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**UNBROKEN JOY**  
**THE HEART OF JOY**  
**Philippians 3:1-7**

We continue our study through the book of Philippians and we come to these verses, beginning in verse 1 of Chapter 3.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Where were you on September 11, 2001? I remember. I was on an airplane, of all places, travelling. I landed in Atlanta and discovered that all the planes had been grounded and quickly began to try to discover what had taken place. I called home and began to get a report of the tragic events of that day. Do you remember where you were on September 11, fourteen years ago?

We, in the providence of God, had planned this Sunday, International Sunday, on the following Sunday. We decided to keep this celebration to celebrate our diversity and to celebrate our unity as a church family. There were extra people in church that particular Sunday. There was a lot of patriotism in the air, understandably so. Generally speaking, I think patriotism is appropriate for us as Christians -- loyalty to the nation in which we have been born.

So we came together on that day. There were a lot of us and we were celebrating our diversity. We were celebrating one another's ethnic origin and identity, especially the most characteristic and loved foods. International Sunday is growing for us. We got to hear Adam sing in Creole today. We got to hear a rap today. I never thought a member of the pastor's family would rap on Sunday

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morning - My wife was going to do it, but my son stepped in. When I listen to my children's playlists, it's always interesting to listen to this son's playlist.

We are diverse. And we are united. And we celebrate that. But what we are really celebrating is Jesus Christ, because it is Jesus Christ who is the source of both our diversity and of our unity. It's important to be reminded that we are really not ultimately exalting unity, though unity is great, and it's needed, and it's important. I don't personally have a "Coexist" bumper sticker on my car. I don't know that I'm opposed to the idea of all of us getting along. I think I am in favor of that. I understand that we need to respect one another. We need to respect everyone who is made in the image of God. I think the foundation for cultural unity is found in scripture, but we need to be reminded that that which is ultimate is not unity. That which is ultimate is Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of all. And we are here because of him. We are here for him.

I think that's so appropriate because on this day, September 11, we saw what was a tragic reminder of how divided we are as a world. We get plenty of those reminders on a daily basis, just incredible division, and we want to be reminded. We need to be reminded that Jesus Christ is greater than all of the loyalties, all of the human loyalties that separate us. He is worthy of the praise of all peoples, of all nationalities, of all ethnicities. He is Lord. He is Lord of all.

In this passage in Philippians 3, as we are making our way through the book of Philippians, we see Paul come to his main theme again. Verse 1: "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord." He is teaching us about joy. We have here a manual for joy, how to experience joy and how to walk in joy. We entitled this series "Unbroken Joy," because Paul's point he returns to over and over again is that joy is found in Jesus Christ. In this passage, in all of Philippians 3, really, he brings out this idea that Jesus is the foundation of joy, and he is the focus of our joy -- that without a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we don't have a proper foundation for experiencing lasting, sustained, unbroken joy. But when we have that foundation, and he fights for that foundation in this passage, he then points us to Christ as the focus, as the daily focus. Knowing Him, the excellency of His worth, knowing Christ -- that's the focus. That's where our joy finds expression and experience.

So he writes, "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you." Paul is almost apologizing for repeating himself - "To write the same things to you again is no problem. I know I have said this before, but it's important. It's a

safeguard for you.” It appears when we read the verse that he is explaining why he is talking about joy again. But that’s not exactly what’s going on here. Joy is there. It’s a part of the repetition, but it’s not the main idea. It’s what follows. Almost certainly, Paul has repeatedly spoken to the Philippians about these truths, about a dangerous, extremely dangerous false teaching, and he returns to that subject. He is aware that as soon as he begins with it, there is going to be a temptation on the part of his readers to say, “Okay, okay, we’ve heard this; we know this; alright,” and to tune him out.

So he lets his readers know, “I’m aware that you’ve heard this before, but this is necessary. This is important.” And he will come to some of the most important verses in scripture in terms of helping Christians understand what life is all about. Verses 8-11 - we will, Lord willing, look at them next week:

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>and</sup> be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Do you hear him? Foundation and focus. Where does righteousness come from? Where does a right relationship with God, a right standing with God come from? What is the foundation for joy? What is the source of rightness with God? Well, it is a righteousness that comes from God. And what is the focus as we are made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ and our sin is forgiven? We are given the Spirit of God and our focus becomes knowing him, sharing in his suffering, walking in his resurrection power, waiting for the day of his return, when we will see him face to face. Foundation and focus. Righteousness comes from Jesus Christ. It comes by faith in Christ.

I was at Publix this week. I was standing in line with my sub and chips and soda. This pleases my wife so much to hear. A gentleman in front of me had his card out and the cashier asked, “Is that debit or credit?” The gentleman, who was somewhat elderly, was confused and he wasn’t sure. He thought it was a debit card, so he slid the card and tried to put in his pin. Well, it didn’t work, and

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this went on for a while. He was sliding the card, and sliding the card, sliding the card, putting in his pin, putting in his pin, putting in his pin. People were generally pretty patient. The line was full of New Yorkers and as you would expect, everyone was just very, very patient. It's International Sunday. I've got to give a shout out to the New Yorkers, right?

I could see in his wallet that his debit card was in his wallet. As he was standing there, I was starting to take note of everything that was happening, and that he's using a credit card. I want to step in to help, but I'm reluctant. Finally, the cashier and I both say to him, "Sir, that's a credit card." He goes, "Really, it's a credit card? Okay." So then he selects credit and puts in his pin. We say, "No, no, no -- you don't have to put in a pin." This goes on for a while. This is why you buy a sub, because it's good for days.

It's a silly picture, but it's an appropriate picture. We are trying to get righteousness out of our own account. Righteousness is credit, not debit. I don't have the goods within me. I don't have it in my own account. I don't have a secret pin number, a secret access point to right behavior and rightness to God and a right standing with God. If we think that those little loyalties that mean so much to us, about what our traditions are, and how we do marriage, and how we find a mate, and how we raise our children, and how we vote, and how we live - all very important things -- but if we think that that is our access point to a foundation with God and a relationship with him, we are just in trouble. Because no matter how clever we are in our pursuit of life, we don't have righteousness within us. Are you following me? Do you understand what I'm saying?

This was particularly brought home to me many years ago when my wife and I had an opportunity to go to Canada for a trip. It was so long ago that one of the Bushes was president of the United States. I can't even remember which one. Some folks from Canada heard I was a pastor and immediately they began to tell me how they just couldn't stand Christians. "Wow, you just met me and you already don't like me." As I explored what they meant by that, this is what they understood Christianity to be: They understood Christianity to be the Republican Party, and that President Bush was like the head of the church.

That sounded crazy to me. But you know, it's not crazy, because in the minds of a lot of Christians, that's how they think. It's amazing to you, but some Christians think that the Democratic Party is synonymous with Christianity, and other Christians think that the Republican Party is synonymous with Christianity. And they're pretty sure that the other side is completely lost.

I'm not insinuating for a moment that the issues that drive us politically are not important. Nor am I suggesting that how you educate your children is not important -- whether you homeschool, or do public school, or do private school. These are important decisions. Whether or not you drink a glass of wine or whatever. See, I am starting to offend you as I just list the issues. Paul is addressing this whole mentality of taking our little provincial perspective and saying, "Boom - let's set this up. This is Christianity." He is saying, "None of that will make you right with God. None of that." And there are particular dangers that come associated with our zeal for these things.

For example, Paul will teach in Romans 14 -- he will talk about how you celebrate certain days, and what you eat, and he mentions diet, and what you drink -- all of those things. He says, "You know, they're important. They are the way you live out your daily life to God in worship. But the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." This teaches us in that chapter, for example, that we are not going to all agree. We are going to have differences. Some of those differences are minor. Tonight, when you go through the food line, you might want to ask which foods are especially spicy. That's just my recommendation based on past experience, which I enjoy, but I want to take in small portions.

Some of those differences are minor. Others have a way of dividing us when that loyalty is what we are all about. Paul does something ingenious, and I'm still kind of talking my way through Romans 14. He says, "Listen, I'm not telling you not to be zealous about those things. I'm not telling you that they're not important. They are very important because this is how you live out your life unto the Lord. But I am telling you that you are not going to all agree about it and you don't have to all agree." He even goes as far as to insinuate, "Just keep some of this to yourself, and love others and consider them rather than promoting your zeal for your particular approach."

So we have here in Philippians 3 a perspective on true Christianity. He actually gives us a definition of Christianity. This is one of the rare places where very concisely we are given a definition of Christianity, and we are going to answer three questions. We will spend most of our time answering the first question, which is:

- What is true Christianity? From verse 3. Then briefly we will answer these questions:
- Why do we need it? And:
- How do we get it?

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Let's start with the first question. What is true Christianity? In verse 3 he gives us three characteristics. He tells us that true Christianity has to do with worship, those "who worship by the Spirit of God." This is the first characteristic. By worship here, he doesn't mean necessarily what we just did. He means all of life. He is using a specific word where he is teaching a very biblical teaching: that all of life is worship to the Lord. And what we do when we come together is the highlight of that experience, so that all week long we are living to the glory of God. We are worshipping him, and then we just come together to sing and express that together as the highlight of our week in worship. He tells us that that worship, that service to God which is all day, every day, is by the Spirit of God, and that we are made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not of our works.

The gift of God is eternal life, and we experience that now by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Spirit of God lives within us, Romans 5. And the joy of the Lord is exploding within our hearts, Paul tells us. He tells us, "Listen, we are so blessed in Christ that we have Romans 5 access before God. We come to his throne. His throne is the throne of grace. We have peace with God. And there, before God, we can call out in his throne room, receiving grace, receiving mercy." We have joy, he tells us, even to the point where bad things that happen in our life? We celebrate. We celebrate tribulation because God is using those in our lives for good, which leads him to say, "And just in case you have any doubt, you know this is true because the Holy Spirit is in you, shedding abroad the love of God."

We serve God by the Spirit, not through our own legal code. All the things that we know to do that are right are good and right, and the things that we know to avoid are wrong and we are to avoid them, but we serve by the Spirit of God. There is a false teaching here, where individuals are coming in and they are saying to the gentile Christians in Philippi: "You have to become Jewish. You have to be circumcised, and you have to keep the Old Testament ceremonial law. It's not enough for you to believe in Christ, but you have to dress yourself externally in the ways of Judaism." And Paul is coming against that teaching.

It reminds us that we need to focus, beginning with the human heart, that God is interested not just in conforming our external behavior, not just in having us all measure up externally, but God is after our hearts. His Spirit resides within us so that Jesus taught us this very thing. We go to the Sermon on the Mount where he teaches us, "Listen, don't murder. But murder begins in the heart

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with hate. Don't commit adultery. But adultery begins in the heart with lust." It's an extremely difficult teaching for us to really get ahold of. We focus on external things. We judge people. We assess people by what they wear and how they keep themselves. Though we know that that's not exactly fair to them or right, even without doing it consciously, we are constantly measuring our world externally.

Even today in worship, a few people lifted their hands. A couple people shouted out. Some people noticed it. Some people didn't notice it. Some people gasped and thought, "We don't do that. We're in church." We are different and we have different comfort levels. There is a place where clearly in scripture you move beyond a place of personal expression to where everyone else is brought into your experience, and now it becomes a corporate experience and your personal worship is distracting. I personally didn't see or hear anything like that this morning. The point is: This teaching is extremely difficult to grab ahold of.

So I celebrate the fact that as a church we have homeschoolers, we have private schoolers, we have public schoolers. I hope that we don't have any no-schoolers. But if we do, we'll try to help. I don't want to be known as a homeschool church or a private school church. I want to give support to all of God's people. I'm not for a moment saying that's an unimportant decision. I think it's critically important. Pray. Seek the Lord, right? But it's not that loyalty that joins our hearts.

Some of you at times have come and expressed helpfully to your pastors, "Hey, I don't feel like we fit because we don't do this...." And we've grown through that experience. My point here is: This is a tough teaching for us. We can be very superficial. Husbands can think their marriage is great because they go on a date night every other week with their wife. I recommend a date night. I think it's wonderful. I think a date night is great every week. But it doesn't mean you have a good marriage. Just because you have a quiet time doesn't mean you are walking with God. I think you need to have a quiet time. I think it's helpful. We can be very superficial and even feel good or bad about ourselves based on these superficial measurements. Jesus is saying that the Christian, the true Christian, is someone who worships by the Spirit of God. Give attention to all these other things, but that's not our foundation. That's not that which we stand upon.

This building - this building expresses a value for us, right? We are the temple of God. We are not giving focus primarily to a building. We want a financial model that isn't a burden so the tenants from this facility pay rent to the church to pay the mortgage. The idea is that as much as possible

we want financial liberty. It's not all that impressive. I have actually had people say to me, "I love this church, but when I pulled up in the parking lot I wasn't sure I was going to go in." Now, I don't think everyone has that effect. It's kind of funny.

I'll tell you a quick story. God is doing something wonderful in the area of unity here in South Florida. Churches are coming together to work together. I've had a small part to play in that, not a significant part. The pastor at Calvary Chapel, Pastor Doug Sauder, who is a friend, hosted a meeting. He is leading a group of other pastors, of which I am a part, that are trying to lead this effort. We had 150 pastors and ministry leaders come together in this meeting. It was great! It was wonderful! Now, here is the problem: When you go to Calvary Chapel (I don't recommend it - it's an okay church. This is a much better church), but if you ever went to Calvary Chapel, if you ever went there, let me tell you - it's impressive. I mean, it's not that...it...I've been told that 20,000 people went to this church at one time and they still go there. I had less people in the college town that I went to college in. So you know, you call all these pastors together and you are having this meeting, but they are in this church where they are thinking, "Well do I even matter?" So I had this picture that Pastor Doug was sitting around and saying, "Okay, where can we have the next meeting, where people won't be that impressed and won't be threatened?" "Hmmm... Let's call Brian." So we are hosting the second meeting!

I think it's great! It's wonderful to have the last seat at the table, right? Just to be at the table! I think God says, "Listen, you happily take the last seat. I'll call you forward if I've got more for you to do." If you are saying, "Okay, Brian, how does this relate?" I'm still on the first sub-point of the first point, so I apologize. We may just end with one sub-point. But it's making the point. How does this connect? You see, when we start to get elevated, we just get off track. We start to focus on all those secondary loyalties. In our minds we may not verbalize it, but we think, "Our way is better, and our way secures a right outcome." I want to tell you, if you think you have the lock on marriage, or raising kids, and the methodology that's foolproof, be careful. I have six kids. I have some experience in this area. Here is my recommendation: Pray. Pray a lot. And it's wonderful. I recommend it. I recommend marriage, though my own marriage almost didn't make it. You've heard my testimony. That's the truth. I was a pastor, preaching on marriage, with a bad marriage.

My point over and over again is: Jesus Christ is the only foundation for joy and he is the focus of joy and if you have Jesus Christ, though all of these other things are very important - they are

critically important – Christ is what matters. Nationalism, a certain political view, a certain approach – we have to be careful.

So Paul gives us these three characteristics. The first one is, verse 3: We are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God. The second one is: We glory in Christ Jesus. And the third is: We put no confidence in the flesh. We glory in Christ Jesus and we put no confidence in the flesh. “Glory in Christ Jesus” could be translated: to rejoice in Christ, to boast in Christ, to be proud of Christ, to talk loudly, to brag about Jesus Christ. Perhaps we do well to put them all together. It’s helpful, because language sometimes misleads us.

We talk about believing in Christ. We talk about trusting in Christ, but it helps us to see Paul concisely define Christianity and to use a little different language. We are boasting and rejoicing and glorying in Christ Jesus. So that what comes out of us is not how clever our financial model is at Riverside, or how unique our diversity is -- both of which, by the way, are true, I think -- and of how good looking our pastors are. I almost got a smile from Adam.

Yeah, that’s just not it, is it? It’s about “we boast in Christ.” Ask yourself today, “What are you boasting in? This is a great spiritual indicator in terms of the foundation and the focus of your life. Put no confidence in the flesh -- our flesh, our human ability, our human resource. That’s question #1. We flew through the last sub-points.

Very quickly: Why we need it. Why do we need the Spirit of God to save us? Why do we need our focus to be on Christ, to trust in Christ, to receive this righteousness? Well, there is an image here that helps teach this, and it’s the image of circumcision. Paul uses the false teachers’ language against them. It sounds like he is being brutal and harsh. He calls them dogs, evil workers. The term “dogs” is a term that’s hard for us to understand, because we think of dogs as pets and we love our dogs, we love our cats. We think of domesticated animals, but in the ancient world a dog was despised. It went around and ate the garbage and would attack weaker creatures, so dogs were despised. For the Jewish person, in particular, they were seen as unclean because of what they ate, ritually unclean. So that term became associated with gentiles and non-Jewish people and nonbelievers.

Paul is flipping the tables. He is using their own language, saying “You’re the dog.” By that, “You are the person who is unclean because you are only made clean in Jesus Christ. You are a worker of evil. It’s not just that you’re wrong, but you are teaching people to trust in something other than

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Jesus Christ and you are blocking the way to the kingdom of God and God hates it.” Why? Because we need a circumcised heart. We need not just external forms of religion, we need a new heart. We need the heart of stone to be made a heart of flesh. We need the sin of the flesh to be cut away. We need a work of the Spirit of God.

This is a reminder for us as Christians that we cannot reform ourselves. We cannot do this on our own, but we do it by the Spirit of God, walking with a close relationship with Christ. He calls them mutilators of the flesh with a play on words. He says that these individuals are not circumcising people, but they are mutilating human flesh. We need it, let me say it this way, because all the other things in our lives that we value, that are precious gifts from God to us are not able; they are not sufficient to be God in your life. A secure job and secure finances and healthy relationships - they are wonderful and there is biblical truth that will help you toward that. Children who do right and love the Lord - it's a gift and we pray for it. Health in our bodies. Good marriages. Happy relationships. All of these things we work at, we love, we are grateful, we look to God, but they cannot be God in our lives. We need God to do a deep work of renovation and renewal and resurrection in our hearts. Nothing else will make us right with God and nothing else will bring the life that God has for us. Our boasting is in Christ alone.

So how do we get it? In verses 4-7 Paul says, “I put no confidence in the flesh. But if anyone could put confidence in the flesh, I could.” And he gives his resume as a Jewish rabbi, his origins, his participation. He goes as far as to say, “In terms of keeping the law,” and he's talking about externals here, “I was blameless. I was full of zeal. I followed God like no one else.” His point here is that it's okay to say that winning and losing don't matter if you always lose. But for the person who is winning to say that, it seems to carry certain credibility. We know that money doesn't matter, but the person with money who says that carries an experience within their testimony that's convincing.

You see, some of us chase a goal in this life. It's not the right goal, it's a good goal, but we've made it God -- our careers, or money, or material security, or the right relationship, and we chase that. And we are still hopeful if we haven't reached it. But when we reach it, as Paul did to some degree, we realize, “This is insufficient to be God in my life.” Then disillusionment will set in until we find hope in Jesus Christ. How do we get it? We get it by trusting in Christ. Paul said it in a variety of

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ways. We get it by the Spirit of God. We get it by glorying in Christ Jesus. We get it by putting no confidence in ourselves, in our own flesh. We get it by faith in Christ, trusting in him.

Now, ask yourself this question as we exit this passage. The Apostle Paul uses this really strong language to warn against this false teaching. It's helpful to know that he has been plagued by these false teachers for a full decade. From the very beginning of Paul going around trying to plant churches, individuals would come in behind him, very sinister, and would try to undermine the church and its focus on Christ by teaching, "Okay, believe in Christ, but in order to really be right you have to also be externally Jewish."

Think about this. Paul is in prison. He can't go to Philippi. He can't go there and combat this in person. And this precious church...remember how we looked at it in Acts 16, the story of the Philippian jailor, that incredible story, and Lydia who was saved on the riverbank? It's just precious people who are spiritually in danger, and you want to say, "Why? Why, God, do you let this go on? And why do you let it go on for 10 years?! And why does Paul, locked up in prison, have to deal with this? So much so that in part, these false teachers are even behind his imprisonment, perhaps.

Do you see the wisdom of God? Why Paul had to repeat himself over and over and over again, and why that helps you and me? How God built into the scripture a protection against one of the greatest spiritual dangers of our lives? The temptation to become religious and prideful and self-righteous, and how God allowed an attack, even ordained an attack on the early church, so that repeatedly his number one apostle, with all the anointing of the Spirit of God, just comes against this teaching over and over and over again, so that God would be saying to each and every one of us in all of our roles, "Listen, do it with all your heart. Find wisdom. Find truth. Apply it. But remember, the foundation of your righteousness, the foundation of your joy is Jesus Christ. The focus of life is Christ." Don't allow these other loyalties to press out that which will matter for all of eternity.