



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Philippians Lesson 10: Philippians 3:1-11

We have now reached the halfway point of the letter. In typical Pauline fashion, he shifts from broader topics and examples to more specific examples. While we don't know exactly the nature of the dispute and disharmony going on in the church of Philippi, this chapter gives us some strong hints.

Read Philippians 3:1

What is the first command Paul gives here in this chapter?

Why does he tell them he writes this again?

Describe the things they were supposed to rejoice in that we have seen so far throughout this book?

Once more we see a familiar refrain from Paul: "Rejoice!" Interestingly enough, he calls this command a safeguard for them. If you think back to all of the reasons Paul commands them to rejoice, they all revolved

around a united focus on the gospel of Christ. I cannot imagine a more difficult target for the devil than a congregation that is functioning with 100% unity of mind and focus, pointed directly toward Christ. This attitude is absolutely a safeguard in so many ways.

What are some ways this attitude of rejoicing acts as a safeguard?

Read Philippians 3:2-3

What does Paul command the church in Philippi to beware of?

Read Acts 15:1-12. What is occurring in the church as a whole that deals with this situation?

How does Paul describe the people they are supposed to beware of?



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It's no wonder that Paul doesn't take kindly to these men. A quick read through Acts and it is easy to see that these men were a constant thorn in his side. They followed him from town to town stirring up the people against him, physically persecuting him, and causing strife and division in the early church. We can only speculate whether this was the specific issue that Euodia and Syntyche were struggling with, but regardless, it is clear that the Philippian church was dealing with the issue in some way for Paul to bring it up as an example.

What was the significance of circumcision for the Jew?

Read Colossians 2:8-12. What does Paul consider the new equivalent of circumcision?

What does Paul say about the "true circumcision" in Philippians 3:3?

How were those opposing Paul putting confidence in the flesh?

How does this go against the attitude Paul has been teaching about throughout this letter?

These men who were causing Paul and the church so much trouble had an entirely wrong perspective. As we see throughout the gospels and Acts, they had found pride in the outward appearance of piety and looked down on others who didn't show all of the same outward signs as they did. This became a big problem in the early church when those men sought to put those same restraints on Christianity, binding what Christ never bound. The entire letter of Galatians was written to address this very specific issue. (Go ahead and give it a quick read, I'll wait!)

Read Philippians 3:4-11

What qualifications does Paul share about himself?

According to verse 7, how did Paul view all of those accomplishments?



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What even stronger language does Paul use in verse 8 to describe all of his previous accomplishments outside of Christ?

According to verse 9, where is true righteousness NOT found?

Where does Paul say true righteousness comes from?

According to verse 10, what is the result of attaining this true righteousness?

Finally, according to Philippians 3:11, what is the ultimate end of attaining this righteousness?

The heart of the issue with those causing this wedge in the church was pride. Paul emphasized that if anyone had a right to boast in his fulfillment of Jewish custom, it was him. But Paul understood that there was no way he could ever earn

righteousness. He understood better than most that it didn't matter what accomplishments you attained or what family you came from, none of that mattered to Christ.

The biggest problem that these men faced was that their focus was on themselves. They were completely obsessed with their goodness and what they had done and had absolutely missed the fact that none of those things could even begin to repay the debt they owed. They looked down on those that didn't toe the imaginary line that they had created, which had nothing to do with following Christ, and everything to do with making themselves look good. Whether it was because they earnestly believed these men or because they were simply afraid of the backlash, so many people in the early church were swept up into this (even Peter himself!!! Cf. Galatians 2:11-14).

Sometimes we turn off our brains when we read about this because it seems so foreign. We don't struggle with condemning those who haven't been circumcised. Don't fool yourself into thinking that this attitude doesn't permeate the church though. How many times do we pre-judge whether we share the gospel with someone because we just assume "that type of person will never listen." How many times do people walk into the church building and get judged based on what they are wearing or their tattoos or their hair style?



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I know a heartbreaking number of people who won't walk into a church building at all because they went once, and people rolled their eyes or ignored or made snide comments about what they looked like. The last time I looked the absolute only passage that addressed the way we dress in worship was James 1:2-4 where he begs us not to make distinctions based on dress. If I look at a person's outward appearance before I consider their soul with love, shame on me! If I pre-judge a person's devotion to God based on a first impression, shame on me! If I assume someone will be unaffected by the power of the gospel message because of the way I perceive them, shame on me!

This is just one example of how we struggle with this same type of pride today. What are some other ways we can be like those who were trying to bind circumcision on the new Christians?

How can this attitude be damaging to the church?

How can embodying the attitude Paul has described throughout this letter combat this issue?

What are some areas in your life where you struggle with a similar prideful attitude?

What are some practical ways you can confront this attitude in your own life this week?

Some of the most profound teachings in all of Scripture come from this tiny letter. We have already encountered so many challenging teachings, but in the coming passages Paul will give us even more pointed commands. Be sure to spend a little time this week reading through the book as a whole at least one time. A continued focus on the entire letter will help you to see the greater context even more clearly.