

The Watford Word

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What's on

Friday 13th of March: 7:30 PM. The next meeting of our Spiritual Practices group will be looking at the spiritual practice of solitude. ✨



Sunday 15 March: Church service.

Events further ahead

Friday 03rd to 06th April: European International Campus Ministry Conference, Paris, France

Friday 22nd to Sunday 24th May: UK & Ireland mature singles retreat – “Trust In The Lord”

Friday 24th to 27th July: ICCM Preteen Camp

Saturday 25th to Friday 31st July: ICCM Teen Camp

Friday 11th - 13 September: UK & Ireland Young Professionals Retreat in Chesham.

Sept 30th - Oct 04th: Celtic Spirituality Retreat.

Friday 30th October to Sunday 01st November: Autumn Student Retreat for the UK & Ireland.

Thursday 12-15th November: UK, Ireland and Nordics leadership retreat.

Beware! Confidence! Christ!

Today's lesson continues our series on Philippians. Let me share some of my personal Bible study on this passage.

Finally?

In Philippians 3:1, Paul writes, “Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.” It does not feel like the end of a letter. Instead, it marks a turning point. He has been describing what Christlike humility and unity look like in the life of a church. Now he prepares to deal with specific problems. If the Philippians take his earlier teaching to heart, these new challenges will be faced in a way that honours God.

Before he warns them, he tells them to rejoice. Perhaps he does not want them to feel crushed. The Christian life is not meant to be heavy and joyless. As he will say again later, “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4). Their joy is rooted “in the Lord” himself. It flows from belonging to Christ and from what Christ has done.

Paul says he is writing “the same things” again. Repetition is not a burden to him. It is a safeguard. He sees pastoral care as a privilege, even though he writes from prison and faces an uncertain future.

Beware!

The tone becomes sharp in verse 2: “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!” The threefold “beware” is deliberate. He is talking about the Judaizers, who insisted that Gentile Christians must be circumcised to be acceptable to God.

“Dogs” was a slur sometimes used by Jews for Gentiles. Paul turns it around. These are not family pets but wild, unclean scavengers. By insisting on circumcision as necessary for salvation, they are the ones acting contrary to God's purposes. He calls them “mutilators of the flesh” because, when circumcision is demanded as a saving act, it becomes a distortion of what God intended. Elsewhere, Paul explains that the problem is not the Jewish rite itself, but forcing it on Gentiles as a badge of spiritual status.

Confidence

That idea of status sits close to the surface. Religion can become a status game. In the Gospels, the Pharisees sometimes displayed their righteousness publicly to be seen by others. Jesus addresses this directly in Matthew 6:1-8. Paul knew that game from the inside.

In verse 3 he draws a line: “For we are the circumcision.” The true people of God are not defined by a physical mark but by a transformed heart. He describes them in three ways. First, they “worship by the Spirit of God.” True worship is not centred on external ritual but on a life shaped and animated by God’s Spirit. As Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4:24, true worshippers worship in spirit and truth.

Second, they “boast in Christ Jesus.” There is a kind of boasting that is wrong, where we parade our achievements. But there is a right kind. It is joyful confidence in what Christ has done. Our hope rests not on careful rule-keeping but on the finished work of Jesus.

Third, they “put no confidence in the flesh.” That is, they refuse to trust in human effort, heritage, or religious performance as the basis of righteousness before God.

Advantages?

At this point, Paul does something interesting. If anyone could have played the status game, it was him. He lists seven advantages: 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; as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

The tribe of Benjamin had an honoured history. Israel’s first king came from it. Paul had even studied under the respected teacher Gamaliel. By every measurable standard, he was a success. Yet this “blamelessness” did not mean he was right with God. His zeal led him to persecute the church.

Reversing

Then comes the great reversal. “Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” He does not merely downgrade them. He counts them as liabilities. Compared to “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,” they are rubbish.

Notice the personal note: “my Lord.” This is not abstract theology. It is relationship. From the Damascus Road onward, Paul’s life has been defined by knowing Christ. That knowledge includes sharing in his sufferings and experiencing the power of his resurrection. The resurrection power at work in believers is the power that brings new life *now*.

In Christ

Paul longs to be found in Christ, not with a righteousness of his own from the law, but with the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. That promise stretches back to Abraham in Gen 15:6. It is received, not earned.

Finally, he speaks of attaining the resurrection from the dead. The small word “if” does not express doubt about his salvation. It reflects humility and the uncertainty of his earthly future. He lives in the tension of the “already and not yet.” He knows Christ now, shares in his life now, and yet still looks ahead to the final resurrection.

What is the message for us? There is no lasting security in spiritual status, heritage, or achievement. Our joy, our righteousness, and our hope are found in one place only: in Christ.

Your brother, Malcolm

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