

Pastor Matthew Ude

October 4, 2026

INI - SDG

Boasting In Circumcision

Worship in Spirit - Rejoice in Christ - Believe in Grace

Philippians 3:1-9 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you *is* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe. ² Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, ⁴ though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence

of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

What kinds of things do you boast about? How big the deer is you shot? Your kids grades? What about boasting about being circumcised?

In our text Paul says “we are the circumcision.” That seems like an odd thing to boast about. But it is important because so many of the promises that God gave in the Old Testament were given to those who were circumcised. What Paul is saying here is that all the promises of God belong to us, the redemption, the forgiveness, the Messiah. We are his people.

Paul had a problem. The Pharisees were trying to claim they were the true people of God and that Paul and those who followed him and more importantly Christ were fakes. Paul wasn’t willing to give up the promise of God.

In our text this morning Paul takes this challenge head on. What makes one a member of the true church? Paul says those are of the circumcision that is they are truly the church who

1. Worship in Spirit

2. Rejoice in Christ
3. Believe in Grace

First those are of the true church who worship God in the Spirit.

It is easy to mistake what Paul says here as those who worship “in spirit,” that is sincerely from the heart. You must really mean it or it doesn’t count.

Paul does not say worship in spirit, but worship in the Spirit. And in fact, even the preposition “in” is not in the Greek. The translators just assume that it ought to be translated “in the spirit” but it could just as easily be translated “by the spirit.” This is how NIV does translate it “by his Spirit.”

In the Spirit then means that the Holy Spirit works within us. Thus, Paul is not saying that you must make your spirit and attitude and heart perfect to God and only then can you worship him. He is not saying, “You must be sincere enough.” If that is what Paul was saying that would be impossible for us. Luther found out just how impossible this was. Luther tried very hard to make his heart and attitude sincere, and it never worked. Being sincere is good, but being sincere is not what makes you a part of the church.

Rather Paul testifies that we come to God impure and unclean. We come in sin and with a hypocritical heart, and his Spirit works in us to produce fruits including the worship of God that is acceptable to God. The Holy Spirit makes our worship acceptable to God, not our efforts.

We can think of God as a car mechanic and church as a garage. Why do you take your car to a mechanic? To show off how perfect your car is or to ask him to fix it? If you come to the mechanic and say look how great my car is the mechanic will say, then what are you doing here. If you come saying my car is broken, please fix it then the mechanic gladly helps.

If any come to God saying look what I brought you, God says, “what are you doing here.” But if someone comes saying I am broken please fix me God gladly gives his Holy Spirit so that he might work on them and in them.

This is the true worship of God as all the prophets make clear.

Psalm 51:17 ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise.

Psa 147:3 He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds.

The true worship of God comes to him with a broken spirit to be healed by His Spirit. These are truly of the church who come in repentance, that is those who worship by the Spirit.

Secondly, they are of the true Church who rejoice in Christ

In how many romantic movies does someone say something to the effect that “I will always be happy as long as I have you.” “Nothing else matters if I have you.” “You complete me.”

Some of us might roll our eyes when they say it in a movie. But this is pretty much exactly what Paul means when he says, “rejoice in Christ.” He doesn’t mean that he goes around whistling all day and singing songs on his guitar. But he means that Christ is his treasure and he is willing to give up everything for Christ.

Paul himself explains his joy in Christ in verses 7 and 8:

Philippians 3:7-8 ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

What does Paul mean when he says, “I count them as rubbish?” Does he mean that these things are valuable but I gladly throw them away for the sake of Christ? Not at all, rather what he

means is that he correctly values them as worthless in comparison to Christ

Paul is like the jeweler who puts the little scope in his eye and looks closely at the gems being offered. Paul sees that what is being offered is cheap plastic and has no real value at all. These things are worthless, but Christ is the real thing. And so, he gladly throws away all these things and keeps only Christ.

Now what things is he talking about here? We could say the things of this world, and that would be true. The things of this world are worthless in comparison to Christ, but what Paul is talking about here is the righteousness of the law. All the hard work that Paul did trying to do what is right all the time. All the effort he put into doing what was good and right, all that work, Paul says I gladly throw it away for the free gift that is mine in Christ Jesus.

Those who find their value and joy in Christ, these are they who are truly circumcised in the heart.

Thirdly they are of the true church who place their trust and their confidence in God's grace and not in the works of the flesh.

I was driving the other day, and I came across a sign "Road Construction, road closed to through traffic," but there weren't

any detour signs. So, what do you do? Do you keep driving and hope that the road construction is only minor, and you can still get through? Since I didn't know any other way to go that was my inclination, but then this other car which had passed me earlier came towards me from the area of the road construction and turned onto another road. It was obvious what had happened. That guy had tried to drive through the road construction and found out he couldn't and had come back.

In our text today we have the road sign. This way is impassable. You aren't going to get through. Don't put confidence in your own ability to do anything. You won't make it through.

We not only have the sign, we have two examples of those who tried going down this road and both came back and are telling us that way is impassable don't go down that road. We have the example in our text of Paul, and also, we have the example of Martin Luther.

Look at how Paul thoroughly tried that path.

Philippians 3:4-6 If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

“Concerning the works of the law, blameless.” When Paul calls himself blameless, he only means that no man could ever find fault with his actions. He is blameless before other men. But that God could find fault with him there is no doubt, Paul himself says,

Romans 7:24 ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Paul tried that road and it didn't work.

Luther as well tried to go down that road it did not end well. That road ends only in a dead end but here we have another path the righteousness which is not our righteousness but is instead the righteousness of God. This is the righteousness which is the grace of God that is the free gift.

We can try like Luther and like Paul did to work hard to make our own salvation, or we can trust in the righteousness that is given to us through Christ Jesus. This road alone is going to lead us to salvation.

Let us instead stay on the only road that leads to our salvation, which is Christ Jesus and him crucified.

As Paul reminds us, I have no righteousness of my own but only:

Philippians 3:9 that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

So go ahead and boast concerning your circumcision, not the circumcision of the flesh but the circumcision of the spirit. Boast in all that Christ has done for you. Boast in his Spirit. Rejoice in Christ, believe in Grace, for these are the true circumcision, and to them belong the promises and the covenant.

Amen