

# [ the cost of doing godliness ]

## :: philippians 3.4-7 ::

The question this morning is: ***How do we see ourselves?***

The heart that is subject to Christ will answer that question one way, but the heart in its natural state will answer it in quite another.

It was once posed this way in the first full length animated feature *Snow White*:

*'Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?'* The answer to the evil queen's question was, *'Not you!'*

It's an interesting thing that throughout time there have been different attributes or characteristics that are universally seen as preferred or greater than others. Culturally speaking we love to rank people based on looks or talents or abilities or persona.

This is always highlighted during election season, where you quickly discover what we think is important in a leader. Usually it's more about presence and personality than other, more meaningful things. Because, it is the physical that the natural man relies on. It is the physical that we celebrate. It is the physical that we put our focus on.

But when it comes to the Christian life we have to understand that our talents, our looks, our abilities, our charisma, our social standing or our background have nothing to do with our spirituality. They have nothing to do with the dynamic Christian life. And, while God **CAN** use our skills or our abilities to glorify Himself, He has no **NEED** of them. He hasn't been waiting around, wishing He could do specific things, but hasn't been able to until **I** came along and **FINALLY** God had a point man He could count on to get the job done.

That's not the Christian life. Instead, the Christian life is about being submitted to God's plan to *transform* you from what you are into something Godly.

Paul hits this very subject in our text. It's Philippians 3, verses 4 through 7. Let me read them for us.

**Philippians 3.4-7 - though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.**

Paul is teaching us about how we lock into the dynamic Christian life, full of God's power, full of God's Spirit, full of God's peace and ministry and all that. He's just warned us about the fact

that there are enemies out there that seek to rob our joy and limit our effectiveness, one of them being legalism. But now he has a very simple truth that we need to take hold of. He invites us to look within and points out that there is a very present danger to our discipleship, and that is to have confidence in our flesh.

Often times we think and speak of the flesh as the sin nature and that's a big part of it. But here, it also encompasses all that is natural in your life. Your mind. Your skills. Your abilities. Your body. All that is you aside from God. The natural, physical things. And those, Paul says, can be dangerous to our Christian living.

Because we have a tendency to trust in our natural selves. He calls it having confidence in the flesh. The word there can also be translated as reliance on the flesh. And it happens in a number of different ways.

One way that we start relying on our natural abilities is in the area of ministry. We start leaning on our own intellect or our own background or our own abilities and start thinking that we've really got some powerful skills to offer God. That He would be lucky to have us promoting Him. And that confidence increases. Because we're pretty impressed with ourselves.

Another way that this tendency effects us is in the area of temptation and sin. We become confident in our own willpower or our own ability to avoid sin and start discounting the need for Godly intervention and fortification in those areas. We again become confident with how impervious to sin we think we are.

This is the snare that Paul is discussing, as we become less spiritually-minded and become more self-minded. We get impressed with ourselves and how much we have to offer God and the Church and everyone else around us.

And in a moment of very bold candor, Paul comes to us and says, "Oh, do you think you have something to be proud of? Let me stack my resume up to yours."

This guy was someone who could impress you when it came to making the grade.

He was from the right class of people. He had the right citizenship. He had the right education. He had the right activity. He had the right record. He was a shoe-in for whatever position of power or prominence a person could want. He knew more than you. He did more than you. He was *from* more than you.

And Paul isn't listing these things to boast or to make you respect him. Instead, he lists them to illustrate his point in verse 7:

**Philippians 3.7 - But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.**

He's very clear and very serious about the issue. Because all of our human abilities and all of our physical attributes and all of our natural skills can actually stand as a hindrance and a detriment to our submission to God. That's what Paul is saying. He's looking back on his life and evaluating himself and he's come to the conclusion that all of those natural things seek to supplant the rule of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our day-to-day living. And when

we neglect to deal with the pride in our hearts, it starts to pervert our thinking about the ministry and our relationship with the Lord.

You can see this playing out on the pages of Scripture.

Elijah, the mighty prophet, started relying on the flesh and stopped submitting himself to God and it caused him to run away from Queen Jezebel and hide in this deserted place. He's not where God wanted him to be. He's not doing what God's Spirit was directing him to do. And then he actually has the audacity to start accusing God of not taking care of him, because, after all, 'he's the best and only prophet God had! He's the last man standing!' He believed in his flesh that God *NEEDED* him in order to do His work.

And God, in His grace, stops Elijah and says, "You know, I have seven thousand people who haven't bowed their knees to Baal and I'm working in their lives." Elijah had allowed himself to become totally self-involved and self-centered in that moment. He loved the Lord. God was using him. But eventually he started relying on the flesh rather than the Spirit and it caused a lack of submission and a lack of humility in his life.

Or, think about Samson. He knew what he was supposed to do. He knew how he was supposed to live. But, he also placed his confidence and his reliance on the flesh. He thought he was impervious to temptation and that he didn't really need to try to live a holy life, because, after all, he was someone God was using. He was a judge. And, one day, he found himself in a place of temptation and sin and he was trapped in a snare that he could not free himself from.

And this is what happens. If we're not evaluating ourselves and if we don't have a proper understanding of what the Christian life is actually about, we start placing ourselves at the center and we make God a footnote or a topping in our lives. We start thinking that Christianity is all about promotion and self-glorification and recognition and people understanding just how important I really am. Just how lucky they are to have me.

But Paul expresses very personally here that our humanity, apart from God, is loss to us. It's a detriment to us.

Can our natural skills be used by God? Yes.

Does God raise up people to minister with their abilities or with the education they've received in the world? Yes.

But the warning of Scripture is this:

**1 Corinthians 1.26-29 - For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.**

God is in the business of glorifying Himself. Therefore, we are called to be bondservants and sacrifices to Him. We're called to surrender and spiritual crucifixion. Not self glorification. Not self promotion. Not self-centeredness. Not self.

Think of it this way...

A lamb is brought to the temple for the sacrifice. As the master lays it there on the altar the lamb turns to him and says, "It's a good thing you picked me, because I'm so good at running. I can run over grass or mud or any other terrain. I can jump higher than all the other sheep in my flock. And I produce more wool than any other lamb you've ever seen."

None of that matters. Because the purpose of that lamb is sacrifice. Not show.

And Paul here is pointing out that if we really want the fullness of Christ, we must cut away any confidence or reliance that we have on our natural selves. Our flesh is not the source of anything heavenly. We are to live the life of a sacrificial bondservant, who leaves the past behind and surrenders all to the will of the Master. Because God purposefully uses people in the opposite way that we sometimes think He should. Paul, the great Pharisee, the master of the Law, was called to the Gentiles!

So how *DO* we set our minds? How do we look at ourselves with a Biblical worldview? This is Romans 12 verse 3:

**Romans 12.3 - For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.**

Be Spirit-led today. You can have confidence, but let that confidence be only in the fact that God loves you, has saved you and desires to use you to glorify Himself and to draw others to Jesus Christ, not to us.