CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IN PHILIPPIANS 3:3

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The church should be looking more closely at the New Testament for instruction about corporate worship. If we come to understand the nature of the church, we will gain substantial insight into the character of her worship gatherings. Paul's definitive statement in Phil 3:3 concerning the identity of the church serves as a springboard for informing and enhancing Christian worship. A proper understanding of this text will highlight the importance of the "corporateness of worship" and show that worship is an activity that believers should do as a diverse unity.

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Introduction

A welcome development in evangelical theology during the past few decades is a revitalization of worship theology. More than sponsoring an academic exercise in biblical or dogmatic theology, many seminaries and Christian universities have created degree programs in worship—usually a hybrid of musical and theological training geared toward preparing students to be worship pastors.[1] There has been an explosion of biblical and practical literature on various aspects of worship. Among these, solid biblical theologies of worship have contributed much to this worship renewal movement.[2]

As one seeks to apply a biblical theology of worship, a tension one encounters is between worship considered on one hand as an individual attitude and lifestyle (being a living sacrifice and doing all to the glory of God) and on the other hand as an event and activity of the community of faith, the church

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[1] There is even an entire graduate school devoted to the study of worship: The Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies (www.iws.edu). Note also the formation of the Biblical Worship section in the Evangelical Theological Society.

[2] See especially David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); Allen Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2006).

gathered. Theological studies of worship have effectively drawn the conclusion that the emphasis in worship in the NT is on the offering of daily life as a sacrifice to God, with ritual as a whole deemphasized.[3] While there have also been theological and practical studies of corporate worship,[4] there is room for further refinement of our biblical theology of worship in this area.

My desire in this study is to emphasize the corporateness of worship, the fact that it is an activity that believers do as a diverse unity. Indeed, Christians are called to be living sacrifices individually, but worship life is not essentially individualistic: "This mode of 'sacrificial living' *coram deo* ought to characterize our daily lives, to be sure, but on the Lord's Day there is a special sense in which believers are gathered together by God as the body of Christ in order to be drawn into God's holy presence as 'living sacrifices.'"[5]

In fact, the uniqueness of that gathering has been lost on many evangelicals, who often tend to treat the Sunday worship service as a program to be attended or a mere collocation of people who have gathered in the same room to be individual worshipers, rather than a corporate activity to be invested in as a collective unity. "One of the most easily overlooked aspects of common worship is that it begins with the gathering, in one place, of scattered Christians to be the church at worship. We usually treat the act of assembling as merely a mechanical necessity, but coming together in Christ's name is itself an important part of common [i.e., public] worship."[6]

This gathering together constitutes a group of people as a unit—a microcosm of the church universal, the Body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the household of God, the assembly (*ekklesia*) gathered together to worship. And nearly every possible element of that worship is debated in some way. One key element of this debate is the tendency to assume that the NT has little to say about the elements and order of corporate worship. Because there is no post-Pentecost Pentateuch to direct the church's worship gatherings in every detail, the tendency is either to heavily emphasize freedom or to take significant cues from the OT. An example of the former is charismatic worship, where

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[3] For example, this (entirely correct) conclusion from Peterson: "When Christians become preoccupied with the notion of offering God acceptable worship in a congregational context and thus with the minutiae of church services, they need to be reminded that Paul's focus was on the service of everyday life" (Peterson, *Engaging*, 187).

[4] Particularly works that help the church apply historically and biblically rich strategies for designing and executing corporate worship services. Among them are Bryan Chapell, *Christ–Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); and Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Crossway: Wheaton, IL: 2008) (theologically well-informed but practically targeted toward music leaders in particular).

[5] Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 75–76.

[6] James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 29.

flexibility is highly valued, and the worship leader is understood to be the Holy Spirit himself, who "sensitizes worship with both freedom and order," the results of which are "free, surprising, 'Spirit-led.'"[7] On the other end of the spectrum are those whose perspective on worship structure is pervaded by Israelite worship under the Mosaic covenant. An example in this category is the "covenant renewal worship" concept of Jeffrey J. Meyers, who develops an order of worship largely reflective of the cultic order of Mosaic sacrifices.[8]

Both of these perspectives contribute something to a robust biblical theology of worship—the desire on one hand to ensure that Christian worship is fully Trinitarian, and on the other hand to reflect a pattern of approach to the living God that is seen broadly throughout redemptive history.[9] However, it seems appropriate also that the church be concerned to read the NT carefully for all that it can contribute to the fullness of the church's worship. In what follows it is assumed that if we come to understand the nature of the church, we will gain substantial insight into the character of her worship gatherings. For this study, Paul's definitive statement in Phil 3:3 concerning the identity of the church will serve as a springboard for the discussion and an example of what it might look like to read the NT specifically for the purpose of informing and enhancing Christian worship.[10]

"We Are the Circumcision"

The beginning of chapter 3 marks a turning point in the epistle to the Philippians. While it may be an overstatement to call 3:1–21 "The Great Digression,"[11] it is abundantly clear that Paul's tone changes to one of warning and stern exhortation in 3:2. His warning is concerning those he calls "the dogs…the evil-workers…the mutilators of the flesh."[12] Paul's language is stark,

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[7] Don Williams, "Charismatic Worship," in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, ed. Paul A. Basden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 145, 147.

[8] Meyers, *The Lord's Service*, 73–88.

[9] For which also see Chapell, *Christ–Centered*, chapters 1–9.

[10] This is not to suggest that there is another level of meaning in the biblical text related to worship – i.e. a "liturgical sense." Rather, the point to be developed here is that the way the NT itself speaks of worship provides a rationale by which one expects that there will be implications for worship when the meaning of the text is understood, believed, and applied.

[11] R. P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1959), 53, 134.

[12] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in English will be from the English Standard Version.

stern, and staccato. In addition to the threefold use of *blepete*, "each noun has the definite article and begins with k–."[13]

Clues in the subsequent context indicate that Paul is warning his readers about the Judaizers—those Jewish followers of Jesus who were entering into local churches and insisting that they must add Mosaic law-keeping to faith in Christ for salvation.[14] On this basis, he uses language that a Jew might apply derisively to Gentiles: dogs, evildoers. To these Paul adds the "bitterly ironic" third term, *katatomē*,[15] or mutilation, which is a wordplay on the subsequent use of *peritomē*, circumcision, in v. 3. Enhancing his negative portrayal of the opponents in question, Paul uses this paronomasia to indicate that they are not members of the true people of God (in either a Mosaic or New Covenant economy). On the contrary, "the boast of these opponents [physical circumcision and lawkeeping] is overturned by using a word that links literal circumcision with those pagan cuttings of the body which were forbidden by the law of Israel…Circumcision, their greatest source of pride, is interpreted by the apostle as a sure sign that they have no part in God's people at all."[16]

Paul goes on to state in strong contrast, "for we are the circumcision." In direct opposition to the "mutilation," (*katatomē*), he says, we are the circumcision (*peritomē*), the true people of God. Because the opponents at hand emphasized the rite of physical circumcision as a necessary part of salvation, Paul uses the similar–sounding *peritomē*, which, "(as a collective noun) points to the covenant people who stand under God's promises, the one true people of God."[17] They are "the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials" (NET). Each of these will be discussed in what follows.

The point to be emphasized for the present discussion is this: it is important to Paul to show that there is a boundary between the church and those outside it, and he goes to some rhetorical length to insist that the false teachers in question are outside the true people of God. The relevance to the present discussion follows immediately in v. 3 with Paul's characterization of the true people of God as worshipers.

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[13] Peter T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 352.

[14] See O'Brien, 26–35 for a summary of the debate over the identity of the opponents here in Philippians 3. Whatever their precise affiliation, it seems necessary to conclude based on Paul's strong words in vv. 18–20 that the opponents were false teachers who promulgated a false gospel.

[15] Ibid., 356.

[16] Ibid., 357.

[17] Ibid., 358. "For the true circumcision is of the spirit and not of the letter, inward, and situated in the heart, not visible according to the flesh" John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. XXI (n.d.; reprint.: Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 88.

"The Ones Who Worship"

Having drawn the sharp contrast between the false teachers and those who were a part of God's people, Paul makes a threefold definitive statement about the people of God. Each of the three parts is a participial phrase which gives a characteristic of those who are members of *hē peritomē*, "describing how they actually live and behave."[18]

The first of these participial descriptions is "those who worship by the Spirit of God" (*hoi pneumati theou latreuontes*). Here the substantive use of the present active participle of *latreuō* indicates that Paul sees this activity as an essential characteristic of the people of God—an attribute that makes them uniquely identifiable as *hē peritomē*.

The use of *latreuō* here is significant and merits some discussion. The more common NT word for worship, *proskuneō*, with its emphasis on the physical bowing or prostrating oneself before an "object [that] is always something—truly or supposedly—divine"[19] is restricted in its usage to the Gospels and Revelation. Paul, like the other NT epistolary writers, prefers the companion word *latreuō*, meaning "to serve" in the sense of "carrying out of religious duties, esp. of a cultic nature, by human beings."[20]

The LXX sets the stage for the NT understanding in that it employs *latreuō* for *'ābad* when a religious meaning of the latter is intended, i.e., when it refers to "the service of God by the whole people and by the individual, both outwardly in the cultus and inwardly in the heart."[21] It is to be emphasized that this service is not merely the outward observance of ritual. "It goes much deeper and involves the demand for right disposition of the heart and the demonstration of this in the whole of religious and moral conduct."[22]

This emphasis on worship as heart-based service to God is carried forward into the NT, where it "denotes actions that are always evaluated positively when God is the grammatical object and negatively with reference to

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[18] O'Brien, *Philippians*, 360.

[19] Heinrich Greeven, "προσκυνεω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1964–76), 6:763. Hereafter, TDNT.

[20] William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 586. Hereafter, BDAG.

[21] K. Hess, "λατρεύω," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 4 vols., ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 3:550. Hereafter, NIDNTT. Cf. H. Strathmann, "λατρευω," in TDNT, 4:60. Otherwise the LXX renders *'ābad* as *douleuō* (Ibid, 4:62).

[22] Strathmann, "λατρευω," 4:61.

any other object."[23] This is perhaps illustrated best in Jesus' deployment of Deut 6:13 in defense against the temptation of Satan: "Be gone Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship [*proskunēseis*] the Lord your God and him only shall you serve [*latreuseis*]'" (Matt 4:10, cf. Rom 1:25).

In what is possibly the most famous use of *latreuō* in the Pauline corpus, the follower of Jesus is entreated to give up his life entirely as a sacrifice that is "alive, holy, and pleasing to God," an act and life–perspective that Paul calls the believer's "reasonable service of worship (*logikēn latreian*)."[24] Also, Paul uses *latreuō* twice to characterize himself broadly: "God, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son" (Rom 1:9); and "God, whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience."[25] The characterization in Phil 3:3 of true believers in general as *latreuontes*, then, is consistent for Paul—serving God in the *latreuō* sense involves a commitment of the heart that characterizes the whole life. As a Christian, one is a servant-worshiper of the true God.[26]

Paul then refers to this worshipful serving as worship that is done "by the Spirit of God."[27] Clearly there is an echo here of Jesus' statement to the Samaritan woman at the well, that the worshipers the Father seeks are those who worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–4). As a result, some see here in Paul's statement essentially the same content as Jesus' point in John 4: that true worship is "out of the fullness of the supernatural life they enjoy ('in spirit'), and on the basis of God's incarnate Self–Expression, Christ Jesus himself, through whom God's person and will are finally and ultimately disclosed ('in

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[23] Karen Jobes, "Distinguishing the Meaning of Greek Verbs in the Semantic Domain for Worship," in *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, rev. ed., Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 203.

[24] For a concise summary of the debate over the meaning of *logikēn* here, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 644–45. Whether one translates it as "reasonable/rational" or "spiritual/*pneumatikos*," the emphasis found in the use of *latreian* will be the same.

[25] Luke attributes similar usage to Paul during the latter's public testimonies in Acts 24:24 and 27:23.

[26] Hebrews, the other epistle that makes use of *latreuō* (6x), also supports this emphasis, although with the cultic emphasis appropriate to that epistle's theme of connecting the work of Christ with the OT sacrificial system. The result for the believer is that the blood of Christ will "purify our conscience from dead works to serve (*latreuein*) the living God" (9:14).

[27] The reading "worship God in the Spirit" (NKJV) is unlikely since *latreuō* takes a dative direct object. The best text, *hoi pneumati theou latreuontes*, is an absolute use of *latreuō*, which indicates that the divine subject is implied, and *pneumati theou* is instrumental dative—a more likely rendering for Paul than "who worship the Spirit of God" (see O'Brien, *Philippians*, 346; cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998], 547).

truth').["28] But we must let Paul speak from his own context in the letter to Philippi, summarized well by O'Brien:

> Those who are in Christ Jesus are part of the new order ushered in by his coming (2 Cor. 5:17), the new age of salvation. They have the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:8–9), and his presence, following his outpouring by the exalted Lord Jesus (Acts 2:33–36), is a sign of this new age. This same Spirit is the initiator who enables Christians to serve and please God, in a service of a comprehensive kind that includes not simply prayer or worship in a formal sense but the whole of life.[29]

While it is best to see Jesus' words in John 4 as a reference to worship apart from geographical restrictions, Paul's point here in Philippians 3 must be more than merely that true worship is "wholly from the heart, and is not hampered by physical constraints."[30] Paul's language is more specific (*pneumati theou*), and his situation in redemptive history is post-Pentecost (as summarized by O'Brien above), so it is reasonable to see here a reference to the Holy Spirit as the enabler of true worship in and among the true people of God. So Paul's meaning in the use of "those who worship by the Spirit of God" should be seen, not as just the same point Jesus was making, but as a development of its implications for the church. Paul's words certainly include the Lord's point about worship being independent of physical, geographical, and cultic constraints, but go beyond them to imply *how* true worship can be thus location-and-ritual-independent: it is worship that is enabled, energized, and focused by the Holy Spirit.[31]

To summarize, Paul's first identity-marker of the true people of God— a characteristic that sets them apart from those who are not—is Spirit-driven worship. There is valuable insight here for the character and content of corporate Christian worship: first, when the church gathers to worship we gather as servant-worshipers of God who come together to submit to our Lord and honor Him as He deserves. It is incumbent upon the leaders of such an assembly to promote this attitude by example, instruction, and careful execution of the leadership of a worship service. Second, if true worship is enabled by and

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[28] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 225–26. See, e.g., William Hendrickson, "Philippians," in *Philippians, Colossians and Philemon*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 152; J. B. Lightfoot, *Philippians* The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 159; Calvin, *Philippians*, 88.

[29] O'Brien, *Philippians*, 361.

[30] Hendrickson, *Philippians*, 152.

[31] Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 128.

infused with the Holy Spirit, corporate worship gatherings must be planned and lead with the express intent to display the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) and further form such fruit in the worshipers (How can worship be "by/in the Spirit of God" if it does not strive to display and inspire love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self–control?). Finally, because the Spirit of God is also the "Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9), whose role is to exalt Christ, the Christian worship gathering will be an event that is dominated by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christian worship, then, is to be Christ-centered, gospel-centered, and Trinitarian, showing and developing in God's people the fruit of a Spirit-dependent, Spirit-enlivened walk.

"The Ones Who Boast in Jesus"

While the first of the three identity-markers in Phil 3:3 is most directly relevant to the present discussion of corporate Christian worship, the other two are closely related and so also provide some insight into the character of worship. Paul's second identity-marker of the true people of God develops logically out of the first: those who worship in the Spirit of God (i.e., the Spirit of Christ) are those who "glory in Christ Jesus."

Here we encounter a favorite word of Paul: *kauchaomai* ("glory"), meaning simply to boast or take pride in something.[32] Of thirty-seven occurrences in the NT, thirty-five are in the Pauline letters. The *kauchaomai* word family includes two related verb forms (with prefixes *en–* and *kata–*), which occur only five times total, and the nouns *kauchēma* and *kauchēsis* (eleven occurrences each). "Apart, however, from 5 instances in Jas. and one in Heb., words of this group are found only in the Pauline writings."[33]

Paul's talk of boasting sometimes refers to rejoicing or exulting: in hope as well as suffering (Rom 5:2–3), and in God because he has reconciled us to himself in Christ (Rom 5:11). But more often, Paul's sense of *kauchaomai* is simply that of boasting. Of course, to boast in oneself is sinful and a denial of obvious divine realities: "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Cor 4:7). Indeed, the OT perspective on self-boasting is equally dim: "It is not simply a casual fault, but the basic attitude of the foolish and ungodly man (Pss 52:1 [LXX 51:3]; 94:4 [93:3]), for in it one sees the person who stands on his own feet and does not depend on God."[34]

So Paul is most reluctant to boast in anything he has accomplished. Seventeen of the Pauline occurrences of *kauchaomai* and six uses of *kauchēsis* are in 2 Corinthians 10–12, where Paul is forced to defend the authenticity of his

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[32] BDAG, 536.

[33] H–C. Hahn, "καύχημα," in NIDNTT, 1:228.

[34] O'Brien, *Philippians*, 361; cf. Rudolf Bultmann, "καυχάομαι," in TDNT, 3:646–47.

apostolic authority. Paul considers this boasting foolish (11:16–21), and keeps his boast strictly within proper boundaries (10:13). For Paul's boast is not in what he himself has done, but what God has accomplished through Paul's weaknesses. In fact, it is of his weaknesses that he prefers to boast (11:30), because it is in those weaknesses that the power of Christ is manifested (12:9). Indeed, it is in this context that Paul's ethic of boasting is summarized in his quotation of Jer 23:23: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (10:17; cf. 1 Cor 1:31).

In his letter to the Galatian churches, in a context similar to Phil 3:3 where some were demanding physical circumcision in the churches, Paul pinpoints the cross of Christ as the object of his boasting: "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14). In sum, Paul's "theology of boasting" is a way of emphasizing that anything good arising from his life actually comes from Christ. R.P. Martin summarizes this well: "Our 'boasting' is not in ourselves, which is the essence of sin, but in Another whose arm alone has brought salvation and on whom we rest in utter confidence and self–distrust. It is an attitude which deflates pride, especially in our religious virtues and attainments, and exalts the sovereign grace of God, and His matchless gift on which we have no claim."[35]

So in Phil 3:3 Paul characterizes the true people of God, in contrast to those who are not, as "those who boast in Christ Jesus." The boasting that Paul attributed to himself in other contexts he applies here to believers in general. In fact, it is a basic mark of Christian identity to boast of Christ and His cross. This presents a timely application to corporate Christian worship—it is a gathering of those whose only true basis for boasting is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Their identity is found in Him, all good that they experience arises from Him, and their claim to be acceptable to God can be substantiated only in what Christ has done on their behalf. Therefore, the Christian worship gathering must be a time that is explicitly designed and overtly conducted in such a way as to make much of Jesus Christ and not of ourselves. Because Christ-boasting is a key element of Christian identity, it should have a prominent presence in a Christian theology and praxis of worship.

"The Ones Who Do Not Trust in Self"

The third and final identity-marker in Paul's brief statement in Phil 3:3 builds on the previous characteristic of boasting in Christ. Paul says that true people of God are those who "do not put confidence in the flesh" (*ouk en sarki pepoithotes*).

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[35] Martin, *Philippians*, 139.

This phrase is so closely related to the previous one that some take it to be a restatement of or expansion on boasting in Christ Jesus. In addition to the logical progression from "boasting in Christ" to "not putting confidence in the flesh," O'Brien sees a chiastic arrangement in the second and third participial phrases and so concludes that the third is a "negative restatement of the preceding."[36] However, due to the straightforward arrangement of three participial phrases in a row, with the second and third each connected by *kai* to the previous, along with a discernible conceptual progression from the second to the third, it seems better to see a third but related identity-marker.[37]

The word "flesh" (*sarx*) is another prolific Pauline term, but its range of meaning is quite broad and flexible, as a partial list of examples will show:[38]

> "so that no [flesh] might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor 1:29)
> "for by works of the law no [flesh] will be justified" (Rom 3:20)
> "for not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals" (1 Cor 15:39)
> "if I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me" (Phil 1:22)
> "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:8)

The last two examples demonstrate the flexibility of this term for Paul—in one context he refers to living life in the flesh as a good thing, in another context it is impossible to please God "in the flesh." Sometimes, then, Paul uses *sarx* to refer simply to human beings or human (even animal) corporeality, while in other cases it refers to the principle of sin that resides within humans and with which believers struggle even though its power has been broken. A few occurrences refer more specifically to humans from the reference point of their genealogy (Rom 1:3) and biological kinship (Rom 9:3).

But sometimes *sarx* "can be used also generally in reference to what is human" such as the inadequate wisdom of humans (1 Cor 1:16, cf. 2:6).[39] It is in this category that Paul is using "flesh" in Phil 3:3—the human achievements, even religious ones, that people depend on for favor with God. The strongest evidence for this interpretation comes in vv. 4–6. Paul repeats the phrase in verse 4: "though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh," and then he lists the religious qualifications he has in mind with the use of *sarx*: his Jewish descent and previous status as an enthusiastic Pharisee. The specific act of circumcision is probably in view due to its presence in the context (*katatomē*, *peritomē*, and "circumcised on the eighth day" in v. 5), but it is reasonable to

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[36] O'Brien, *Philippians,* 362–3; cf. Hendrickson, *Philippians,* 153.

[37] As, e.g., Melick, *Philippians*, 128; Calvin, *Philippians*, 89.

[38] For a helpful discussion of the Pauline concept of "flesh," see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 140–46.

[39] H. Seebass, "Flesh," in NIDNTT, 1:676.

conclude that Paul is including anything on which people rely (*pepoithotes*, perf ptcp of *peithō*) to achieve membership in the true people of God.[40]

So the third identity-marker of the true people of God is their complete lack of trust in human credentials in light of their sole boast in Christ. This principle is well-established in evangelical theology as it applies to evangelizing unbelievers and discipling believers. As one of the basic characteristics of Christian identity, though, it can also make a contribution to a theology of corporate worship. Because human beings can come into God's presence only on the basis of the redemptive work of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the experience of corporate worship must be planned and executed such that the worshipers can regularly express their dependence on God and their distrust of self.

Existing as they do in an entertainment-oriented culture, Western evangelical churches are constantly tempted to appeal to attendees on the basis of human accomplishments such as excellent music, impressive facilities, diverse programming, and charismatic personalities. The assumption seems to be that people are worshiping if they are enjoying themselves. An entertainment-oriented worship service is an example of placing confidence in the flesh and can easily involve boasting in something other than the person and work of Christ Jesus. But Christian worship must be characterized by a self-conscious rejection of reliance on human achievement and qualifications, for those who are true worshipers are those who boast only in Christ Jesus.[41]

Conclusion

Reading Phil 3:3 in its context and with an eye toward applying Paul's meaning to corporate worship has yielded some basic yet insightful fruit for the benefit of the church's corporate worship. First, the people of God are servant-worshipers, those who seek to give of themselves in service to a gracious God. Therefore, a worship service should be oriented toward self-giving for the sake of God and others. Second, God's people are those who boast in Jesus. Therefore, a worship service should be oriented toward exalting the person and work of Christ and celebrating what He has accomplished on our behalf. This leads to the third characteristic of the people of God, a complete distrust in self. In light of this, a worship service should never depend for its success on merely human factors such as personalities, talents, and facilities.

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[40] Cf. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 364. The NET rendering seems to capture the idea with "do not rely on human credentials" if Paul is referring to "everything that is apart from Christ" (Calvin, *Philippians*, 89).

[41] Of course, none of this is to say that excellence in planning and execution of the events in a worship service is unimportant. Humble worshipers should boast in Christ with the greatest enthusiasm and highest excellence they can achieve given their particular circumstances.

The implications for pastoral ministry here are significant. Since corporate worship is a matter of the heart (the gathered are indeed "living sacrifices" on an individual basis), the planning and conducting of a worship service is very much a pastoral matter. It cannot be delegated to musicians or producers who are not essentially pastoral in their approach—seeking to lead the assembly of servant-worshipers to give humbly of themselves to the Savior who has given himself for them.[42]

I will venture one modest suggestion based on this study of Phil 3:3 for the sake of corporate worship. One example of how worship can serve as an expression of Christian identity in a corporate setting is through corporate confession, an element of worship services that is now relatively rare in evangelical churches. The renewal of interest in the history and theology of worship among evangelicals has produced some helpful explorations of this valuable opportunity for corporate worship.[43] While all the actions of corporate worship are opportunities for the enactment of the church's identity as the true people of God, corporate confession provides an especially poignant moment for servant-worshipers to boast in Christ and express (and experience) their utter dependence on Him. In short, corporate confession is a chance for the church to embody its identity in a worship setting.

Finally, since there seems to be a tendency to rely heavily on the OT for insight into the church's corporate worship, I have attempted to exemplify a way of reading and applying the NT so as to show that it has much to offer that will enhance the worship of God's people. Since the NT presents worship as a matter of the whole life of the Christian, and since worship is an essential marker of Christian identity, it is appropriate to read the whole NT in light of this emphasis on pervasive worship. The result, hopefully, will be an increasingly vibrant, diverse, redemptive, and transformative corporate worship life among the gathered saints.

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[42] Indeed, one of the contributions of the worship renewal movement in general is that evangelical churches are increasingly realizing that worship and music are not identical but that the latter is one of several means to accomplish the former.

[43] See, e.g., Chapell, *Christ–Centered Worship*, chap. 15 (with historical and theological background throughout chaps. 1–9).