord? Paul says a true Christian boasts about Jesus.

C. An authentic Christian displays death to self

“We who put no confidence in the flesh.” Paul said, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” (Romans 7:18) Paul had confidence, but it wasn’t in himself—it was in Jesus. Do you feel pretty confident about who you are and what you have accomplished? Are you boasting in your flesh? A true Christian doesn’t.

II CONCEIT THAT DECEIVES

Some people have confidence in the flesh—bragging, pride—the deceives them into believing that they’re acceptable to God.

Credentials can be a powerful thing. Policemen can get in just about anywhere by flashing their badges. When went to Russia, we had to have right credentials to get into the country. I'd like to go down to the sidelines of Veterans Stadium tomorrow night in Philadelphia and be on the sidelines when Dallas beats up on the Eagles. I'd love to be there, but I couldn't walk on the sidelines because I don't have the credentials, they'd throw me out. I'd love to go into the White House and meet the President but I don't have the credentials.

A. Ritual

Paul mentions seven credentials he used to think would get him into heaven. The first was ritual. "I was circumcised on the eighth day." Paul used to believe he was acceptable to God because of this ritual. A lot of people today think ritual will get them into heaven. When I ask some folks if they are going to heaven when they die, I've had people say, "I was christened as a baby." "I attended mass." "I've received the Lord's Supper."

B. Relations

Paul says, "I was of the people of Israel." When you ask some people about their relationship to God and if they attend church, they'll say, "My granddaddy used to be a Baptist preacher." "My dad was a deacon down there at that church." But they're not certain of God. God has no grandchildren, only children. If you're trusting some of your relatives to save you, you're sadly mistaken.

C. Respectability

"I was of the tribe of Benjamin." That was the most respected of all the twelve tribes. That's today's equivalent of the Vanderbilts or the Rockefellers. When all the tribes rebelled against King David with Absalom, the tribe of Benjamin stood by the king. Saul, the first king, came from the tribe of Benjamin. Paul once believed that having the right name gave him access to heaven.

D. Race

"I am a Hebrew of Hebrews." Paul was saying he wasn't a half-breed like a Samaritan or Jewish proselyte, he once thought because he had pure lineage, he was going to heaven.

E. Religion

"I was a Pharisee." A Pharisee belonged to the National Honor Society of Judaism. They were the cream of the crop, the MVPs of the Jewish race. A Pharisee memorized the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Old Testament. They tithed twenty percent of their income. They were careful about everything they did. They were proud of their religion. We've got a lot of "Pharisees" today who are proud of their religion, but religion never saved anybody. Hell will be full of religious people.

F. Reputation

"As for zeal, persecuting the church," Paul said he had a good reputation, because he was a stickler for purity and made sure everyone toed the line. He was present when Stephen was stoned to death and was involved in running Christians out of their homes and having them put to death. People thought he was an up-and-coming star in Judaism.

G. Righteousness

"As for legalistic righteousness, faultless." Paul said he had the credential of legalistic righteousness when it came to all the laws of the Old Testament; he was blameless." That doesn't mean he was a perfect person and never broke the law. He meant for every law he broke, he underwent the prescribed ceremonial cleansing. It is sad when you ask people about their relationship to God to hear, "I am a good person." "I'm a better person than some of those people down there at your church." And they are too. If goodness could get you into heaven, Paul could have been there.

Paul said all the credentials he thought he was going to flash at the gates of heaven were worthless. One day on the road to Damascus, Paul met Jesus Christ face-to-face. Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4) From that day forward, Paul understood all his credentials meant nothing.

III. CHRIST WHO DELIVERS

It's not in keeping the law; it's in Jesus Christ. It's not in being born in the right family; it's Jesus Christ. It's not in being zealous; it's found in Jesus Christ and Christ alone. Paul says all our righteousness is garbage. Those of you who work with numbers will appreciate Paul's profit and loss statement in verse 7, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." All those former credentials no longer mattered. When Paul got saved, he moved all his credits from the profit column to the loss column. He realized all those "good things" were actually hurting him.

Paul took it a step further in verse 8, "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish." The King James Version calls it "dung," which is a good translation. The word rubbish used here comes from the Greek word *skubala*, which literally means "sewage." If you've ever been to a third world country where the stink from open sewages fills the air, it's not pleasant, but the Bible says that's what those so-called important things are.

Instead of getting him into heaven, Paul's list of qualifications was keeping him from it. There's nothing wrong with combing your hair, but if you substitute combing your hair for breathing, before long combing your hair is going to kill you. There's nothing wrong with being born into a good family. There's nothing wrong with doing good works. We have been saved unto good works. There's nothing wrong with being faithful to attend church or being baptized. But if you substitute them for knowing Jesus Christ, they'll send you to hell and Paul says that's what he was trusting to get him into heaven.

A few years ago when the Superbowl was in New Orleans, someone advertised Superbowl tickets in *USA Today* at a fantastic rate. They sold hundreds around the nation. A lot of people paid several hundred dollars for Superbowl tickets, they paid their airfare down to New Orleans, walked up to the Superbowl with their tickets in hand but when they got there, Superbowl officials said the tickets were counterfeit, leaving the ticket holders shocked and angry. They really thought they were buying Superbowl tickets but someone faked them out.

Paul said if he had died before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and stood before God and was asked why he should be let into heaven, he would have gotten out his list of credentials. The people who bought fake Superbowl tickets were also sincere, but they were sincerely *wrong*. There are a lot of people today who think they are going to get into heaven by how good they are. The Bible says, "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." (Titus 3:5)

Salvation = Jesus + Nothing

It's not Jesus + Baptism. It's not Jesus + Walking an Aisle. It's not Jesus + Filling Out a Card. It's not Jesus + Perfect Attendance in Sunday School. It's Jesus ONLY. All those things are good works you ought to do. "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6) Our righteousness is just like garbage.

Let's go to the garbage dump and take all those things you are counting on to get you into heaven and leave them on the rubbish pile. Just walk away from them. The most important thing in your life is knowing Jesus Christ and everything else in life—your job, your hobbies, is like garbage compared to knowing Jesus Christ. Until you leave those things at the garbage dump like Paul did, you won't understand what it means to be a sold-out, devoted follower of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

How many of you can hold up your hand and say you are righteous? Hold up your hand if you are going to heaven when you die? We've got a big problem, because only those who are righteous are going to be in heaven. The mistake is I didn't ask you if you were self-righteous. I asked if you were righteous. The Bible says when Jesus died on the cross, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) We just read in Philippians 3:9 "the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." If you are a Christian, God doesn't look at YOUR righteousness, he looks at the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Have you ever transferred money from one account to another? When Jesus died on the cross, two transfers took place. First, our overloaded account of sin was transferred into his empty account, because he was sinless. And his account for sin got as big as the world's sins. But another transfer took place. When he died on the cross, HIS account of righteousness, which was plenty, was transferred into our account, which was empty. And we received his righteousness. That's what the Bible's all about.

It's not our righteousness. Our righteousness is on the garbage dump. His righteousness is the only thing that will get us into heaven.

Let me ask you again: How many of you are righteous? Amen! My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

OUTLINE

I. COUNTERFEITS WHO DESTROY

How to spot an authentic Christian:

- A. Desire for worship
- B. Devotion to Jesus
- C. Death to self

II. CONCEIT THAT DECEIVES

Paul's "credentials":

- A. Ritual
- B. Relations
- C. Respectability
- D. Race
- E. Religion
- F. Reputation
- G. Righteousness

III. CHRIST WHO DELIVERS

- A. All our righteousness = garbage
- B. Salvation = Jesus + Nothing

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