



SUPER JOY - A STUDY IN PHILIPPIANS (Week 8) - Why the Gospel Brings Joy

Last week we looked at where we should ultimately place all of our confidence. This week we're going to look at why placing our confidence in Christ alone and what He has done leads to a deeply joyous life.

The two questions we'll examine on the way — what's the difference between faith and superstition? And what's the difference between the two types of righteousness Paul talks about?

This is the most important issue in Christianity

worldwide even today. I'm glad we're covering it, because tomorrow, October 31, is such an important day in church history because why? Not because it's Halloween, but because it marks the anniversary of the Reformation (499 years).

“In 1505, Pope Julius II had decided to knock down the old St Peter's and start again. He had big plans for his own tomb and wanted a basilica to match. It was time to make Rome magnificent once again. But that didn't come cheap, so the church embarked on a fundraising campaign. It was this campaign that brought Johann Tetzel to Germany to sell indulgences, promises of time off purgatory in exchange for cash. And so it was that on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his protest against indulgences to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.” (from the article [10 Things You Should Know about the Reformation](#))

For the sake of review, let's read these first four verses.

Philippians 3:1-4

3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

That's where we find our ultimate joy — in that relationship. When that is our primary relationship we will have that joy unshakable. When it's not, well, we won't.

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—

“Just to be clear, the Council of Trent says, “If anyone says, that by faith alone the ungodly are justified in such a way as to mean that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to receive the grace of Justification and that it is not necessary for a man to be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.” (Canon IX) The Council of Trent was the Catholic Church's response to the Reformation, a response it has never repudiated.” (from [10 Things](#))

What does Paul mean by confidence in the flesh? What are you trusting in? What will enable you to stand before God and receive His grace instead of His judgment?

If you think you can gain God's favor by some physical act, then you are putting your confidence in something you do, that's putting confidence in the flesh, which in many cases amounts to superstition.

Many people in our culture would say, "Superstition and faith seem to me to be both the same thing. They are both irrational. Not actually based on any facts."

Now that statement is an assertion, not a fact. The person who says such a thing has faith that what they're saying is true — but that assertion cannot be proven. As a matter of fact, it can be disproven, because the statement itself shows us the difference between faith and superstition. The statement is not a superstitious claim, but a proclamation of faith. Now, it is a secular faith, but a faith nonetheless.

From a Christian perspective, faith is based solely upon facts. Our faith is not in a set of ideas or principles per se. Our faith is in the historical proclamation that Jesus lived, died and rose again, as the Apostles often said of the resurrection of Jesus — "we are witnesses of these things."

That's historical testimony. That's something we can thoughtfully consider by weighing the evidence, examining the sources, comparing and contrasting it with other claims, etc.

It's why history for the longest time turned on the events of the life of Jesus. That is until the Enlightenment thinkers "taught us to trash our own history," because they understood that Christianity is an all-encompassing view of the world. It's not personal or private. So, they had to downplay Christianity because they wanted the Enlightenment view of the world to prevail. Christianity changes everything about how we see the world. If truth matters, it's the only side of history to be on.

That's not to say that superstitious practices don't exist in the church.

"God will bless me if I light a candle" — superstition.

Another example of superstitious practices, there are pockets of Christian women who believe that their power in prayer comes from the length of their hair. They get that from a misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 11, but it is a very mistaken application of it. It's to make the Holy Spirit subject to human physical

activity, like clapping your hands three times in groups of 20 or more (or some such nonsense). That's superstition.

When it comes to how we practice our faith, the difference between faith and superstition is that faith is relational. "Lord, you said you desire none to perish but all to come to repentance, so I'm asking you to shine the light of the gospel in this person's life. Father in heaven, you said you hate divorce, so I'm asking you to save this marriage." That is faith and it is relational.

Superstitious things can be done without any relationship. Divine help will come to my mother if I avoid stepping on cracks. I will not break her back. Superstition expects the result based upon the action alone.

Faith expects results based upon the Person alone. We put our confidence in the risen Christ and put no confidence in the flesh.

Paul gives us a thorough list of examples of misplaced confidence.

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,

He had the right ritual.

of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews;

He had the right pedigree.

as to the law, a Pharisee;

He had sincere belief.

6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;

He had sincere passion.

as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

He had sincere behavior.

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

If you think your ethnicity gives you great favor with God — you are mistaken.

If you think your outstanding moral character has given you great favor with God — you are mistaken.

If you think your great wealth is a sign that you have great favor with God — you are mistaken.

Don't put your confidence in a ritual.

Don't put your confidence in your rank.

Don't put your confidence in your tradition.

Don't put your confidence in rule keeping.

The only thing that gives you great favor with God is what Jesus Christ has done in His life, death and resurrection.

Philippians 3:8-11

8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Paul's point is that if you're trusting in anything other than Jesus Christ ALONE you are trusting in the wrong thing when it comes to being connected to the God of this universe.

To count *everything* loss is not to say these other things have no value. It's to say they

don't hold all the value you place upon them. It's misplaced confidence.

For instance, does your family not have value? Yes, of course. But misplaced confidence is when we don't understand the value of something in light of the gospel.

Here's an example of misplaced confidence — the evangelical priorities code. You have probably heard this before.

1. God first
2. Family Second
3. Career Third
4. Church Fourth

It was probably created by some pastor to help his congregation to think through their priorities. But Jeff Christopherson in his book *Kingdom First*, points out an alarming aspect to this listing of priorities.

In Matthew 22, when the Pharisees (a group who liked to make protective lists of rules) asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was — which is really another way of asking, "What should be the greatest priority of my life?" Jesus said: Love God above all else. Then to clarify, He added: And

love others as you love yourself. That's it for the list of priorities.

“When God is first, I will see others as first, not my own selfish ambitions. When God is first, there are seasons that my family is first. When God is first, there will be times when my career must have priority. When God is first, there are times when my church family take sacrificial priority over my physical family and career. When God is first, He gets to make the call — kingdom first... The math works out that by not prioritizing my family but prioritizing my relationship with God, the blessing that flows down from that proper ordering is an enormous grace gift that would have never been realized through idolatrous family worship... In clamoring to assemble our priorities according to evangelical code, we may unintentionally turn our families into idols.” (Christopherson, page 51)

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

Paul is contrasting two different kinds of righteousness here. To help us understand the

contrast, let's think of righteousness in terms of our right standing before God. In other words, your acceptance before God. If you want your right standing (your acceptance) before God to be based upon how perfectly you have obeyed His revealed law, then you will find yourself sorely disappointed “for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” — His revealed standards of righteousness.

So, anyone who thinks their moral goodness will win them heaven, has misplaced confidence in themselves. And if that happens to be you, you probably have a misplaced confidence in how moral you actually are because you haven't examined the law of God. You're not living your life in light of God's word.

The gift of righteousness — our right standing before God because we're clothed in the righteousness of Christ — leads to the experience of knowing and obeying God.

In other words, the gift of righteousness leads to the experience of righteousness.

“Catholicism's focus was on becoming right with God through the sacraments or monastic

life, but the Reformers preached that being right with God is a gift. There's no need to do works for God's benefit. It's already a done deal—achieved by Christ and received by faith. And that frees you up to serve your neighbour in love.” (from 10 Things)

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.

Trust in Christ leads to experiencing Christ.

“Our faith in Christ does not free us from works, but from false opinions concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works.” - Martin Luther