

“Nothing Compares”

Today in our text Paul goes on the attack, while at the same time making passionate proclamation of the superiority of Christ.

You might say that he is playing both offense and defense. Positively speaking, he is trying to score points by lifting up the “surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ his Lord.” (v.8) And negatively speaking, he is trying to destroy the enemy by attacking error that has infiltrated the church.

Healthy churches always have to do both. It must state positively to the world who it is and what it believes as a church, and it must also attack error when it arises, lest it be destroyed from the inside out.

First let’s look at Paul in the attack mode.

Paul’s Attack on the Idea that Circumcision Is Necessary for Salvation- v.1-3

In verse 1-3 of the text Paul attacks the idea that circumcision is necessary for salvation.

There were people in the church, probably Jews, who were insisting on the necessity of circumcision in order to be Christian.

This problem has to do with the fact that Christianity came out of the roots of God’s dealings with the Jewish People in the Old Testament.

In that great story, God called Abraham and made a special promise to him. God told Abraham that He would make a great nation from him and that He would bless the whole world through his offspring. This was nothing less than a promise of salvation. God was going to shine the light of His grace into the world and redeem His people, both Jew and Gentile, through His promise that He made to Abraham.

God gave a special sign to mark this promise, the sign of circumcision. This sign makes sense because the fulfillment of God’s promise was predicated upon God giving Abraham offspring. No offspring equals no nation and no people, and no nation and no people equals no Savior; therefore circumcision would have served as a constant reminder to Abraham of the necessity of God giving him offspring.

Eventually God would fulfill His promise to bless all the nations of the earth, by sending forth His own eternal Son into the world, the Lord Jesus Christ, from the bosom of Abraham, in order to do for Israel and for us, what we could not do for ourselves. Unlike Israel, Jesus kept God’s

Law perfectly for us, on our behalf, and he made us one with God through his death on the cross. Where Abraham's people, the Jews, failed, Jesus succeeded perfectly.

Because Jesus fulfilled the promise that God made to Abraham there was no longer any need for circumcision.

In Christ circumcision had come to an end and it was replaced by the waters of baptism as God's new sign of being in His family; the water, of course, signifying the cleansing power of Jesus' death on the cross for our sins. Yet there were still Jews who were insisting that Gentiles who were coming to faith in Jesus be circumcised.

This outraged Paul. He believed that by adding circumcision as a *requirement* to be a Christian these people were adding something additional to the gospel other than what Jesus had done for them in his life, death, and resurrection. We are saved by the blood of Christ, not circumcision, and this salvation becomes real in our lives through the gift of faith, and nothing else. So here in this text Paul is fighting for the purity of the gospel of grace.

Paul is quite passionate about this fight.

The things that arouse our passions the highest are the things that are most important to us. They are the life and death things and this issue was a matter of life and death for Paul and the gospel he was preaching.

Paul is so awash in emotion that he uses a derogatory term, a vulgar slur, if you will, to describe those Jews who were trying to say to the Gentiles that they cannot be a Christian unless they also get circumcised. Paul calls them "dogs, men who do evil, mutilators of the flesh." (v.2)

The term that is so offensive is "dogs." It doesn't sound offensive to us Americans because we have dogs as pets. But back in Paul's day they were not pets, but rather scavengers who roamed around the streets in wild packs. To call someone a "dog" back then, would be akin to calling someone a cockroach today. It would be a most derogatory put down.

I do not raise this point to encourage anyone here to use derogatory terms, but rather to show you the passion of Paul and the seriousness with which he sought to guard the truth of the gospel. This passion would not be here if Paul did not believe the gospel in its entirety. People do not get upset over changes in things they do not believe in or care about.

It begs the question can anything arouse our passions in the church when things go awry, besides things like the color of the carpet in the sanctuary?

Many Christians are asleep at the wheel while their congregations and denominations are being attacked from within by false perversions of the faith.

Paul would have none of this. He attacked back when the gospel was attacked. That's what a good shepherd does. He defends his flock from the enemy. We should do the same. The flock must be protected.

The next set of verses, v.4-6, are transitory in nature in that they point back us to the problem that Paul was attacking in the church in v.1-3, the circumcision problem, and they point us forward, by setting us up to hear Paul's positive declaration that nothing can compare to knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Paul does this in v.4-6 by making the point that if he can't be saved by keeping God's law then no one can be saved by keeping God's law.

If Paul Can't be Saved by Works Then No One Can Be Saved by Works- v.4-6

After Paul warns the Philippians to be on the lookout for those "dogs" who would lead them astray by having them put their confidence in the flesh (*by "flesh" he means "circumcision" not carnal or sexual desires*) he then goes on to say that if there was anybody on the face of the earth who ought to have grounds putting his "confidence in the flesh," meaning his good works and his efforts in keeping God's law, it was Paul, yet even he found his efforts to be righteous before God to be insufficient for his salvation.

In v. 4-6 Paul tells the church that he himself was circumcised on the eighth day, not a minute too late; that he came from the tribe of Benjamin, the only tribe that sided with Judah after the nation of Israel split into northern and southern kingdoms. The point here is that Judah was the tribe from which the Savior came and the tribe of Benjamin was her only friend, and Paul came from that tribe! That he was the Hebrew of Hebrews, meaning that he could read, write, and speak the Jewish language in a day when many Jews could not speak it due to them being absorbed by the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day. When it came to the Law of God, Paul was a Pharisee, meaning he knew it up one side and down the other. As for zeal, no one was more passionate because Paul persecuted Christians in his former life. As for legalistic righteousness he was second to none, faultless, meaning that Paul kept the OT law tit for tat.

If there was anyone who should be promoting the necessity of circumcision for salvation it ought to be Paul because he was a man of impeccable credentials; yet even he found them to be worthless in light of Christ. What Paul is saying here to the Philippians is that they ought to listen to him, not to those Jews who were telling them that they must be circumcised, because if

he can't be saved by all of those things then neither can they or the Philippians who are being led astray by them.

Today there may be someone here who thinks that their credentials will get them into heaven.

You think to yourself I have lived a pretty good life. I go to church every Sunday. I give to charity. I help my neighbor. I am a member of the Rotary Club. I got my eagle scout. I am patriotic. I do not lie, cheat, or steal, or use bad language. I am a good person. I will get to heaven, because I am good.

This is what the apostle Paul used to think, but then he came to realize that he was not as good as he once thought, and that God was more holy than he could have ever imagined.

After the risen Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, Paul got the proper perspective on his legalistic righteousness. He came to understand that "all of his righteous acts were as filthy rags" and that he deserved death for his sin. Paul looked good on the outside, but on the inside he knew that his heart was "desperately wicked and deceitful above all things."

In order for a person to be saved he must come to embrace God's perspective on his credentials.

God says your credentials are inadequate and insufficient to save you and the very fact that you think they can save you is a *repudiation* of what Jesus Christ did for you on the cross. When it comes to your salvation you must understand that your list means nothing to a holy God.

Now Paul goes on offense.

Nothing Compares to the Surpassing Worth of Knowing Jesus Christ as Lord - v.7-11

In verses 7-11 of the text Paul drives home the point that nothing compares to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord.

In this last section of the text he begins to put into perspective everything he has already talked about- circumcision and his impeccable credentials- by comparing them to Jesus Christ. And when the two lists are placed side by side next to each other, there is no comparison, Jesus wins hands down.

Once again, Paul uses graphic language to make the point. He says in the text, in v. 8, that he considers all of these things "rubbish" when compared to what he has gained in knowing Christ. The Greek word that we translate as "rubbish" literally means "dung."

John Calvin, in his commentary on Philippians, offers a wonderful illustration to make the point of contrast that Paul is trying to make in the text.

Those who cast their merchandise and other things into the sea, that they may escape in safety, do not, therefore, despise riches, but act as persons prepared to live in misery and want, than to be drowned along with their riches. They part with them, but it is with regret and with a sigh; and when they have escaped death, they bewail the loss of them. Paul, however, declares that he had not merely abandoned everything that he formerly reckoned precious, but they were like dung to him, or were disesteemed like things that are thrown away in contempt.

The question we must all ask ourselves is do we view all of our earthly belongings, and all of our credentials, in the same manner, in light of knowing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior?

If we can't we might have a problem.

Conclusion and Call to Faith

Paul gladly gave up his credentials and privileged position in life for the sake of knowing Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

He gave up his ethnicity, family lineage, education, favored job status, and his pride, and set them all aside at the foot of the cross. That is the hardest thing in the world for a man to do. To admit that he is a sinner who cannot save himself and to forsake all of the stuff that he thinks can save him.

If man is to be saved then it is something that God must do and it is something that we must respond to in faith and repentance.

The good news of the gospel this morning is that God has done it for us in Jesus Christ! In Christ God has accomplished our salvation through the righteousness of Jesus that comes to us by faith in him.

The Bible says that if “you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.”

I invite anyone here today who does not know the Savior to make that commitment. Ask Jesus to be Lord of your life and reconcile you back unto God, so that you may “know Christ and the power of his resurrection,” both now and for all eternity.

Nothing compares to knowing Jesus as Lord.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.