

PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

The Book of Philippians #20

Have you ever heard someone say, “*Do what I say, not what I do?*” Perhaps your parents said it to you, or you may have even said it yourself. Why do we say this? We say this because it’s true. We actually do say one thing but in practice do another; and we do not want someone else, particularly our children, doing the things contrary to what we tell them to do, even if we as adults chose to do them ourselves.

It’s hypocritical, I know, to teach others to do something that we ourselves do not do. But it is a fact of life that we all do things which we do not want others to imitate. This is true in our households and at work but is also true in our Christian walk.

Think for instance of stress and worry. It is far easier to quote a bible verse to someone than it is to actually live out that verse for all to see. We may teach the concept of giving all our anxiety to the Lord through prayer and supplication, but if instead of praying we worry and fret over the future, we are saying one thing and doing another. The same goes for tithing. We may say that all we have is His and that we are simply stewards of His money, but if we spend all our money on ourselves and give no percentage to the Lord and His work, then we are saying one thing and doing another.

Think also of our belief in raising our children in the admonition of the Lord, loving our wives as Christ loved the church, and dying to the flesh. If we do not teach our children the ways of the Lord, if we belittle or disrespect our wives, if we feed the flesh by viewing things we should not, we quench the Spirit in all these areas. We are saying one thing, but doing another. We are not practicing what we preach.

Now for some, the solution is to not speak of these things at all. The thought is that if you do not speak of your faith others will not expect you to live it out. Hence, by silence, it will be assumed that you are living out what you believe. Since you do not profess your faith others will not expect you to live it out. This may fool some but it does not fool the Lord. Even if no one else expects you to live out the words of Scripture, the One who spoke them does. He holds each of us accountable for what we know.

I found this concept more pronounced when I became a pastor because I began speaking out much more frequently and forcefully about what God requires of us. And I found the spotlight was now focused on me 24-7 because of what I taught others to do and professed to believe myself. I confess that at times, because of this, I don’t always enjoy being a teacher. The responsibility and the conviction can be overwhelming at times. I’d rather not be held on the line for everything I say and do.

But that’s why James says that not many of us should become teachers. Teachers will incur a stricter judgment than those who do not teach. He says this in reference to the tongue because we all stumble in what we say from time to time. But a teacher is to keep control of his tongue at all times so that his actions match his words.

I have spoken of this before so I will make this example brief. A few hours after I had taught the potent verse found in James 1:19 the Lord gave me an opportunity to put it into practice. He tested my ability to live out what I taught. As soon as I got home from teaching I felt my voice rising up to respond quickly and in anger to someone I encountered there. But the Spirit whispered His words in my mind, the very words I had taught others to obey – “*Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.*”

I was instantly convicted that I could not preach one thing that morning and do another that afternoon. I had to live out what I taught, had to do what I said, or I would be a hypocrite. Thankfully I heeded His words. But that lesson has stayed with me. And His words continue to echo in my mind. Whatever you teach you must practice. You must do what you say. You must practice what you preach. This has not always been easy. But it is what is required of me. And it is what is required of all of us.

In Philippians chapter three Paul warns us against those who say one thing yet do another. And he starts to build his case against following their example even if they speak words of truth. For him it is all about the true manifestation of righteousness rather than the false impression we give to others by hypocritically saying one thing and doing another. As we look into this we will also visit the words of Jesus who also had something to say about those do not practice what they preach. So let's now turn to Philippians 3, verses 2 and 3.

PHILIPPIANS 3:2-3

“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

In this chapter Paul makes a distinction between those whom he calls the false circumcision and those whom he identifies as the true circumcision. Paul identifies the Jews as those who are of the false circumcision and the believers in Christ as those who are of the true.

False circumcision is based on the Law and the deeds of the flesh. It prides itself in deeds done and obedience to commandments. It does not take into consideration the attitude of the heart, but rather the obedience to commands. Those who hold this position seek to impose it on others, claiming it is not by faith but by works that salvation is obtained. And, like dogs, they keep nipping at the heels of those who disagree with them. The words spoken and deeds done by those who are of the false circumcision may seem to honor God, but their hearts are far from Him. That is why Paul warns us against them. We spoke at length about this last week.

In contrast, Paul says those who are of the “true” circumcision put their faith in Christ and do not manifest their righteousness by their outward appearance or by the deeds they do to be noticed by men. True circumcision is based on the attitude of the heart and humility of mind. It begins with grace, continues in faith and manifests itself in reliance upon the indwelling Spirit of God.

Paul says those of the true circumcision are identified by three things – they worship in the Spirit of God, they glory in Christ Jesus, and they put no confidence in the flesh. Last week we looked at the first of these three - worshipping in the Spirit of God. This week we will address the other two. But first, let's do a quick review to keep us in context.

As part of the Law, God required the Jews to worship him at a specific location. At first this was a portable structure called a Tabernacle which they used as they traveled through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. Later, when Solomon built a permanent structure they were to worship at this Temple. Within each of these man-made structures God promised He would dwell in the portion reserved for Him called the Holy of Holies (Exodus 40:34; 2 Chronicles 5:11-14).

Though the entire Temple compound was considered holy, King Herod decided to enclose the outer court of the Temple with colonnades calling it the Court of the Gentiles. Non-Jews were allowed to enter that

portion of the Temple area but they were forbidden to enter any of the inner courts which were reserved for Jews only. But even the Jews had their separate areas. For instance Jewish women had a separate area from the Jewish men, and non-priests were not allowed to enter where only priests were allowed.

The temple area became increasingly more holy as you entered further in from east to west. This was because the Holy of Holies was located at the westernmost end of both the tabernacle and the temple. Only a veil hid the Holy of holies from all the inner courts. But access to the Holy of Holies was extremely limited. And here was the other restriction. Only the High Priest could enter and even he could only enter once a year on the Day of Atonement. So even though God dwelt in a man-made structure, only one person could enter His presence and then only once in a twelve-month period.

But that all changed with Jesus. Matthew tells us that when Jesus, in His final moments on the cross, cried out with a loud voice and gave up His spirit, the veil in the temple separating the Holy of Holies from the inner courts was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-51). As a result of this Paul says that God no longer dwells in temples made with hands but rather in His people (Acts 17:24). God still desires to dwell in a temple. But the temple that God has now chosen to live in is His church. The Spirit of God now dwells in those who believe and receive Him as Lord and Savior (1 Corinthians 3:16).

So what was previously limited to a time, a place and a person, has now become available to all believers in Christ, in all places, at all times. This means that everything we do we do in the presence of God. We are the temple in which He dwells. We do not come and go from His presence. Everything we do we do in His presence. As a result, worship is now a 24-7 experience.

Worship is no longer a place, it is a Person.

Worship is no longer a destination, it is a Presence

Worship is no longer done out of weakness, it is done out of Power – Holy Spirit Power.

So what does it mean to worship in the Spirit of Christ? It means that through the power of God's Spirit dwelling within us we have direct access to God at any time. We are no longer unclean vessels but vessels that have been cleaned from the inside out, set free from the immorality and uncontrollable urges of the flesh now able to follow the urges and promptings of the Spirit, relying on the power of the Spirit to overcome the evil one.

But this is not the only identifying feature that Paul mentions. There are two other attributes which are manifested by the "true" circumcision – they glory in Christ Jesus and they put no confidence in the flesh. This is what we will address today.

They Glory in Christ Jesus

To glory in something means to boast in something. Once again Paul is making a distinction between those of the false circumcision who boast in their own deeds, and those of the true circumcision who boast in the deeds of Christ. Boasting here refers to that in which one places ones trust or confidence.

The false circumcision places their trust in themselves for salvation. They boast in their own deeds. By that I don't mean that God has no place in this process. They still look to Him for their salvation. But they expect God to reward them with salvation because of the righteous things they do and the evil they do not do. It is their works that will determine their eligibility for salvation. Their hope is that God will see these righteous deeds, consider them worthy, and reward them with eternal life.

We still hear this argument today from people who have their own standard of righteousness, believing God will grant them entrance into heaven because of their personal belief in themselves and in what they have done. Having confidence in the fact they are good people they cite what they have done and compare it to others whom they see as less worthy. It seems this concept of personal righteousness dies hard.

But this is in direct opposition to those of the true circumcision who trust not in themselves or the deeds they do but in Christ alone for their salvation. They understand that nothing they do will ever be good enough to guarantee their salvation, could never measure up to God's standard for righteousness. So they look not to their own name or reputation as justification for salvation, but rather to the name and reputation of another.

ACTS 4:12

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

What those of the false and the true circumcision have in common is both know they are enemies of God because of their sin. Each of them understand they were not born righteous and that cleansing from this sin is needed. They identify with the words of Isaiah which say,

ISAIAH 64:6

“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.”

Though they agree on the concept they do not agree on the solution. There is a difference between how the true and the false attempt to gain cleansing from this filth. Those who boast in their deeds seek cleansing by obeying the Law and by association - by their being descendants of Abraham and receivers of the Law through Moses. They believe their genealogy and their works will provide the justification for their righteousness.

But those who boast in Christ look to Him for their cleansing. They understand that all their works are as filthy rags. It matters not if they are blood relatives of Abraham because Christ provides the opportunity for salvation to both the Jew and the non-Jew (Ephesians 2:14-16). Even if Moses and Abraham were listed in their genealogy, it would not matter. It is not possible to earn salvation through works. It is only obtainable because of the death and resurrection of Christ.

As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, this is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). But those of the true circumcision understand that the removal of their sin comes only from the work that Christ did on the cross. Nothing needs to be added for His work alone is sufficient for cleansing. They also understand that faith in Christ is required for this salvation to become active and viable. For without faith salvation is merely an offer, devoid of power. But with faith the power of God is activated and the forgiveness of God is unleashed. Let me repeat that:

Without faith salvation is merely an offer, devoid of power. But with faith the power of God is activated and the forgiveness of God is unleashed. This unleashing of God's power and grace allows us to be cleansed from all our unrighteousness.

So those who glory in Christ Jesus do not glory in their own fleshly deeds. They do not boast of the

things they do either by words or by exaggerated endeavors. They understand that no confidence can be placed in what they do but only in what Christ has already done. If salvation is to be achieved it will not be achieved by anything they are able to do, because salvation is not a reward for things done. Salvation is a gift from a loving God. Even as we were drowning in the sea of our continuous sin, God made a plan for our rescue. And that is why we boast or glory in Christ Jesus. He alone is responsible for our salvation.

ROMANS 5:8-11

“But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult (boast) in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the one reconciliation.”

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

“By grace you have been saved through faith; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (glory).”

They Put No Confidence in the Flesh

And that is why the true circumcision puts no confidence in the flesh. Nothing done outwardly can earn salvation. Only by what is done internally can salvation be activated. So we put no confidence in what we ourselves are able to do, but rather in what Jesus has already done for us.

Confidence means assurance or trust. Flesh refers to those things that can be shown off and admired, things that are outwardly visible. The Jewish leaders – those of the false circumcision - were experts at displaying their perceived righteousness to others. Jesus said of them,

MATTHEW 23:5-7

“(The scribes and Pharisees) do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the marketplaces, and being called rabbi by men.”

Jesus is obviously speaking of their outward appearance when He refers to the tassels they wear on their garments. But to be fair, wearing tassels on their garments was an instruction given by the Lord to the Israelites. We read about this in Numbers 15.

NUMBERS 15:37-39

“The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, ...so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God.”

Here is what the tassels looked like.



Because God instructed the Jews to place tassels on their garments the Jews did so in obedience to the command of the Lord. Obviously this is not something that Jesus would have objected to. He said He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). So there is something else the matter here; something else that draws His displeasure.

But before we address that let's move on to phylacteries. Phylacteries are little boxes or receptacles that hold scripture verses. There are four texts in Scripture that mention phylacteries, which our English versions also translate as frontals.

EXODUS 13:9, 16

"It shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the Law of the Lord shall be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt."

EXODUS 13:16

"It shall serve as a sign on your hand and as phylacteries on your forehead..."

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on you heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals (phylacteries) on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

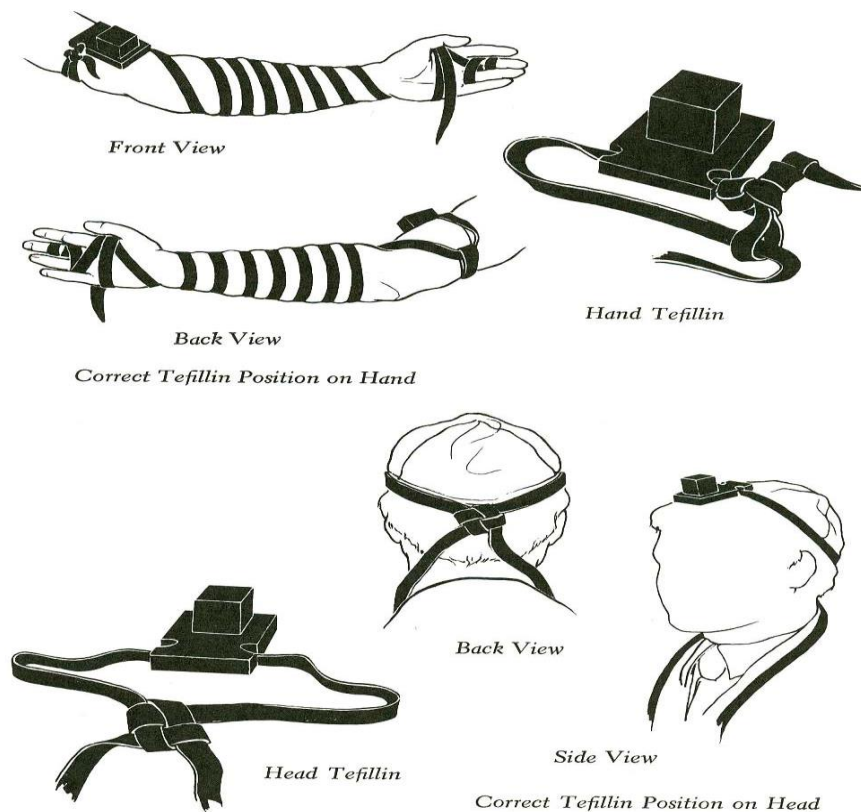
DEUTERONOMY 11:18

“You shall therefore impress these words of Mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals (phylacteries) on your forehead.”

Though there is not an obvious command in any of these passages to physically wear something, the teachers of the law concluded that these scriptures were not symbolic but referred to a physical object which was to be worn outwardly. The Hebrew word for this is *teffelin*. A *teffelin* is a literal representation of the Lord’s command to bind the law on the hand and between the eyes. God also said that the Law of the Lord should be in their mouths. But perhaps the reason for not taking this one literally is obvious.

In any event, the phylactery designed for the arm consisted of a receptacle, resembling a small box. In this box they place a piece of parchment which contains the four Scripture texts that mention phylacteries. This is attached to it a long, narrow black strap. The box is placed on the left arm, on the biceps, pointing toward the heart. Before this is placed in its position, however, a prayer is offered. The strap is then wound around the arm seven times, during which seven Hebrew words are repeated which translated mean, *“And cleave you unto the Lord your God all the days of your life.”* The remainder of the strap is then placed three times around the hand. I will show you an illustration of this in a moment.

When they are finished placing the one on the arm, the one for the head is placed in position. This receptacle is placed on the forehead with the box placed between the eyes. The straps are bound in a knot at the base of the brain; then a long strap is allowed to fall on either shoulder. When this is placed in position, another prayer is offered and a closing scripture is spoken. Here is an illustration of what these phylacteries look like and how they are worn.



These may look a little strange to us but they were being done out of reverence and obedience to what they considered was a part of the Law.

But let's get back to the objection Jesus made about the scribes and Pharisees who in obedience to the command wore their tassels and phylacteries.

MATTHEW 23:5-7

“They do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the marketplaces, and being called rabbi by men.”

So we see that the issue is not in the wearing of the articles but rather in the excessive display of them. They broadened their phylacteries and lengthened the tassels of their garments so that they were much more noticeable to others, as if the size of their tassels and phylacteries was an indication of how much greater their righteousness was than others. They loved the honor of men better than the honor of God. Jesus saw through their outward appearance to their heart. And what He saw was a coffin, a nice looking box that contained a body devoid of life. Jesus called them whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones (Matthew 23:27) who honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him (Mark 7:6)

In contrast to the false circumcision, who seek after the praises of men, we are told that the disfavor of men will bring a great reward, and that this reward will be awaiting us in heaven. There can be perhaps no greater contrast between those of the false circumcision and those of the true than this.

MATTHEW 5:11-12

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of things against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.”

According to Jesus our reward comes through earthly persecution, not from earthly praise. Our reward is great, but it awaits us in heaven and is not to be found on earth.

Here is another contrast. The false circumcision did the following to be noticed by men: they sounded a trumpet when they gave to the poor and they prayed in the synagogues and on the street corners; they used meaningless repetition when they prayed and they put on a gloomy face when they fasted.

Jesus tells us to do the exact opposite. He tells us to do our giving in secret and to go into our inner room and close the door when we pray; and when we pray to do so simply and to the point; and when we fast anoint our head and wash our face. All of these things are to be done so that no one will take notice of our righteous deeds. The exact opposite of what the religious leaders of the day were doing as examples of righteousness. That is why Jesus said to do what they said regarding the Law of Moses, but not to do what they did because they did not practice what they preached.

MATTHEW 23:1-4

“The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.”

Putting no confidence in the flesh frees one up from the burden of attempting to become a righteous person by one's own efforts. To put no confidence in the flesh is to understand that those things which are done outwardly bring no assurance of salvation. They cannot be trusted to guarantee forgiveness and removal of sin and entrance to heaven. To put no confidence in our own flesh is to put confidence in someone else's flesh – that of the body and blood of Jesus – the only acceptable sacrifice for sin.

To sum up, those of the true circumcision worship in the Spirit of God because the Holy Spirit resides within them. They glorify in Jesus Christ because their salvation comes from faith in Him and not from the Law. And they put no confidence in their flesh, either in the fact that they were circumcised Jewish males or in their performance-based righteousness through obedience to the Law because there is only one flesh that is acceptable to God as a sacrifice for sin – the body of Jesus. Faith in Jesus is the final and only proof needed for their imparted righteousness.

Abraham understood this and believed it. That is why his faith was credited to him as righteousness. We too believe and have been counted as righteous because of our faith. This makes us true sons of Abraham and partakers of the true circumcision - not through blood but through faith; the same faith that was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Like him, this too makes us children of the living God (John 3:1).

Next week we will look dig further into this by looking at it from the perspective of Paul who was a Pharisee and had every reason to boast in his human pedigree and in the deeds he performed to obtain righteousness. We shall also see why he counted all of these efforts as useless. In the meantime let us all remember that though what we do matters, and we will all be held accountable for our actions, faith, and not works, is the key that will unlock the doors of heaven. For without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Let me close with the words of Jesus found in the gospels of Mathew, Luke, and John.

MATTHEW 5:20

“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of God.”

MATTHEW 7:21-23

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

LUKE 10:20

“Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”

JOHN 6:28-29

“(For) this is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent....(And) this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

These verses summarize what I have been saying, that righteousness does not come from works but rather

comes through faith. Jesus is the ultimate Discerner of faith. He is able to recognize those who look to Him for their righteousness and those who seek to be justified through self-effort. He will reward those who believe in Him with entry in to heaven. But He will keep the doors shut to those who seek entrance through works, even if they claim to have done works in His name. There is an old hymn which we will sing in just a moment, which contains a verse that capsulizes what I have been saying. And I will close with this.

*Nothing can for sin atone
Nothing but the blood of Jesus
Naught of good that I have done
Nothing but the blood of Jesus*

SING “Nothing But The Blood of Jesus”