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Protecting God's People Philippians 3:1-11

How many of you have ever seen the television show hoarders? Hoarders is a show about people who hold on to everything they buy and get rid of nothing. Stuff keeps piling up in their house because they get attached to things and can't let go. Evidently, it is hard for some people to get rid of things they love or consider valuable.

I remember when Brianna and I first got married back in 2004. We were living in a pretty small apartment and she immediately wanted to have a garage sale at her parents house to get rid of some of my clothes that had been around since my high school days. That was a problem since I was 29 when we got married. I couldn't understand that shirts I had been wearing for well over 10 years were being sold for \$1. I guess I'm a hoarder at heart after all.

One lady on the television show hoarders summarized the danger of a hoarding mentality – “Because everything is important, nothing is important.” If you hold on to everything after a while nothing becomes important.

Tonight I'd like to point you to something dangerous we have to be willing to get rid of in the church if we are going to have a healthy church. What is something we have to get rid of in order to have a healthy church? **One thing we have to constantly be on the lookout for and be willing to get rid of is legalism.** This morning we were all reminded about what is so dangerous about a legalistic approach to God from the parable of the tax collector and the publican. One man trusted in his own righteousness and went home condemned and one man looked away from himself to God's provision and went home justified.

A legalistic approach to God threatens true joy in the life of the church. One pastor describes legalism as “seeking to achieve forgiveness from God and acceptance by God through my obedience to God.” At the heart of legalism is a

wrong approach to God. Legalism is a whole lot more dangerous than avoiding certain movies or certain music. Legalism is really a salvation issue. Legalism was an important area the early church had to deal with because it threatened the joy of the church and its witness to a watching world.

Please take your Bible and open to Philippians 3. Let's begin by reading Philippians 3:1-11, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. **2** Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; **3** for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: **5** circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; **6** as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. **7** But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. **8** More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, **9** and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, **10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; **11** in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

The last few weeks Pastor Rick has been teaching about the role of elders and the role of deacons in the life of the church. Since I was made an elder a few weeks ago I have been thinking a lot about one of the qualifications of an elder that Rick went over a few weeks ago. In Titus 1:7-9 the apostle Paul writes, "For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, **8** but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, **9** holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

I've really been thinking a lot lately about that last verse. An elder must be able to hold fast the faithful word that is in accordance with the apostles doctrine for two reasons - To exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. The responsibility of an elder is really to protect God's people spiritually.

One of the privileges of an elder is to take God's Word and help the local church know what they must believe (what accords with sound doctrine) and what they must beware of (Refute those who contradict). Our responsibility is really to seek under Christ, to protect you from false doctrine by continually pointing you back to what is true. To help you understand what to believe in and what to beware of. This is our privilege. This is our joy.

Why is it so important for godly elders to be able to take the teaching of Scripture and help the local church know what to believe and what to beware of? Look with me over at I John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." **The end of I John 4:1 is why you need spiritual protection.** Have gone out is translated from one greek word that is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense describes a point in time event with abiding results. I John 4:1 reminds us that false teachers went out at a point in time in the past and they remain in the present.

Because false teachers went out at a point in time in the past and remain in the present you need protection. Heresy is everywhere and you need to understand better what to believe and what to beware of. True joy in Christ is at stake in terms of what you are trusting in and what you are staying away from. That is what we're going to consider tonight from Philippians 3:1-11 - **True joy in the life of the believer comes down to knowing what to believe and what to beware of.** We want to look at this section of Scripture tonight under two headings:

1. Reject False Teaching That Leads to Confidence in the Flesh - Philippians 3:1-3
2. Receive True Teaching That Leads to Confidence in the Savior - Philippians 3:4-11

This morning I got to lead the devotion in our elders meeting and I told the other guys about a time when I was in the 11th grade at Robert E. Lee High School and I wasn't taking notes like I should have been. My science teacher asked me why I wasn't taking notes and I told her it was because I had a photosynthetic memory. I meant photographic. I told her I didn't take notes because I could remember what she wrote on the whiteboard by staring at it. Looking back it was no wonder that I was an online level student growing up.

Some people are better visual learners. You remember things better if you are shown something and not just told something. Philippians 3:1-11 is a great example of the apostle Paul exhorting the Philippians in sound doctrine and refuting those who contradict. **This is Titus 1:9 in action.** In these verses Paul reminds the Philippians where true righteousness comes from that maintains solid joy in the Lord. He begins this chapter with the word finally. You know Paul was a preacher because he uses the word finally and then if you notice he has a lot more to say. Paul uses the word finally but he is not landing the plane. He has more to say to the Philippians.

Finally introduces a new subject Paul wants to address. Paul begins this section by commanding the Philippians to rejoice in something? Rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice is present tense command. All true joy for a genuine believer is found in Christ. It has its source and ultimate aim in Him. **Sinclair Ferguson, "Joy does not lie in our changing circumstances but in our unchanging Savior and in the joy-giving Word He has spoken to us."**

This is what Paul wanted the Philippians to believe. They had been kind enough to partner with Paul in the furtherance of the gospel through a love offering and Paul writes back and reminds them to always find your joy in your Savior. Look at the end of Philippians 3:1, "To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you." **Safeguard means a measure taken to protect or prevent something.**

Why did the Philippians need this command? Why did they need this safeguard, this protection? Because there was a group of people who were tempting the Philippians them to take their focus off of Christ and to focus on something else.

Look at Philippians 3:2. Remember the role of the elder is to do what from Titus 1:9? Exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. He is to take the Scriptures and interpret them the right way to help believers know what to believe and what to beware of. Philippians 3:2 is an example of Paul refuting a group of people in the early church who taught something that contradicted the teaching Christ gave the apostles to preach. Philippians 3:2, “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.”

You’re probably going to think I watch too much television after asking if you have ever seen the show hoarders and now I have another television question. Do any of you remember the crocodile hunter? The Crocodile Hunter was a wildlife documentary series that was hosted by Steve Irwin and his wife. Do any of you remember what Steve Irwin would say when he was close to a dangerous animal, “Danger, Danger, Danger.” His Australian accent made it even better.

Three times in Philippians 3:2 Paul yells out danger, danger, danger. There was something dangerous these believers needed to beware of. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision. Who are these people? We understand that Paul isn't writing about literal dogs. He is writing about a heretical group that made its way into the early church who are called Judaizers. The Judaizers were a group of heretics whose teaching threatened the health of the local church.

The Judaizers were a group of Jewish believers who professed faith in Christ but demanded that Gentiles be circumcised and follow Jewish customs if they were to be saved and considered equals in Christ. The Judaizers posed a major threat to the early church. Their teaching clearly deviated from the truth that Christ gave the apostles to preach. Paul was very concerned the Philippians would be seduced by this false teaching and so he tells them three times to beware.

Again, the role of the elder is to take the Scripture and help believers understand what to believe and what to beware of. In this case it was the Judaizers. Paul refers to them as dogs, evil workers and false circumcision. Is that direct? Absolutely. Paul loved these people enough to deal directly with dangerous doctrine that threatened the Philippians joy in the Lord. Paul is trying to raise an awareness in the Philippian church that this group of people is not who they appear to be.

In Paul's day wild dogs roamed the streets seeking something to eat. Even so, the Judaizers roamed churches looking to devour anyone who would listen to their false gospel. "As the dogs represented a danger to those who encountered them, so the teachers represented spiritual danger to their hearers." These dogs were dangerous.

When Addison was about 1 or 2 we were visiting Brianna's family in San Diego. They live in a descent neighborhood, but on the top of the hill above where they live are some really expensive houses. At the time someone who played for the San Diego Chargers lived in one of the houses - a linebacker named Shawn Merriman.

One morning I decided to take Addison on a walk up the hill and as he walked past Shawn Merriman's house I looked and I noticed a pit bull on the front porch. It was the kind of pit bull that you didn't want to mess with. I was thankful there was a fence between me and Addison and the pit bull. Then I noticed the pit bull make eye contact with me and he came running down the hill toward us and he slipped under the fence and came running up to me and Addison. I wasn't sure what to do. Addison was excited, "She kept saying. Puppy daddy. Puppy."

The dog kept circling us down the hill until we got to a fence on the side of Brianna's parents house. I opened the fence and got Addison and I through the fence and shut the door back on the dog before he got in. About 30 minutes later we hear screaming outside the house and the pit bull had attacked another dog that was outside the house. I still remember when the pit bull ran up to us not knowing what to do. But I knew I needed to be careful.

Paul's picture of these people as dogs was a reminder that they were dangerous. Some people in the church aren't what they seem. They weren't what they appeared to be. They were dangerous. They were also evil workers. They worked hard but their work was evil. They were diligent in terms of their efforts but their message didn't help people - it actually harmed people. In Matthew 23:15 Jesus said of the Pharisees, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." Woe is a word of

judgment. The Pharisees worked hard and went on a lot of mission trips, but their message hurt more people than it helped.

Finally, Paul describes them at the end of verse 2 as the false circumcision. They insisted circumcision, something in addition to faith in Christ was essential for justification, for being declared right by God. Throughout his ministry Paul taught that adding circumcision to the work of Christ did not enhance true spirituality, it actually harmed it. “With a striking play on words, Paul calls those who would cut off the foreskin not friends of salvation but agents of destruction.”

Why does Paul warn the Philippians? Because that’s what a godly leader who wants to honor Christ and help the church does. Paul understands the tragic consequences that flow from false teaching. In 2 Timothy 2:17-18, Paul calls out two men who were harming the church Timothy was pastoring at the time, “Their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, **18 men** who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.” Hymenaeus and Philetus are men who denied core doctrine - They denied the resurrection and Paul called them out on it.

Paul compares their false doctrine to the spread of gangrene. **Gangrene was a nasty sore that resulted from problems with blood flow. It describes the death of bodily tissues due to the loss of blood supply.** Nasty ulcers would develop from gangrene. Just as gangrene progressively brought death to the human body, the sickening progress of the heretical teaching worked havoc with the body of Christ in Ephesus. Notice Paul was willing to refute people brought false doctrine into the life of the church.

What is Paul doing in Philippians 3:1-2? He is taking the truth Christ had given him as an apostle and he is exhorting in sound doctrine - Rejoice in the Lord; and he is refuting those who contradict - beware, beware, beware. He is trying to help the Philippians see what they may not be seeing about the Judaizers for their good and God’s glory.

In Philippians 3:3 Paul explains the contrasting characteristics of the true church. We are the true circumcision who do what - Who worship by the Spirit of God

and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Nothing about a Christian is self generated. Nothing comes from us. Our flesh profits nothing. It's been said that the only thing sinners contribute to their salvation is the sin that makes it necessary. God's Word in Philippians 3:3 reminds us where true power and where true righteousness are found.

A truly regenerate person, someone who is really born again, doesn't put any confidence in their flesh for their relationship with God. ***'In broad terms, flesh is anything apart from Christ on which one bases his hope for salvation'. The believer, understanding that there is absolutely nothing that he can do with his body to earn salvation, trusts in Christ and Christ alone.'***

Richard Melick, "True believers worship by the Spirit of God. Using a term that often referred to temple service (*latreuō*), Paul identified inward, spiritual worship in contrast to the legalism of outward conformity to the law. The Spirit energizes and focuses Christian worship. Second, true believers glory in Christ Jesus. The term "glory" means to boast. Paul consciously contrasted the boasting of good works with boasting that is in the work of Christ. Third, true believers have no confidence in the flesh. A righteousness that trusts in human initiative and energy to gain spiritual blessing."

There is a principle we need to take away from Philippians 3:1-3 - **What we rely on is what we rejoice in and what we rejoice in is what we rely on.** The Judaizers put their confidence in their own flesh so they rejoiced in themselves. True believers put no confidence in the flesh and therefore we worship in the Spirit and rejoice in the righteous provision of Christ. This is how we remain joyful in Christ. It's important for us to remember that we must reject false teaching that leads to confidence in the flesh - that's dangerous and it sucks the joy out of the life of the church.

Paul reinforces with his warning with a reminder of his own personal testimony in Philippians 3:4-11.

2. Receive True Teaching That Leads to Confidence in the Savior -
Philippians 3:4-11

If anyone had reason to put confidence in the flesh it was Paul. Verses 4-7 show us Paul's religious resume. It's quite impressive. Read Philippians 3:4-7. That's quite an impressive religious resume. His parents took him and had him circumcised when he was 8 days old as the law of Moses required. He was born into the nation of Israel and into the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Hebrew beyond question.

When he grew up he became a card carrying member of the Pharisees. He had displayed unquestioned zeal for Judaism, going so far as to persecute Christians, whom he regarded as a threat to it. If you were a Judaizer and you read this resume you'd have to be impressed. **“His performance was such that all those who had known him and observed him would have to say that he was blameless in every way.”**

But something happened on the road to Damascus that we read about in Acts 9. When Paul met the risen Savior everything changed for Paul. Read Philippians 3:7-11. Do you see how a right understanding of the gospel completely changed Paul's approach to God? Where did he place his confidence? He now placed his confidence in what God had provided for him through Christ. In Philippians 3:4-11 Paul is showing the Philippians why he rejoiced in Christ and put no confidence in the flesh. He was really an example for them to follow.

Paul lost a lot when he became a Christian. He most likely lost his family, he lost his wealth, he lost his reputation, he lost all his friends, but notice what he gained. Paul gained the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. Paul finally gained what he had been searching for his whole life. Paul gained a whole lot more than he lost. Why? Because he gained a relationship with the Savior of the world. With that relationship came spiritual power and a new purpose in life.

“Paul regards his prior privileges and achievements as spiritual rubbish in comparison to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, and being justified (v. 9), sanctified (v. 10), and glorified (v. 11) in him.”

Let me close with this - What is really at stake in being a godly leader in the church? What is at stake is nothing more and nothing less than salvation. Godly leaders can't save anyone. We know that. The Word does the work. The Spirit of

God uses the Word of God to convict of sin, convert to Christ and conform God's people into the image of Christ. We can't save. But we are responsible to exhort in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict. That's our wonderful privilege.

Usually on Monday mornings when I don't have a meeting or something to prepare for immediately, I like to take some time and read through the pastoral epistles - 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. I love those three letters because they are written to young men in pastoral ministry. They were written to two young men who needed help fulfilling their responsibility in the church. I like reminding myself what God has called me to do. There's a verse that really stands out to me about the role of the pastor. 1 Timothy 4:16, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."

That's a very sobering verse because it reminds me that I need to make sure I am applying what I am learning and I need to make sure my teaching lines up with the Scripture in the way the Spirit meant for it to be understood. That takes time and energy and obviously the help of the Spirit. But notice what is at stake. The salvation of those who listen. "Persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you." Persevere is a strong word. It means to continue steadfastly. Don't swerve to the right or the left. Stay focused because the Word does the work. Nothing less than salvation is at stake in what a leader does with the Word in the life of the church.

Paul understood that. He knew that false teaching that leads to confidence in the flesh must be rejected because it leads to damnation and he knew that true teaching leads God's people to confidence in the Savior which leads to eternal life. He was willing to point the Philippians to what they needed to believe in to maintain joy and what they needed to beware of that threatened their joy. May all godly leaders follow this example while relying on the power of the Holy Spirit and resting in the righteous provision of Christ for the glory of Christ and the health of His body. Amen. Let's pray.