

Paul Gauguin was a 19th C French painter. He was kind of weird. I think most French painters are. He is probably best known for a massive painting on a heavy sackcloth. Almost like a mural. It is a weird one, lot of animals and people and symbolic figures. In the middle is an androgynous person reaching for an apple. The title is, "Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?" That title sums up the underlying confusion of the world we live in. We are lost, purposeless, no roots, no real identity besides our own feelings, no direction, no hope, no grand goal. Phil 3 helps us. **Phil 3:1-3** (922 . .This is) - Main point: We are the Spirit-filled, NC community that puts no confidence in the self but only boasts in the Lord Jesus Christ. Three points:

I. Rejoice – 1. "Finally," but Paul in typical preacher fashion says "finally" then continues on for a couple of chapters before he wraps it up. You may have heard of the little girl who asked her Father, "Daddy, what does the preacher mean when he says "finally?" The Dad responded, "Nothing sweetie, he means absolutely nothing by it."¹ / Finally, rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice. That is a command. That means you can. You may need to beg God for help, but you can rejoice. This is what made Augustine pray, "Lord, command what you will, but grant what you command." Joy is not based on circumstance, but Christ.² Remember, Paul was in prison. Rejoice *in the Lord*.

Rejoice. Why? Well, what have seen in the letter so far? The gospel, grace, the promise that he will finish what he started, that we get to be partakers in the ministry by supporting ministers, that death is gain and life is Christ, that the Son emptied himself for our salvation, that every knee will bow to the victorious Christ, that God is at work in us, that God has made us his children who shine as lights in the world. Finally, rejoice!

Paul says to write the same things again is no trouble to him and is safe for us. He understands the necessity of repetition in the Christian life. Repetition is the essence of education. Repetition is the mother of formation. The German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted that normally you teach information previously unknown so that you don't have to teach it again. He writes, "It is of the essence of teaching that it seeks to render itself no longer necessary." But not so with Christian truth; no, repetition is the very thing it requires. Paul tells Timothy, "keep reminding God's people of these things" (2 Tim 2.14). Why? Because we forget so easily. We need to hear it again and again, which is one of the reasons we meet weekly. We are called to be the salt of the earth but we lose our saltiness every 7 days (some of us every 3!). Resalinated.

II. Watch Out for False Teachers – 2. False teaching kills rejoicing. So watch out. Beware. Warning. We see that word a lot today, don't we? There are warning labels on everything. We are such a litigious society today that companies have to warn consumers about every possibility. Warning: this hot coffee may be hot. My favorites are the warnings that follow anti-depressant commercials: in low volume speed language, they say, side effects may include suicidal thoughts or actions, anxiety, panic, aggression, anger, mania, abnormal sensations, hallucinations, paranoia or confusion, constipation, diarrhea, vomiting, seizures, memory loss, sleepwalking, rashes, swelling of the face, mouth and throat that can cause trouble breathing, and depression." You're like "hold the phone." Here are some more classics: Warning: May Cause Drowsiness: Product: Nytol Sleeping Pills. Chainsaw: Do not hold the wrong end of the chainsaw. Product: Jet Ski and the warning was: Never use a lit match to check gasoline levels. Do not use for drying pets: microwave. Do not use writing instrument for signing checks or legal documents: The Vanishing Fabric Marker. Touching wires causes death. \$250 fine.

¹ Carson 80.

² "The gospel provides grounds for faith's obedient joy irrespective of circumstance." Harmon 305.

We dismiss warnings, often because we are inundated by them and often because we don't think they really matter, but this one does. The NT is chock full of warning about false teaching. Do you take that seriously? Today, the air we breathe is relativism. Your truth and my truth. No absolute truth. Today, it is unpopular to be so exclusive. Today, the only heresy is that there is such a thing as heresy. Tolerance has been redefined in our society. Now tolerance is intolerant!³ Tolerance used to mean that two people could disagree but still tolerate one another, accepting that other viewpoints do exist even when you think they are wrong. One could disagree with a person and still live alongside them just fine. In our postmodern culture, slowly the meaning of tolerance has shifted to the view that all views must be accepted. If you do not affirm me, you are intolerant and hateful. Well, to understate the matter, the Bible is politically incorrect on this matter. There is true teaching and false teaching and we must be on guard for false teaching.

Paul has some strong words here in verse 2. What were they teaching? These false teachers were likely the same ones he addresses in Galatians. We call them Judaizers. They were Jewish "Christians" that went around to all Paul's church plants and said, yes, you must trust in Jesus the Messiah, but you must also obey the OC Law. They said you must obey the OC Law and you must basically become Jewish: be circumcised, obey the Sabbath, eat kosher. It was a "Jesus plus" theology.

And Paul puts on the gloves when you try to add to Jesus. He needs no supplementation. When you try to add to him, you take away. To supplement is to dilute. He is sufficient. Christ alone. The whole letter to the Galatians is about this. And he is very sharp in that whole letter, from beginning to end. Toward the end he says, "I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!" The word means castrate. Paul says, oh you are insisting on cutting foreskin to earn God's favor, why don't you cut the whole thing off. NLT: "I just wish that those troublemakers who want to mutilate you by circumcision would mutilate themselves." This is serious business. *Watch out* for those who would seek to supplement the finished work of Christ.

Here in Phil he calls them three names, and in Greek they all start with the same letter. Best we can do is watch out for the mutts who are malicious mutilators.⁴ He says look out for the **dogs**. Dogs are on the same level as children today. Recently in a mall in Colombia, there was a lady walking a dog in a diaper. But back then, in Greco-Roman society, they were despicable, unclean scavengers. The lowest option on the social scale. 1st C Rome didn't have dog hotels and spas! So this was an insult. Even today, many Muslims are taught that they must perform a ritual purification if licked by a dog and a dish licked by a dog must be cleansed seven times! There was a controversy in MN a few years back when a Somali cab driver refused to let a blind man in his cab because he would be accompanied by his seeing-eye dog. Ironically, Jews would often use the label "dog" to slander non-Jews. He turns the table on these enemies of the cross.⁵

One NT scholar writes, "In a world view that defines the people of God on the basis of Jewish privilege, all who are outside of that circle of privilege are dogs. But in a world view that defines the people of God on the basis of their relationship to Christ, all who seek to define the people of God on any other basis are in fact the dogs."⁶ Watch out for the dogs.

Watch out for the **evil workers**. They were concerned to add supposed good works onto the gospel of salvation by faith and Paul says to do that is actually the opposite of good. It is evil! It is evil to add to salvation

³ See D.A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

⁴ Kyle Brenneman says mutts, malefactors, and mutilators. Harmon 308.

⁵ Much like using the language of Israel to refer to the pagan world in 2:14-18.

⁶ Harmon, 309. See fuller quote.

by grace alone through faith alone (2 Cor 11:13-15). When you trust in your own works, they turn from good to evil.

Watch out for the **mutilators**. Paul uses a play on words. In a moment he's say we are the circumcision but in Greek these words: mutilation and circumcision sound alike. Watch out for the *katatomēn* for we are the *peritomēn*. In English it is sort of like watch out for the incision for we are the circumcision.⁷ Watch out for those who mutilate the flesh by pushing circumcision. The Message paraphrases this as “knife-happy circumcisers.”

This is a reference to the pagan religions that required self-mutilation and cutting to manipulate the gods to respond. Paul is basically calling them pagans.⁸ The related verb is used in 1 Kin 18:28 (Lev 21:5, Hos 7:14) where Elijah challenges the prophets of the false god Baal and they can't get their god to respond. Remember Elijah mocks them: he must be busy relieving himself. Finally, they cry aloud and cut themselves after their custom until blood gushed out. Mutilators of the flesh.⁹

So look out for the unclean intruders, watch out for those whose good works are actually evil, and watch out for the pagans who seek to manipulate their false god by slashing their own skin. Strong words. Why? Because the purity of the gospel was at stake.

Everywhere the Apostle went, false missionaries would follow him seeking to distort the gospel. And nothing has changed. People are constantly seeking to add to the sufficiency of Jesus, whether it be adding extrabiblical rules, man-made traditions, works, or baptism, on and on. Beware of “Jesus plus” anything. Jesus plus nothing = everything we need.

III. We are the True People of God – 3. He says we. The “we” is emphatic. In the original, it is frontloaded. It is the first word of the sentence. Makes for awkward English but Paul has a point to make. *We are the true circumcision*. We are the true removal of the foreskin! What in the world, Paul? First, kind of weird to talk about in church, but what is circumcision? Why does Paul call the church the circumcision? Well, we must recall that the NT is but the tip of the iceberg. Paul assumes we know our Bibles. This word is like a hyperlink to a whole worldview. The tip of the iceberg to a robust biblical theme.

Circumcision was a type that pointed forward to heart circumcision. Let's take a brief tour. Remember that in Gen 12, Abraham was promised blessing and through his blessing all the world would be blessed. So, Abraham's family is set apart, marked out. God commands all his offspring to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant. **17:4-5, 10-14**. Circumcision was the defining marker of OC Judaism. It was the essential badge of Jewish identity and Paul applies it to the Gentile church! How can he do that? Let's take a biblical stroll.

Deut 10:16 - remember that the heart is the control center of the person., **30:1-6. Jer 4:1-4, 7:24**. Stiff-necked. As Stephen preached in his final sermon in Acts 7, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears” (7:51). **9:24-25**. Ezekiel condemns the abominations of Israel for admitting pagans in the temple who were “uncircumcised in heart and flesh” (44:6-9, cf. 11:16-21, 18:30-32, 36:22-36). Long before Paul, the OT itself points beyond physical circumcision. Even back then, there was teaching that some other type of circumcision was needed and coming – circumcision of the heart. Paul merely picks up this thread. We – the church – the

⁷ NTW PFG 986.

⁸ Cf. Gal 4:8-10, *stoicheia*.

⁹ “Thinking they are pushing for the removal of the foreskin as the clear sign of their covenant status, they are instead encouraging a mutilation that separates them from the new covenant sealed in Christ's blood.” Harmon, 311.

community of the NC – post-Pentecost-people- are the true circumcision. Our hearts have been changed and we are indwelt by the Spirit.

In the NC, heart circumcision, not physical circumcision, is what matters. Paul says as much 4 times: neither circum nor uncircum counts (1 Cor 7:19 Gal 5:6, 6:15 Col 3:11). Flip over to **Col 2:11-12**. This little phrase “without hands” has a long OT history. Usually the phrase is “made with hands,” which was often used of idols. Idols were “made with hands.” It was a way of dismissing false gods. Who can worship a so-called god that humans make with their own hands? Well, the circumcision these legalists are trying to impose is “made with hands.” Paul is saying that those who emphasize physical circumcision are worshiping false gods. It is an idolatrous man-made rule now that Christ has come. We are no longer under the law. Now that the NC has come, all that matters is being in Christ, so to add circumcision is to add something “made with hands.” Something idolatrous.

An idol is anything in which we put our trust instead of God. To trust in man-made rules is idolatry because you are putting your faith, hope, identity, and security in something other than Christ. / The body of flesh is referring to Christ’s body of flesh (1:22). The circumcision of Christ is his death. Not just a piece of flesh but his whole body was sacrificed. So, he is saying we are circumcised (converted) by the circumcision (death) of Christ. Physical circumcision was a type that pointed forward to spiritual circumcision.

Flip over to **Rom**. Stott says Rom has two paramount themes: J and the redefinition of the people of God around the Messiah - **2:28-29**. Incredible verses! The privileges of Jewish identity have nothing to do with externals. True circumcision is not outward and physical. No, those who have had their heart circumcised by the Spirit are true Jews. Jewishness is now all about the heart, the inner person.

So we are the circumcision, the true people of God, the new Israel. NLT: “For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort.” Then he lists some characteristics of the people of God:

The true Israel *worships* by the Spirit of God. Why does he say this? Well, he is saying we are the true people of the new covenant. This word for worship (*latreuō*)¹⁰ here means to perform religious rites. It is a worship word in the OT. It is a word for priestly duties, but as we have seen, we are all priests in the new covenant and worship is all of life. Rom 7:6 “But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law.”

In the NC, the totality of the Christian life falls under the category of worship. It is a life focused on God, empowered by the Spirit.

The people of God worship by the Spirit of God. The prophetic writings of the OT are filled with promises that in the new covenant, God would pour out his Spirit on all his people (John 4:19-24). The Spirit is the *promised* Holy Spirit. With the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the new age has dawned. Heart circumcision was a reality tied to the new age. We are the people upon whom the end of the ages has come. We are the Spirit people.

Look at **Phil 3:3** again. We glory in Christ Jesus. Notice the Trinitarian framework: we serve God the Father by God the Spirit and only boast in the Son. To glory in is to take pride in. Jer 9:23-24 "This is what the LORD says: The wise man must not boast in his wisdom; the strong man must not boast in his strength; the wealthy man

¹⁰ We saw the Holy Spirit use a similar word in a similar way in Phil 2:25, where Epaphroditus “ministered” (*leitourgos*) to Paul’s needs.

must not boast in his wealth." "But the one who boasts should boast in this, that he understands and knows Me-- that I am the LORD, showing faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things." 1 Cor 1:31: "The one who boasts must boast in the Lord." Gal 6:14 But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. **7-8.** We boast in Christ. He is our glory, our joy, our center, our treasure. Like a fresh new grandparent with an iPhone full of baby pictures, we can't stop gloating about the glory of our King.

The true Israel glories in Christ and puts *no confidence in the flesh*. The flesh is the fallen human tendency to sin. One NT scholar defines the flesh as "humanity in its fallen frailty, unable to help itself and in need of God's redemption."¹¹ The flesh is that orientation toward the world, that deeply rooted tendency to find the focus of our life in the self. Flesh and Spirit are two different ages: the present evil age and the age to come, OC and NC. These false teachers are wanting to move them from Spirit back to the flesh. Gal 3:3: are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh? Rom 8:5-9a: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,"

Those who put confidence in the removal of the flesh are an example of the larger more fundamental human problem: trusting in anything other than Christ as the grounds for acceptance before God.¹² There is no room for boasting in and of ourselves. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling." 1 Cor 4:7 What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it?" Eph 2: "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift-not from works, so that no one can boast.". We are creatures. He is the creator. Confidence in Christ and confidence in the self are mutually exclusive.¹³ You cannot have both. If you are a not a Xn, you know how you are ready? Lose conf in self.

"Behold the Man upon a cross, My sin upon His shoulders Ashamed I hear my mocking voice, Call out among the scoffers It was my sin that held Him there Until it was accomplished His dying breath has brought me life / I know that it is finished / I will not boast in anything No gifts, no power, no wisdom But I will boast in Jesus Christ / His death and resurrection / Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer But this I know with all my heart His wounds have paid my ransom."

Church, rejoice in the Lord. Put your identity in Him, not in this world. You cannot truly rejoice when your foundation is sinking sand. Watch out for false teaching. It will always be with us. We must stay on guard. We must guard the gospel, being firmly opposed to any teaching that wants to add to Jesus. We are the circumcision, the people of God. We are his. The promises are ours through faith in Christ. We are worshippers by the Spirit. All of life is worship. We seek to submit every area of our lives to his Lordship. We worship Jesus in all of life. The Spirit empowers us to that end. We glory in Christ. He is our everything. We live for him. To live is Christ and to die is gain because we get to be with him. We put no confidence in the self. Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? We are the Spirit-filled, NC community that puts no confidence in the self but only boasts in the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹¹ Thielman, *Philippians*, 176.

¹² Harmon, 315.

¹³ Thielman, *Philippians*, 169.

Benediction: Now may the Spirit of the Living God empower you to live as the people of God and drop all confidence in the flesh and boast only in Christ Jesus our Lord.