

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

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

Everyday I go to work I am surrounded by Christians. I don't hear the foul language, the off color stories. I am not surrounded by bad attitudes. Everyday is always the same. I don't have the wonderful opportunities that many of you have in your work places. Not only do you have your general smattering of atheists, agnostics, and pseudo-Christians but you also have cult members. All these unsaved individuals provide you wonderful opportunities, even those from the various Christian cults.

I know that the passage of scripture that we have been studying has given us strong warnings about cult activity in the church at Philippi but we need to make a distinction between those who belong to cults from those who belong to cults and are seeking to spread their false gospel.

Why should we make this distinction? Because so many individuals involved in traditional cults are not militant. They are simply bumping along with no great religious agenda. They actually may not even know what their particular religious organization believes. If you know people like this in your neighborhood, at work or in your family you are in a great position to cultivate relationships and eventually share the gospel. But what about those individuals who are militant? What about those people who are aggressively seeking to recruit others to their false religion how should we deal with them? The passage that we are presently dealing with can help us with this question.

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.** The safeguard is not referring to the command to rejoice in the Lord but rather to the subsequent warning given about the group described in **verse 2..... (2) Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;**..... Theologians call this group the “Judaizers.” The Judaizers were professing Jewish Christians who taught that in addition to believing in Jesus a person must be circumcised and adhere to Jewish Law in order to be saved. Though the apostles and elders unanimously condemned this teaching, which we see in **Acts 15**, the Judaizers continued to be a problem for the early church. We see this reflected in the threefold warning that Paul gives in **Philippians 3:2 “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.”**

Last week we looked at the first descriptive phrase, **“Beware of the dogs”** Metaphorically the term “dog” (KUON) was a term of contempt. The Jews used the term “dog” to describe the Gentiles because they saw them as unclean and as the enemies of God. Dogs today are regarded as pets, as objects of affection, but in Bible times they were scavengers, normally living on garbage and without human masters. When Paul uses the term “dog” to describe the Judaizers he is identifying them as unclean, unrighteous, unsaved and the enemies of God. The Judaizers were not being declared dogs because of their support of the Old Covenant, which other unbelieving Jews also supported, but rather because of their active opposition to the New Covenant.

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The new covenant is God's promise to save those who place their faith in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. The new covenant is rooted in the shed blood of Christ. Though the Judaizers recognized that Christ died for sin they opposed the thought that gentiles could reap the benefit of that shed blood without circumcision and adherence to Jewish law.

We are again going back to **Philippians 3:2** and asking ourselves the question, "How does Paul describe those who were preaching a false gospel of works?"

Again my hope as we continue to 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 second descriptive phrase he uses to warn the church about those who were preaching a false gospel is "beware of the evil workers." There are many individuals in our community who are working very hard at promoting false gospels. The Jehovah Witnesses, the Mormons, and the disciples of the LA Church of Christ are examples of people who are doing exactly that. Each of these groups in one way or another have rejected the true gospel. You might respect them for their work ethic but their work ethic does not make them righteous. What does Paul call the Judaizers? "**Evil workers.**" And the same term applies to all those who are seeking to spread a false gospel.

The Judaizers and people like them are not the ministers of Christ but rather they are the ministers of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). Listen to the words of Paul in **2 Corinthians 11:13-14** "**For such men (referring to the Judaizers) are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.**" Paul has identified the Judaizers first of all as dogs but he is not satisfied. He goes on to call them "evil workers."

The third descriptive phrase he uses to warn the church about those who were preaching a false gospel is "beware of the the false circumcision." The word translated "false circumcision" is a very interesting word.

The word translated "false circumcision" (KATATOME) lit. means "to cut off" and is used in the LXX to refer to certain practices which are condemned (Leviticus 19:28, 21:5; Deuteronomy 14.1).

Leviticus 19:28 "And you shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead, nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the Lord."

Leviticus 21:5 "They shall not make any baldness on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts in their flesh."

Deuteronomy 14:1 "You are the sons of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave your forehead for the sake of the dead."

In the Old Testament the slashing or the cutting of the body was associated with the pagans and their attempts to earn favor with God (1 Kings 18). We see an example of this in **1 Kings 18.**

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In this passage Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal to petition their so-called god to send fire from heaven to consume their offering. And they agreed to do this, so from morning until noon the bible tells us they prayed, **“O Baal, answer us”** But there was no voice and no one answered. Then they got a little more excited and began to leap and jump around but still nothing happened. Then at noon Elijah mocked them telling them that **“perhaps he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.”** And how did they respond to this? In **1 Kings 18:28** **“So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom and with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them.”** Paul could not see a great deal of difference between the prophets of Baal and the Judaizers because both believed that the cutting of the flesh would earn God’s favor. The prophets of Baal thought that cutting themselves would cause God to listen to their prayers and the Judaizers believed that people cutting themselves in the practice of circumcision was a prerequisite for salvation. How did the Judaizers come to this damnable position?

In order to answer this question we need to know a little bit about Jewish circumcision. The Lord made an unconditional covenant with Abram in **Genesis 12:1-3**. Let me once again read this for you, **“Now the Lord said to Abram, go forth from your country, And from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; (2) and I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, and make you name great; and so you shall be a blessing; (3) And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

God reconfirmed this covenant with Abraham it in **Genesis 15** and after God confirmed His covenant with Abram it says in **Genesis 15:6** **“Then he (Abram) believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”**

God gave the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12, confirmed it in Genesis 15 and then commanded that every male be circumcised in Genesis 17 as a sign of that covenant. Let me read for you **Genesis 17:9-14**, **“God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. (10) This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. (11) And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. (12) And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. (13) A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. (14) But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant. The word in the LXX used to translate the circumcision in Genesis 17 is the word PERITOME which literally means “to cut around” and has none of the negative associations of KATATOME.**

So how did PERITOME, the cutting around which was sign to the nation of Israel of God’s covenant with them, become the KATATOME the cutting off? The PERITOME became the KATATOME when the Judaizers made the sign of the covenant with Abraham a necessary component of saving faith.

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This is the point that Paul is making in **Romans 4:1-12** “**What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? “And Abraham believed God, and It was reckoned to him as righteousness.” (4) Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. (5) But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, (6) just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works; (7) “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered, (8) Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account (Psalms 32:1-2).”** What is Paul’s point? Those who sought to make circumcision necessary for salvation failed to understand that Abraham was not saved by faith plus circumcision but by faith alone (Romans 4:1-12). After making this point Paul goes on to make sure that his readers do not miss his point.

(9) Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, “Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.” (10) How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; (11) and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them, (12) and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.” The institution of circumcision recorded for us in Genesis 17:10-13 takes place fourteen years after God declared Abraham righteous by faith alone in Genesis 15:6. How could the Judaizers not have been persuaded by the arguments of Paul in **Romans 4**? The reason is quite simple Satan had not only blinded them to the truth but was using them to oppose the true gospel. They truly were the ministers of Satan.

People are not saved by faith plus something but by faith plus nothing (Ephesians 2:8-9). What does **Ephesians 2:8** tell us “**For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is a gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast.**” This was not the message that was being preached by the Judaizers; they were preaching a false gospel. And Paul certainly wants to make sure that the Philippians were properly warned. What does **Philippians 3:2** say, “**Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.**” This is strong language.

How should we respond to these people when they come to our doors. When they are actively seeking to spread their false message? Let me read for you **2 John 4-11**, “**I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. (5) And now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. (6) And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. (7) For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. (8) Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. (9) Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.**”

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(10) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; (11) the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.”

Those that John mentions in this passage are not Judaizers but rather Gnostics which is a different heretical group. But even though this is true the passage does help us to see how we can respond to anyone preaching or teaching a false gospel. When John tells this woman not to receive them into her home he is in essence is saying don't support their evil work by providing meals or lodging which was the customary way that strangers would be entertained. In addition to this John did not even want them to be extended a greeting. A greeting in that time period might be “May peace be with you.” Paul wants to deny anything from a militant cultist that might somehow encourage or help them.

Cultists who come to our door should not be encouraged or assisted in any way. We should not be rude but we should not make ourselves available to them. How much easier it would have been for the apostle Paul if the churches had been vigilant to identify those who were preaching a false gospel and would have closed their doors to them. But many of them did not and which threatened the purity of the gospel message within many of the local churches that Paul had established.

The only exception to this personal encouragement not to make yourself available would be if you are believe that you are well equipped to confront their error and to with gentleness take charge of the conversation so that you are leading them to the truth. But in any attempt to do this remember the warning of Paul to the Philippian church.....

CONCLUSION

But remember the threat of those who are preaching false gospels is not only toward us and our families, but they are a threat to the whole of the community We do not only need to prepare ourselves to deal with those who might come to us with a false gospel we also need to prepare ourselves to go with the true gospel.....