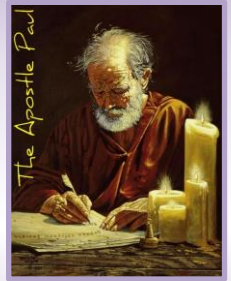


PHILIPPIANS

Joy In Christ



Lesson 09: Danger of Legalism ... [PHILIPPIANS 3:1-6]

PREVIEW

Paul starts with a command to rejoice and immediately follows with a warning about false teachers, both Jew and Gentile, who would pervert the gospel message, putting faith in their flesh and working for their salvation. To magnify the futile nature of fleshly position or accomplishments, Paul shows how he had been the perfect fleshly example of righteousness.

LEGALISM: IN CIRCUMCISION: (3:1-3)

NECESSITY OF WARNING (3:1)

The opening command to “**rejoice in the Lord**” sets the tone for the entire chapter. They were not to rejoice in who they were or what they had done. They were to rejoice in all that Jesus Christ, is and in all that He had graciously provided through His redemptive death and resurrection. Such holy joy however, can be threatened by the onslaught of doctrinal and moral error.

FOR PAUL: Faithful preachers must not only declare truth, but also expose error. Paul knew that he had “**to write the same things**” he had taught them during his past visits to their city (3:18). Repetition and reinforcement are basic laws of teaching.

Such warnings were not “**tedious**” to Paul; he did not shrink from his responsibility to point out error. Paul determined to declare the whole counsel of God at all costs (Acts 20:26-31).

FOR THE CHURCH: Paul’s writing the same warning over again, was a “**safe**” for the Philippians. This adjective comes from a verb that means to totter or to reel. Paul wanted them to be forewarned, to be alert to danger, and to be watchful for their souls.

NATURE OF THE WARNING (3:2)

The imperative “**beware**” is repeated **three** times. This verb simply means to keep looking out, to continue watching, or to persist in seeing. The warning is addressed to **three** different groups, (1) Gentiles (2) Greedy Teachers, and (3) Jews.

BEWARE OF DOGS: The title “**dogs**” is applied to the unsaved that are filthy and vulgar (Proverbs 26:11; 2 Peter 2:22), who mock God (Psalm 59:6), who are contemptible (2 Samuel 9:8), and for Gentiles (Matthew 15:26).

BEWARE OF EVIL WORKERS: This warning describes the conduct of the false teachers. They were workers in that they aggressively promoted their beliefs. They were working to gain their own salvation, and they attempted to influence others to accept legalism as an additional requirement to faith as the grounds for divine acceptance. The Judaizers were “**evil**” deceitful workers and false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13), whose work was marked by a heretical message and selfish motivations. They were ministers of righteousness based on human pride and effort, not proclaimers of the divine righteousness that is imputed by grace through faith alone (2 Corinthians 11:15).

BEWARE OF THE MUTILATION: The term “**mutilation**” refers to false circumcision. This title is in contrast to genuine circumcision. Physical mutilations, practiced in pagan idolatry, were prohibited by God through Moses (Leviticus 21:5; 1 Kings 18:28).

In their zeal to physically circumcise their converts, the Judaizers were spiritually castrating them. They harmed people by their false teaching. They proclaimed salvation by faith and works, a concept that really is a “**works only**” human religion. They were unsaved and under the curse of God (Galatians 1:6-9). They perverted the gospel by removing its gracious character.

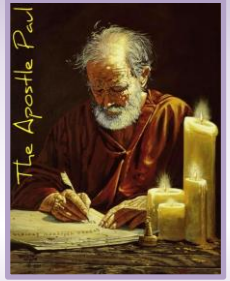
REASON FOR WARNING (3:3)

The connective “**for**” gives the reason for the three warnings. In this verse there is a contrast between the true circumcision and the false circumcision.

DEFINITION OF TRUE CIRCUMCISION: “**We**” believers in Christ, including circumcised Jews, circumcised Gentile proselytes and uncircumcised Gentile converts, are the true spiritual children of Abraham (Galatians 3:26-29).

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“**Are**” reveals a conviction that Paul was absolutely sure of the spiritual standing of his converts and himself. It was a present procession enjoyed by all of them.

The phrase “**the circumcision**” is a synonym for the body of Christ, the true church, the family of God in this present age. It manifests the work of the Spirit of God within the heart of each believer at the time of regeneration (Colossians 2:11). In the flesh, the presence of absence of physical circumcision distinguished between the Jew and the Gentile (Ephesians 2:11), but spiritual circumcision involves the heart and the spirit (Romans 2:28-29). True circumcision removes the sin of the heart, not the skin of the flesh (Jeremiah 4:4).

EXPLANATION OF TRUE CIRCUMCISION: First, genuine believers “**worship God in the Spirit**”. Constant worship is part of their daily behavior. Jesus Christ declared that God is a spirit and that people must worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Believers worship God the Father in their human spirits by the Holy Spirit who indwells them.

Second, genuine believers “**rejoice in Christ Jesus**”. All saved people glory continually in the finished redemptive work that the God-man accomplished through His death and resurrection (Galatians 6:14). To “**rejoice in Christ Jesus**” also means to admit that he is Jehovah God (Jeremiah 9:23-24; 1 Corinthians 1:29-31).

Third, genuine believers “**have no confidence in the flesh**”. When people have such confidence, they think they are good enough in themselves and that they have sufficient ability to do whatever it takes to gain entrance into heaven.

LEGALISM: IN CONFIDENCE: (3:4-6)

COMPARISON OF CONFIDENCE (3:4)

Paul reluctantly involved himself in boasting to disprove the false allegations against him (2 Cor. 11:1-12:11). To portray graphically the folly of self-confidence, he now used himself as an example. Paul presents two claims. He asserts that he could have confidence. The phrase

“**I more so**” links him with the Judaizers who built their ministries on self-confidence. The phrase “**in the flesh**” makes it clear that this was a confidence based on human standards, not on divine and biblical evaluations. Paul then charged that he could have more confidence than anyone else in the world. He did not just match the Judaizers or any other self-righteous group; he surpassed them. This boast did not originate from any pride on his part. He actually used this evaluation of his past as an argument to show the fallacy of such egomania.

DEMONSTRATION OF CONFIDENCE (3:5-6)

CIRCUMCISION: Circumcision was a sign of faith in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:1-14).

STOCK OF ISRAEL: Paul could trace his genealogical ancestry to the patriarchs.

TRIBE OF BENJAMIN: Benjamin was the last of the 12 sons of Jacob. His mother Rachael died as she gave birth to him (Genesis 35:16-18). This tribe gave Israel its 1st King, Saul – Paul’s namesake.

HEBREW OF HEBREWS: Paul was a Hebrew son born to Hebrew parents. He learned the Hebrew language and orthodox customs at an early age in his hometown of Tarsus and later received his rabbinical education in Hebrew at Jerusalem under the respected Gamaliel (Acts 22:2-3).

PHARISEE: Paul was not only a member of this legalistic, orthodox group, but he was also its most zealous member (Galatians 1:14).

ZEALOUS: In his zeal for legalistic Phariseeism, Paul had persecuted the church. He honestly thought that the killing of Christians was a noble and meritorious service for God (John 16:2).

BLAMELESS: Legal righteousness can only be achieved by meticulous conformity to all of the positive and negative commandments. It can only be granted to those who deserve it.