

Faith Alone

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 October 2018

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the assistant pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy, as always, to bring God's Word to you.

A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad you're here, and we're glad you're here not because you're filling another seat, but because we are following Jesus together as one community. And so we believe that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it.

And so everyone needs to be here to hear what God has to say in His Word. If you've been with us over the last several months, you know that we are in the book of Philippians. And Philippians is a letter, as I've said before, it's a letter written to a church.

That church is a church very much like ours, and it's in a city very much like ours. And as we've gone through, I've pointed out that one of the main themes, if not the main thing that Paul hits over and over again in this letter is partnership for the gospel.

That not only do we need the gospel, the news of Jesus' life and death and resurrection, but we also need our partnership together in it. And we've been spending a lot of time talking about the partnership.

[1 : 0 7] In the last couple weeks, we've been talking about how we grow in the gospel, how it is that we become more and more like Jesus. And we're going to start to shift a little bit away from the partnership more towards the gospel.

And they're always connected, so we're always going to talk about both. But each one is going to have its own emphasis. And so we've been in the partnership pretty strong in chapters 1 and 2, and now we're going to be in chapter 3.

And I've also been teasing you with chapter 3 for a while, because I've told you several times that Paul is going to use the phrase dogs and mutilators. And so we're finally there.

So I have not teased you in vain. We're finally going to talk about the dogs and the mutilators. But as we come to this passage, it reminds me of a story, and it might be a story that you know.

A tragic story in 2013 in Tampa, Florida. A man named Jeremy Bush, in the middle of the night, heard his brother Jeff, who had a bedroom next door, screaming.

[2 : 0 5] And so he got up, trying to figure out what was going on. As he walked into his brother's room, he saw his brother's bed sliding into the ground. Everything around him disappearing into the ground underneath his bedroom.

And so Jeremy jumped in after his brother to try to save him, wasn't able to get him. And rescue crews came. They were able to pull Jeremy out, but Jeff was lost. And what it turns out happened is that it was on a foundation of limestone.

And this actually is pretty common in Florida. And over time, acid from rain and from the soil had eroded the entire base, the entire foundation under that part of the bedroom.

And so the whole house had to be demolished and taken away. The property has been now abandoned. Jeremy will still come and visit from time to time. And, of course, this is not totally isolated.

This is something that happens throughout Florida just because of so much limestone. And I tell you the story to say this. This passage before us points out that our foundation matters.

[3 : 10] The foundation of our faith matters. What it is that we trust in is either solid and secure or it's not.

And what we'll see in this passage is that there are only, ultimately, two ways to live. There are only two different foundations that we can look to in this life. And so our foundations matter.

What we trust in, what we rest in, matters. It can be, in fact, a matter of life and death. And so look out for those two ways as we read Philippians 3.

We're going to start in verse 1. This is in your Bible, but it's also in your worship guide near the end, if you want to just quickly get there. Remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so read with me now, starting at verse 1. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

[4 : 12] To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

For we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. 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. Verse 5. 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, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. Verse 7.

Verse 10.

[5 : 28] Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Dear Father in heaven, we come to you as we do every Sunday, distracted, weighed down, sometimes joyful, but always needing to hear from you.

And so we ask that you would do that again today. You do what we ask you to do every week, that you'd send your Holy Spirit, that you'd speak to us, you'd do it clearly, you'd help us to understand, and that as a result you would change us, that you would make us look more and more like Jesus.

We ask all these things in the name of your Son. Amen. Amen. Amen. So I mentioned before that there are essentially two ways to live.

Now, outside the church, just as you walk around, you'll probably find people talking about three ways to live, and they won't necessarily put it in those terms, but it sounds a little bit like this. There are people who are extreme moral exemplars.

[6 : 49] These are people who are models. These are the Mother Teresas of the world. There are normal people like you and me. You know, we're just good people. We're trying to do our best.

We're trying to live right. You know, we make mistakes, but that's human. And then there are bad people. And those people are people who, they should probably be in prison, in jail. They're people who cause problems in our families, in our neighborhoods.

But there's three kinds of people, and we're always in the middle. We're always kind of the normal, everyday, good people just trying to do the best we can. You know, we're no Mother Teresas, right? But we're also upstanding citizens.

We're in the middle of the three. And yet, the story of the Bible is that there are not three ways to live, but there are two ways to live. Two and only two. And Paul cuts to it right away.

He doesn't mess around. He says in verse 3, We are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God in glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Now, there's a lot going on here, but the two ways to live are this.

[7 : 48] There's either confidence in the flesh or there's living by the Spirit. We can either live by the flesh or live by the Spirit. We can either live by flesh or faith.

And bear with me here. Those terms are not intuitive. They don't immediately make sense. And there's a lot that Paul is talking about here in terms of circumcision that we could spend all day unpacking. And so I'm just going to tell you a story, and I hope that this makes sense of everything that's going on.

I want you to imagine that you're married. If you're not or if you are married, you don't need to imagine. And someone comes up to you and says, You know, I just really want to know, how is your marriage going? How are you doing?

And you look at them and you say, What do you mean? I don't even understand the question. Can't you see I'm wearing my wedding ring? I'm wearing my ring. Why would you?

Can't you see that? There's nothing else for you to ask. I mean, obviously things are good. I'm wearing my wedding ring. Or imagine you go to a marriage counselor and you're struggling in your marriage.

[8 : 50] You're not sure if you're going to be able to work things out. And you sit down, and the counselor asks you, Okay, so tell me what's going on. And, you know, 45 minutes later, you're just beginning to describe what's going on.

And the counselor says, You know, we only have about 10 minutes left. And so, you know, I want to leave you with something here. I can tell, you know, it repeats everything. I can tell all these problems in your marriage. But it's really clear to me what the problem is.

I saw right away when you walked in here that you weren't wearing your wedding rings. And so if you would just go home and put those on, we're not going to need another session. Because that's going to solve your problem. The simplest way I can explain what's going on here to you is this.

Circumcision was the wedding ring of God's people in the Old Testament. Circumcision was the sign. It was an external sign of what was supposed to be an internal reality.

And so wearing a wedding ring isn't bad. And being circumcised is not bad. But our reality is not in the sign, but the thing that the sign points to. And so these folks, these evildoers, these dogs, these people who mutilate the flesh, they are teachers who are going around telling new converts to Christianity that what matters most is keeping a limited set of rules.

[10 : 12] Paul's going to refer to it later as the law. We see in verse 9. Be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law. And this is referring to all the Old Testament rules that God gave to his people.

And circumcision sort of represents all of those. It was an external sign of what was meant to be an internal reality. And so God would tell his people all over and over again in the Old Testament, I don't want you to just be circumcised on the outside, physically circumcised.

I want you to be spiritually circumcised. I want you to have the sinful nature cut away from you. I want you to be clean and purified. And yet these teachers, these Jewish folks, had taken the law and decided that that was all that mattered.

The external signs, the external behaviors, were the only thing that were worth anything. And so it was as if they were going around and telling these new converts to Christianity, that's great that you believe in Jesus, but you don't even know about all these lists of rules, and you need to keep all of them.

And so it's on the one hand very challenging, very difficult, right? This is a long list of rules. And on the other hand, very too easy.

[11 : 24] It's both a bar that's too high and too low. I mean, what if I gave you 50 things that were external actions, and if you made sure you did them, you would know that your marriage was good.

Okay, you have to make sure you're wearing your wedding ring. Now there's a little bit more to the law, so you've got to make sure you're trading off every other morning on who's making the bed, and then you've got to do certain things in terms of your personal hygiene, and you're going to sit down every week and have a meeting where you work out responsibilities in the family, and as long as you have those things down, everything else is good.

You know that your marriage is alive and well. That's what these folks are teaching. That's what these dogs and evildoers are teaching about their relationship with God.

That if they can just keep a certain set of rules, they can earn God's favor. They can earn their way before God. I've talked a lot before about the different ways of talking about good.

We can say, be good like I'm good, and that's exactly what these folks are doing. These Jewish teachers are saying, be good like we're good. You're not Jews, but you need to become Jews.

[12 : 29] You need to keep the law. And so on the one hand, you have to do this very difficult thing. On the other hand, you don't have to have any change in your heart. You can be proud and rely on everything you've done to earn you a standing before God.

And so Paul here goes on to say, you know, I've tried this. We see in verses four through seven, Paul lists a lot of things. I'm not going to go through every single one of them, but Paul lists all the things that he has done that according to the law would make him perfect and blameless.

And so his point is this. The law, zero out of ten, would not recommend. I've tried it, I've done it, and I've done it better than any of you would ever be able to.

I'm not a convert. I was born into Judaism. Anything that you could do that is external, that is on the outside, that people could see, any action you could complete, any checklist you could check off, I have been there and done it.

And so I can do it better than you can, and I don't even think it's a good idea. I can do it better than you can. I, if anyone, has a right to claim standing under the law, and I think it's a bad idea.

[13 : 43] This is sort of like, it came out a few years ago that Bill Gates and Steve Jobs and various executives high up in social media companies had decided that they personally were going to limit their children's access to social media, sometimes cutting it out entirely.

And you have to think, wait, someone who runs Facebook thinks this is a bad idea? And that's what Paul's saying here. I run the law, and I think it's a bad idea.

If anyone has standing, if anyone has ability, it's me, and I have still gone away with it. In fact, I've given up everything that I could have had under the law.

I used to be a, be good like I'm good person, but now I'm a, no one is good, only Jesus is good. Because I've realized that the law is not going to earn me favor before God.

The law can't change my heart. It can't make me able to please God. The law takes God's demands and His holiness and makes it much less than it ever is. And so I, it comes to a place that is not just, not just mistaken, but actually evil.

[15 : 02] And so we've talked a lot about unity in the church. We've talked a lot about figuring out what's important and what's not important. And I promise you that Paul is going to be willing to fight over certain things. And it's this that he's willing to fight over.

It's the heart of the gospel. This understanding of there's only one way that's right to live of two. And so that's why, back in verse two, he says, look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers.

Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. He's warning us about these things because the, the sad and at times unseen reality is that living by the law isn't just mistaken.

It's not just a mistake. It's not getting a math problem wrong. Living by the law is actually evil. It leads to destruction. These are people who are going after others, trying to get them to live up to their standards and be good in the way that they are good.

And so they turn out to be people who are going out harming others. And it's not just in verse two that we see that. It's also, Paul slips it in when he's listing his qualifications.

[16 : 07] He says, as to zeal, and this is in verse six, a persecutor of the church. In other words, Paul's love for the law, his love for being good, actually resulted in hurting other people.

His insistence on his own righteousness, his own goodness, it didn't leave him to be a good, upstanding citizen. It led him to be biting and attacking other people.

And so living by the flesh, it isn't just mistaken. It harms other people. It hurts people around us. And it hurts people around us because if you live by the flesh, if you're a be good, like I'm good kind of person, what ultimately often happens in your life is just tremendous anger.

Because you have your identity tied, if you have it tied to anything other than Jesus, you have it tied to imperfect people and imperfect things. And so someone who lives by the flesh, they're either proud or they're crushed.

They're consumed by what other people think of them because they believe that their standing in this world is based on their actions. The family motto of law families is we are the perfect family.

[17 : 29] And there's a destruction that comes of that too when no one's willing to admit their flaws and their weaknesses and their imperfection. It destroys the ability to be honest and open with other people. It destroys the ability to have real relationships.

And it destroys families as well. It destroys us when we can't handle the imperfections of people around us. If your identity, as Paul says, comes from his family heritage, his line, if it comes from his behaviors and his actions, what happens if someone in your family doesn't do the right thing?

If that's where you're getting your sense of rightness and righteousness, then you're not going to be able to live with it. You're not going to be able to live at peace with them. And so living by the law drives people apart rather than bringing them together.

It leads towards anger, towards others who can't live up to your standards. And yet the hard thing is, right, that there's this list that the Pharisees have put together. And it happens to be a list of things that they're really good at doing.

When you're a law person rather than a spirit person, when you're a flesh person, you put together a list. We put together a list of things that we're good at and others aren't. And then we judge them by it. The other flip side is not the proud person, but the crushed person.

[18 : 49] You know, we live in a flesh law culture. Even more and more as the internet takes off, you know, if you've made one mistake in your life and someone can find out about it, then things might be over for you.

Because in a law culture, all that matters is how you've kept the law. There's no reconciliation. There's no restoration. There's no knowing how to take someone from a mistake and restoring them, bringing them back in.

Because if your standing is dependent on what other people do, if it's dependent on you keeping a set of rules to be in with your group, then there's no way you're going to be able to associate with people who are different.

I mean, we're seeing this all around us with the tribalization that's happening in our society as people more and more break into their groups and make a list of rules, sometimes rules that change from year to year about what you need to do to fit in or say or do the right thing.

There's no opportunity to enter into dialogue and be able to make a mistake because it becomes a law, just like the law that's being taught here. And so if you're wondering why Paul is calling them dogs and evildoers and mutilators of the flesh, it's not to give you an excuse to use those words about other people.

[20 : 12] This is not a proof text for it being okay to use strong language. What it is is it's expressing Paul's outrage because he sees the destruction that the law does.

And he's trying to protect this church that he loves in Philippi from being influenced by it in any way. He's trying to protect them from being crushed by it or from crushing other people.

And so instead he presents the only other way and that way is to live in the spirit, to glory in Christ. He tells us in verse 3, when he says, for we are the circumcision, what he means is this is what really matters.

The people who are truly in a right relationship with God are not the ones who have kept this specific list of commandments, but those who worship by the spirit of God. In other words, as we've talked about the last couple weeks in Philippians chapter 2, God's spirit has come in and he has taken away the power and the penalty of sin.

These are people who are able to see victory more and more in their lives. They're not seeing perfection, but they're seeing victory. They're seeing God putting sin to death. And they're striving for it.

[21 : 26] We're going to talk about this more next week, but they're working towards it, but they know that their keeping of the law is not what makes them right before God. They can say, not be good like I'm good, but no one is good.

Only Jesus is good. And so they have the freedom to grow more and more, the freedom to make mistakes, the freedom to be wrong. But instead of the pride of the be good like I'm good, they also have to have the humility of the gospel.

They're free to make mistakes, but they also have to be willing to say it and admit it. Because it's this righteousness that's being talked about here that comes from Christ.

And so when Paul's talking about righteousness, by the way, it's a technical term that he's using, but he's talking about our standing before God. Remember, we've talked about before that there are two comings of Jesus.

Jesus has already had his first coming, and we celebrate that at Christmas. We're going to celebrate that soon. But Jesus also has a second coming. And his second coming is when he's going to return again to judge the entire world.

[22 : 29] And so when Paul talks about righteousness, what he means is, what are you going to stand on? What's your foundation at Jesus' second coming? When Jesus returns again and he judges the world, there's only two ways.

There's only two foundations. One is to say, I kept the law. I did it all. Or you can say, I didn't keep the law. I didn't do it all.

But Jesus did it for me. Jesus accepted the penalty that I deserve for my sin when he died on the cross. He lived the perfect life. He had all the righteousness, and he gave it to me.

And so that is my standing before you. And so there are only two ways to live, only two foundations. And at Jesus' second coming, when he comes again, Paul references this in verse 10, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection.

In other words, that I may have a righteousness that doesn't come from what I've done, but from what Jesus has done, so that when he comes again, at his second coming, I will be able to stand.

[23 : 39] And I'll stand not because of what I've done, not because I've kept a list of rules, not because I've looked down at others who are not able to do as good as I've done, but I'll stand because of the righteousness God has given me.

I'll stand because of what Jesus has done in my behalf. And so that's why he begins this entire passage. You notice we skipped over verse 1.

That's why he begins it by saying, rejoice in the Lord. One of the themes of Philippians is joy. And the secret is not just that be good like I'm good.

It's not just wrong but evil. But the other secret is that no one is good, only Jesus is good, is the only way to joy. It's only when we know that our standing before God is based on what Jesus has done and not anything that we can do, that we can have true joy.

Not only is that the way we have true joy, but Paul presents it as the definition of true joy. That the only way that we can have joy, something that's not rooted in our circumstances, is to place it in something that's not affected by our circumstances.

[24 : 47] And so we can have joy even if people around us are not making us look good. We can have relationships with them even if they're failing to keep the law in the way that we would want to.

We can have the humility that comes from knowing that our standing is with and from what Jesus has done for us. We're able to celebrate the victories that God's given us rather than being filled with pride.

When we make mistakes, we can have hope rather than being defeated. We can know that if we're in Jesus, no matter what we've done, there's a future for us that he offers to us, that there can be restoration and reconciliation.

We can confront other people and their sin without shaming them. We can talk about the ways that we need to grow without saying, I'm good, I've kept the law, but you haven't.

Instead, calling us towards what Paul is going to talk about next week, which is striving towards the goal. And then Paul ends with this, that this kind of joy, this kind of freedom that comes from not the law, not the flesh, but the spirit, it's worth losing everything for.

[26 : 03] Paul has had real loss. Paul actually did have the perfect family. He did have the perfect pedigree. He did have the perfect background. And yet he realized that none of it was worth it.

It was worth nothing compared to that, verse 9, which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. Paul saw himself and he realized that he was self-righteous and self-assured.

He wasn't finding joy and running around and persecuting the church. wasn't bringing him what he wanted. Instead, it was just rotting him from the inside out. And so here, as much as the partnership matters, he's coming to remind us that it's a partnership specifically about the gospel.

And the gospel is many things, means many things, at least in our life, but it really is one thing. It's this one thing that it's two ways to live and the gospel is one of them.

And so God is calling everyone to repent. He's calling us to repent of believing that others and ourselves need to be good like we're good. Or to repent of being crushed, believing that there's no hope because we're not able to be good.

[27 : 18] But instead, he's calling us to confess and follow Jesus who is good even when we're not. to avoid the pain and the evil and the destruction that comes from trying to obey the law and expecting others to do so as well.

There's a famous story about the concentration camps in Germany. They would often give those in the camps meaningless work to do.

They would give them bags of salt filled with water to carry from one side of the camp to the other and then carry it back. Sometimes they would make them build a wall and then have them tear it down again.

And there was a sign over Auschwitz and many other of the entrances to the concentration camps that read translated into English like this, Work will set you free.

Of course, the great irony was that as they were doing all this meaningless work, the very opposite was happening. And so what Paul is telling us is this, work when it comes to earning favor from God will not set you free.

[28 : 36] It will lead to death. But Jesus was willing to become death to take on that work to set us free. And so we can choose to live in that way because of him.

we can, as he tells us in verse 10, know him and the power of his resurrection and sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death so that we attain the resurrection from the dead.

That's the hope that Jesus offers us. It's the treasure that we're going after together in our partnership. And it is worth more than anything else. And so, brothers and sisters, let's continue.

Let's go together working towards the righteousness that comes through faith that Jesus has given us and not that from the law. Please pray with me. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you have freed us from the burden of self-righteousness.

We ask that you continue to do that, that you move in our hearts by your spirit, that we would worship by the spirit of God, that we would glory in you, not ourselves, and that it would lead us more and more to joy with you and with one another.

[29 : 51] We ask all these things in the name of your son. Amen.