

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Beware of Those Who Corrupt the Gospel Philippians 3:1-3 Part 1

I am sure that many of you have heard of the “International Churches of Christ” or the “LA Church of Christ.” A few years ago when they were establishing a foothold here in the Antelope Valley they approached a local church to use their facility. That church agreed to open their doors to them. We believed that this was a serious mistake and encouraged that particular church to expel them.

This group might resemble Christians who are excited about serving the Lord. This group might resemble Christians in their choice of certain words. This group might resemble Christians by claiming that the Bible is their only source for doctrine but they are not Christian. International Churches of Christ disciples or in other words the LA Church of Christ are members of one of the fastest growing heretical movements in the world.

Why classify this seemingly Bible-based organization as heretical? To warrant this designation, a sect must deny one or more of the cardinal tenets of the historic Christian faith. Among the International Churches of Christ deviations are a works-oriented plan of salvation that is related to a faulty understanding of grace.

While saying they believe in salvation by grace through faith in actuality certain sequential acts have been added as prerequisites for salvation. One must become a disciple, which by their definition includes changing one’s lifestyle to conform with the movement’s standards for Christian behavior, and be baptized. With these additions International Churches of Christ or the LA Church of Christ which is the familiar designation of this so-called church in this area departs from the gospel of grace and enters into the realm of the cults. There are basically two religions in the world. The religion of divine accomplishment; (salvation by grace through faith) and the religion of human achievement. The LA Church of Christ is a religion of human achievement.

Why did we seek to intervene to remove them from this local church facility? We sought to intervene because they were a threat to the gospel of Christ and therefore the mission of the church. Our instruction and our warnings were ignored by the local church that opened their doors to them. And from that humble beginning within that facility they have continued to expand within the Antelope Valley.

Adherents of the true gospel must be vigilant against those who would seek to corrupt the gospel. The vigilance required by those who have embraced the one true gospel is highlighted in **Philippians 3:1-3**. Let us read this passage, **“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. (2) Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; (3) 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.”**

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There are two groups of people contrasted in this passage. The first group is introduced in **verse 2** **“Beware of dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.”** And the second group is introduced in **verse 3** **“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.”**

Before we can look at the specifics of how these two groups are contrasted we must first of all look at **verse 1** to see how Paul introduces these them.

Paul begins the verse by saying, **“Finally,**” When Paul uses this word he is not using it to convey the thought “in conclusion” but rather it should be understood more in the sense of “furthermore.”

Then Paul says, **“..... my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.”** Paul is once again revisiting the overall theme of this epistle. Paul is continually throughout this epistle looking for opportunities to sprinkle in references to joy. In its four very brief chapters the words “joy” or “rejoice,” are used 16 times. And one of those references to joy is found here in this transitional verse.

But what is different in this particular reference to joy that we have not seen before in this epistle is the phrase, **“in the Lord.”** This phrase indicates both the basis of Christian joy and the sphere in which it thrives. The only reason that we can as Christians continually experience a sense of well being no matter what our circumstances might be, is because our joy is in the Lord rather than in our circumstances. The joy that is in the Lord flows from the Holy Spirit as we walk in obedience to Christ while trusting in the promises of God. The joy that is not from the Lord is totally dependent upon good circumstances.

This weekend Paul is exhorting us, commanding us to rejoice in the Lord. You may be here this morning suffering because of some terrible circumstance in your life. The suffering certainly can be understandable, but in the midst of that suffering hopefully you will also choose to rejoice in the Lord. This means that you will totally and completely without reservation or compromise choose to obey God and trust the promises he has made to you in his word. If you will by the grace of God this weekend choose to do this you will immediately begin to experience the joy of the Lord in the midst of your suffering. You will immediately begin to feel a deep sense of well being in spite of whatever personal circumstances you might be experiencing.

Paul then goes on to say, **“To write the same thing again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.”** You might think when you read this that he is referring to his constant references to joy and rejoicing. This would be very reasonable if all he had said was **“to write the same thing again is no trouble to me,”** but this is not all that he said, he goes on to say, **“and it is a safeguard for you.”** How is a command to rejoice in the Lord a safeguard for them? And the answer is, “It isn’t.” The safeguard is not the preceding command to rejoice in the Lord but rather the subsequent warning about the group described in verse 2.

Paul had warned the Philippians about this particular group when he was with them, and he is telling them that he does not consider his present written warning about them any big deal. He is not afraid of them.

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But he is afraid of their influence on the Philippian church and therefore he hopes that his present written warning might serve as a safeguard for them.

This leads us to the passage that we will begin to study this weekend. My hope as we study this passage is that we will have a much greater appreciation of the true gospel and that we would be motivated to exercise even greater diligence to identify and confront those who would seek to corrupt it.

The first group that Paul introduces is the false circumcision (verse 2). Let us read **Philippians 3:2** **“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.”** The dogs, evil workers and false circumcision are not three different groups but rather one group described in three different ways. And with each individual description Paul gives a warning: **“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, and beware of the false circumcision.”** Paul obviously considers this group a serious problem we see this first of all by the repetitive warnings. But who is this group that is such a danger to the church.

The group described as the false circumcision is a group that we commonly refer to as the Judaizers. The judaizers were a constant threat to the churches.

We see their activity at the very beginning of the New Testament Church. Let me read for you **Acts 15:1-11** **“And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” (2) And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. (3) Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. (4) And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. (5) But certain ones of the sect of the pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”** These individuals that stood up at the Jerusalem council were Judaizers. Judaizers were professing Christians who taught that in addition to believing in Jesus a person must be circumcised and adhere to jewish law (Acts 15:5). After a lengthy debate the apostles and the elders of the church at Jerusalem unanimously agreed that salvation was by grace through faith alone and that circumcision and adherence to jewish law was totally unnecessary for Gentiles to be saved. But just because all the apostles and elders were in agreement at this point in time on how gentiles were saved it doesn't mean that every so-called believer at that point in time supported that decision.

The evidence of this continuing problem with Judaizers being active in the church is clear from the passage that we have before us: **“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.”**

This is obviously very strong language. What is Paul's problem with this group? Why is he so hard on them. Let me ask you this question, “How are we saved?” We are saved by grace through faith plus nothing.

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What does **Ephesians 2:8-9** tell us **“For by grace of you saved through faith and that not of yourself it is the gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast.”** The Bible teaches us that when we exercise faith in Jesus, as He is revealed in the Scripture both in terms of His person and His work we are saved. What is the problem with adding a few works to this message?

In **Romans 11:1-5** God is speaking about the righteous remnant that has always been present among the physical seed of Abraham. And then in commenting on how this righteous remnant came to have salvation Paul says in **Romans 11:6** **“But if it (salvation) is by grace (which he has declared all the way through the epistle of Romans) then it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.”** The Judaizers were trying to mix grace and works and that is absolutely impossible to do (Romans 11:6).

But even though it is impossible to mix grace and works these Judaizers were very effective at actually leading people to believe that this could be done. How? Though it is impossible to mix grace and works the Judaizers used Old Testament Law in order to confuse Gentile converts.

People today continue to confuse well meaning Christians with their misguided appeals to the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written to the Jewish people who were living under the old covenant. The Old Testament was not written to the church. Certainly it can be profitable for us to read the Old Testament for there is much we can learn about God and his dealings with men particularly the Jewish people. But even so Christians need to understand that we are not bound to the Law in fact we are dead to the Law (Romans 7:1-6) Listen to **Romans 7:1-6** **“Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? (2) For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. (3) So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. (4) Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. (5) For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. (6) But now we have been raised from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”**

Don't think that this teaching about Old Testament Law frees us to live our lives any way that we want. What did Paul say in **Romans 6:1-2** **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase.” (2) May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it.”** We may not be bound to the Law but we are bound to Christ and we should seek to live our lives in the same holy manner as He sought to live His life (Ephesians 5:1-2). Let me read for you **Ephesians 5:1-2** **“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; (2) and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”** This means that we will seek to honor every command given to the church in the new testament while utilizing every command and teaching in the Old Testament in a supplemental way to enhance, reinforce or clarify New Testament truth.

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Hopefully each of us are clear on this. If we are not clear we will invariably end up arbitrarily picking and choosing what laws or promises apply to us and what laws or promises do not apply to us. And this is exactly the problem that many of the early gentile converts had. And the Judaizers effectively used it to their advantage. How effective were the Judaizers?

Listen to the words of Paul in **Galatians 1:6-7** **“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; (7) which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”** Just because the Jews were to be circumcised according Law does not mean that we need to be circumcised. The command to be circumcised is not binding on us. The teaching on circumcision certainly can be profitable to us in understanding the Jews special standing before God but we are not bound to this law or any Old Testament law. But many gentiles in the early church did not understand this and many began to believe through the influence of the Judaizers that circumcision was actually necessary for salvation. We can see in **Galatians 1:6-7** that Paul was upset about this but how upset was he? Listen to what Paul says in **Galatians 1:8-9** **“But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.”** Paul pronounces a curse on those who sought to mix grace and works (Galatians 1:8-9).

The word for “accursed” (ANATHEMA) is referring to the judgment of hell. The verdict that Paul is pronouncing upon these Judaizers is the same judgment that Jesus pronounced on the Pharisees in Matthew 23:13-39. In light of this we should not be surprised that Paul’s warning uses such strong terms in describing these Judaizers in Philippians 3:2 when he describes them as dogs, evil workers, and the false circumcision. These individuals that he is describing are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Just because a so-called Christian group might appear to be excited about serving the Lord; just because so-called a so-called Christian group might use similar terms to describe Jesus and his work; just because a so-called Christian group may claim the Bible is their only source of doctrine it does not make them Christian.

What makes a person a Christian? A person who desires to be set free from their sins becomes a Christian when they place their faith and trust in the Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. Anyone who seeks to add or subtract from this gospel cannot be saved.