

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Let's go ahead and begin.

I titled my message: *Empty Religion*

In the early 1900's there was a famous evangelist by the name of Billy Sunday.

I love reading about Billy Sunday because before he was a famous evangelist, he was actually a professional baseball player. He was descent too.

He played for the Chicago White Stockings – these same White Stockings went on to become the Chicago Cubs.

He quit baseball to pursue the burden that God had placed in his heart and he started evangelizing across America.

He was Billy Graham before Billy Graham.

One of his most memorable quotes and one of my favorites is, "If there is no joy in religion, you have a leak in your Christianity."

If there is no joy in religion, you have a leak in your Christianity.

In other words - if there's no joy in your walk as a believer - you have a problem.

You've got a leak someplace and you need to find a way to deal with it.

As believers, there are many reasons why we may experience these leaks of our joy??

Trials and tribulations in our lives -

Uncertainties – we can get so overwhelmed about how certain things are going to turn out that it robs us of our joy.

Dissension within the church

Strife, Envy, Jealousy, Selfishness

And we have seen that Apostle Paul has tackled many of these topics in the first two chapters in the book of Philippians.

He has asked for oneness and humility and sincerity among the church. He has made it very clear that he still rejoices even though he is being held in a prison in Rome.

However, in my opinion, the biggest culprit is the one that Apostle Paul is going to speak about in chapter three. It is something that is still alive in the church today.

It is one of legalism.

Let's see what Paul has to say about legalism –

Let's pray...

[Phl 3:1-11 NKJV] 1 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; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

So our text this morning is going to cover legalism.

Now, the word legalism is never found in scripture. However, we do find numerous examples of legalism throughout scripture.

Basically, legalism is the practice by some in the church, who proclaim that you can only grow spiritually or achieve salvation by adhering to a list of do's and don'ts.

For example, in the 1950's, it was considered a sin to go to the movie theater. You couldn't even take your children to the local theater to watch the movie Bambi.

When black and white television became popular, many in the church again came out and proclaimed that owning a TV was a sin.

When color TV became popular, it was ok to have a black and white TV but a sin to have a color TV???

Legalism will tell you how to dress, whether or not you can have piercings or tattoos, it will tell you what to eat and it will even tell you how to worship God.

I knew an older gentleman who once told me that the day that my old church started worshipping with a set of drums, that would be his last day at the church.

Legalism is the reason that many people leave church and it is also the reason that many who stay in the church don't mature in their walk.

People leave because it is too hard or don't grow because they become complacent in their own self-righteousness.

During the three year ministry of Jesus, we saw Him encounter a form of legalism by the Pharisees.

Turn with me to the gospel of John 9.

This is a wonderful example of what Paul is speaking about here in the letter to the Philippian church.

This is what legalism does –

In John chapter nine, we have the story of the man that was born blind.

He was a beggar.

Now, Jesus sees the blind man and He proceeds to spit on the ground – He reaches down and He makes a little mud pie – rubs some of the mud on the eyes of the

blind man and then commands the blind man to go wash his in one of the nearby pools and the blind man is obedient to the words of Jesus and is now able to see.

Now, keep in mind that it wasn't the spit that healed the blind man, it wasn't the mud or clay – it was our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who healed the blind man.

Why is this event significant??

This is the first time in all of scripture that anyone is healed of their blindness.

Write the following two verses down.

[Psa 146:8 NKJV] 8 The LORD opens [the eyes of] the blind; The LORD raises those who are bowed down; The LORD loves the righteous.

[Isa 35:5 NKJV] 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

So let's see what happens to the blind man after he is healed – we will start in verse 13.

[Jhn 9:13-25 NKJV] 13 They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. 14 Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight.

He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 They said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." 18 But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. 19 And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 "but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." 22 His parents said these [things] because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed [that] He [was] Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." 25 He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner [or not] I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."

The Pharisees were the religious rulers during the day along with the Sadducees.

They knew the word of God. They memorized the word of God.

The two verses that I gave you should have opened their eyes that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. But, their legalism prevented them from seeing the obvious.

They awaited the Messiah – yet they failed to recognize Him standing in front of them.

Their legalism robbed the once blind man of his joy as now they were even questioning whether or not he was truly blind. And it was the same legalism that blinded them from seeing the truth.

Let's go back to our text in Philippians

[Phi 3:1-2 NKJV] 1 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!

Apostle Paul is letting them know that he doesn't want to sound like a broken record.

He had warned them about legalism before and he is going to do so again and it is for their own good.

You see, there were those that would infiltrate the church and they would say to the people that they were not truly saved because they were not circumcised.

These men were known as the Judaizers.

The Judaizers taught that in order for you to be saved, you had to adhere to the law.

They taught that salvation was achieved through a mixture of grace (through Christ) and works.

And in verse two, Paul likens them to dogs, to evil workers.

You see, back in those days, they didn't have cute pugs or poodles in their homes. Dogs were scavengers, running around in packs, fighting with other packs of dogs.

This is what they Judaizers were doing.

Going into the churches and dividing the congregation with their false doctrine.

Turn with me to Acts 15

[Act 15:1-2 NKJV] 1 And certain [men] came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension

and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

Church, we must be very careful when anyone proclaims anything other than Jesus Christ as a way for salvation.

Anyone who adds a requirement for salvation is in effect stating that what Jesus Christ did on the cross is insufficient.

In Paul's day, it was circumcision, in our day – we have churches that have works as a requirement.

The mutilation is of course in reference to the physical circumcision that the Judaizers were pushing to the church.

[Phl 3:3 NKJV] 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

Here in verse three, Paul reminds the church regarding true circumcision.

This past Wednesday night, in our study through Genesis, we saw the institution of circumcision as it was supposed to memorialize the covenant between God and Abraham. And I made the point that even in the Old Testament, the scriptures reveal that circumcision was always about the heart.

[Deu 30:6 NKJV] 6 "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Notice who is doing the circumcision? God!

Now turn with me to Colossians 2

[Col 2:9-13 NKJV] 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. 11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with [Him] through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,

Much of the congregation of the Colossian church consisted of Gentiles who because they were not Jewish, had not been circumcised.

Here Paul tells them that, "Circumcision is not important; what is important is the spiritual cutting away of the flesh that Jesus performs in the life of every believer.

You see, Christianity is not about an outside-in religion.

We often misunderstand the nature of Christian faith.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for thinking religion was outside-in. He said, "You clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence" (Matt. 23:25).

Sometimes we think that if we get all the externals right, then we'll be right before God.

But Christianity is not an outside-in religion where we take care of the externals so that the inside will be different. Rather, Christianity is an inside-out transformation.

God moves in us and changes us and reshapes us on the inside so that the inward reality affects the outward reality. The transformation that takes place in our hearts and in our souls shapes our outward behavior.

We don't need a list of do's and don'ts because our relationship with Jesus Christ will lead us to do things that will bring glory to Him.

We must work in our relationship with Him first and be transformed from the inside.

This confidence of the flesh that Paul speaks about here at the end of verse three is having confidence in one's religious work.

There are people that treat their religion as idols.

You see, man-made religion only leads us to trust in our own works instead of the putting our trust in the Almighty God.

Being religious is just as dangerous as someone who is irreligious –

[Phi 3:4-6 NKJV] 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.

This is directed toward the judaizers.

These judaizers were boasting about their confidence in their flesh – their circumcision. Paul counters their boast and details his own pedigree that Judaizers would not be able to come close to.

If anybody could trust in the flesh, Paul could. If you want to learn from someone who “had it all”, listen to Paul.

First of all, he was born Jewish – he wasn’t a convert like many of the Judaizers.

Paul considered himself blessed, having been born a Jew.

He was of the small tribe of Benjamin. This was the smallest tribe in Israel, but it was also the tribe of the first king, Saul, and so it was considered a special tribe.

He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews – this was significant because during this time, you had two types of Jews, You had Hebrew Jews and Greek Jews (Hellenist Jews), the Hebrew of Hebrew Jew spoke Hebrew and followed the law meticulously. The Greek Jew adapted to the main culture of the time – which was the prevailing Greek.

He was a Pharisee - The Pharisees were the strictest sect, being careful to do everything according to the Law and their traditions.

He was a zealot for his Jewish faith.

He persecuted Christians – Paul could be considered in the elite among the Jews, believing so strongly in his faith that he had others put to death who disagreed with him.

He considered himself blameless - Not blameless in the sense that Paul was actually in a perfect standing with God. But blameless in the sense that as far as he knew as a Jew, he was doing everything he was supposed to do.

Paul had it all. There was nobody who was more religious than Paul.

So Paul build up his pedigree and the he responds in verse 7.

[Phl 3:7-8 NKJV] 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

Do you understand what Paul is saying?

He's saying that everything he thought was important— his ethnic and social status, his religious right-standing with God, his achievements, and so forth— **they are nothing compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus.**

You see, Paul is not rejecting his Jewish heritage – in fact, in many of his epistles, he reminds us about the tremendous blessing that God has demonstrated to the Jews.

What Paul is rejecting is the false assumption that one can earn a righteous standing before God because of one's credentials or based on one's works.

That is what Paul is rejecting.

I think that sometimes we can fall into the trap of trying to become something great so God can utilize us.

The problem with this mentality is that we then become a person who learns to trust in on own strength, and not in the Lord's. We then fall flat on our faces.

We must always remember that,

It's not what we can do for God that counts, but what God can do for us.

God wants to do a bigger work through you and me than we could ever do by ourselves.

But for that to happen, we need to get out of the way.

We need to become dependent upon the Lord. We need to “rejoice in the Lord”

There is only one way that we can get to heaven, and that's by trusting in what Jesus has done for you on the cross.

Everything else is worthless.

[Phl 3:9 NKJV] 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;

The second that we opened our heart to Jesus and decided to trust in His death as being enough to pay for our sins, God did something wonderful. God performed an exchange, taking your sins and my sins and exchanging them for Jesus' righteousness.

[2Corinthians 5:21 NKJV] 21 For He made Him who knew no sin [to be] sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

You see, God put our sins upon Jesus and in turn took Jesus' righteousness and gave it to us.

This is how we can be found righteous in the eyes of God. Not by our works but by what Jesus Christ did on the cross.

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The phrase "I want to know Christ" is important. Paul has been a missionary for about ten years at this point.

He has traveled all over the Mediterranean world, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. From the road to Damascus to his prison cell in Rome, he faced all kinds of beatings and persecutions. Yet in the midst of it all, he was able say, "I want to know Christ ... I want to become like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

So do you understand what this means? Paul, who has known Christ and fully devoted himself to Christ, realized that there is always more of Christ to know. There's always more of Christ to experience and to discover. When we discover more of Christ, we experience more transformation in our lives.

It doesn't matter if we have walked with the Lord 5,10,20 or 50 years – there is always more of Him to know.

The last things that Paul speaks about in verse 11 is the resurrection from the dead.

At Christ's coming those believers that know Him will experience the resurrection of their bodies.

Whether we've been buried, cremated, buried at sea or still alive at Christ's appearing it doesn't matter. God's power will create for us new resurrection bodies –

No more pain, no more illness, no more tears. We will have physical bodies, just like Jesus did at His resurrection.

Finally,

It is hard for our fleshly nature to accept the fact that our salvation is a gift. It is all because of grace –

The moment that we fully grasp that, we will abandon legalism and instead draw closer to Him and allow Him to work in us.

It is then, that we will rejoice in the Lord.

Amen!

Let's pray...

Dear Jesus,

Please forgive me of all of my sins.

I know that my sin has separated me from You and I am deserving of death.

I believe that you died for my sins and rose again.

I turn from my sins and I am asking that You come into my life.

Show me how to live my life that is right and pleasing to You.

I accept You as my Lord and Savior.

In Jesus name I pray.