

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Beware of Those Who Corrupt the Gospel Philippians 3:1-3 Part 4

We have been studying **Philippians 3:1-3**. In this passage the church is being warned about a very real and present threat. 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 warning about a particular group described in **verse 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.”**

The first descriptive phrase Paul uses in his warning to describe the Judaizers was the term “dogs.” What did he say in **Philippians 3:2, “Beware of the dogs.”** Metaphorically the term dog was a term of contempt. When Paul uses the term 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 but rather because of their opposition to the new covenant. 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 apart from circumcision and adherence to Jewish law.

The second descriptive phrase that Paul uses in his warning to describe the Judaizers was the term **“evil workers.”** The Judaizers viewed themselves as righteous workers helping people to come into a personal relationship with God but they were mistaken. Rather than being the servants of God, they were the servants of Satan and in reality opposed the message of God.

The third descriptive phrase Paul uses in his warning to describe the Judaizers was the term **“the false circumcision.”** The word translated “false circumcision” KATATOME literally means “to cut off.” In Paul’s minds the Judaizers had taken the God given rite of circumcision, the PERITOME, and turned it into a “mutilation” the KATATOME.

The God given rite of circumcision, the PERITOME, which literally means “to cut around” had been given to the nation of Israel as a sign of the unconditional covenant that God had made with Abraham. It had nothing to do with Abraham’s salvation. In fact we know from **Genesis 15:6** that Abraham’s faith had been accounted to him as righteousness 14 years prior to the time that circumcision or the cutting around was given by God to Abraham as a sign of the covenant. But the Judaizers had taken this external sign of the Abrahamic covenant, the PERITOME, and turned it into something very evil, the KATAOME, when they made it a necessary work for salvation. This is the reason why Paul in the NAS calls them the “false circumcision” and in the NIV he is said to have referred to them as “those of the mutilation.”

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Paul could not have leveled a more powerful warning to the Philippian church concerning the Judaizers than when he said, **“Beware of the dogs, Beware of the evil workers, Beware of the false circumcision.”**

Let us now go on to consider **verse 3**. It begins with the words **“for we are the true circumcision....”** The expression “the true circumcision” is used by Paul to refer to true Christians.

Why would Paul refer to the uncircumcised gentiles in the Philippian church as the true circumcision? Uncircumcised gentile Christians can be included under the description of the “true circumcision” because they have been circumcised in the foreskin of their heart (Jeremiah 4:3-4). Listen to **Jeremiah 4:3-4 “For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, “Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns. (4) Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.”**

Jeremiah is calling them to remove the foreskins of their heart if they wanted to avoid judgment. How would that be done? They could do this only by believing God. What does **Hebrews 11:6** tell us, **“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”** The circumcision in the foreskin of the heart has nothing to do with external acts but an internal willingness to believe the promises of God (Hebrews 11:6).

The Jews in Jeremiah’s time were not only living under the unconditional provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant which dealt with the land and the future Messiah and the blessings to the world that would come through Him but they also lived under the conditional provisions of the Mosaic Covenant. They knew because of God’s promises to them through Moses that if they did good in the promised land, good things would happen to them. And if they did bad things in the promised land, bad things would happen to them both individually and on a national level as long as the Mosaic Covenant was in place.

In order to circumcise their heart they would, just like Abraham, have to believe God and express that faith in very tangible ways. For the Israelites in Jeremiah 4 under the Mosaic Law that would mean that they would have to turn from their practice of idolatry to worship the only true God.

Would they be circumcised in their heart as a result of them giving up their idolatry? No! They would be circumcised in the foreskin of their heart when they believed in the promises of God. The circumcision of the heart has nothing to do with externals but with internals, specifically with the presence of genuine and living, and saving faith. But obviously if Israel truly believed in the promises of God what would the nation of Israel have done in the day of Jeremiah? They would have repented and given up their idolatry.

For unsaved people in the church age what do they have to do in order to circumcise themselves and remove the foreskin of their heart? An unsaved person today is circumcised in the foreskin of his heart when based on the promise of God he exercises faith in Christ alone for his salvation.

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Have you done this? If you have then though you may not have ever been circumcised in the foreskin of your flesh or had your children circumcised in the foreskin of their flesh you have been circumcised in the foreskin of your heart. And having been circumcised in the foreskin of your heart by grace through faith alone you are now a part of the “true circumcision” and a participant in the “New Covenant” whether you are a Jew or Gentile. Again let us go back to **Philippians 3:2** but this time let us read through **Philippians 3:3**.

Philippians 3:2-3 “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.” After Paul identifies himself and the Philippian church as a part of the true circumcision Paul will now go on to describe the true circumcision. Or in other words Paul will go on to describe the true Christian.

Just as there were three descriptive phrases to describe the Judaizers there are three descriptive phrases to describe the “true circumcision.” This morning I would like to examine each of these phrases. In examining these phrases I would hope that we would clearly see that these three phrases serve as guidelines to help us discern whether we are a part of the true circumcision or not a part of the true circumcision.

The first descriptive phrase that Paul uses to describe the true circumcision is they “worship in the Spirit of God.” This is an extremely important truth for us to understand especially in this day and age where a great many so-called Christian churches and organizations are being solely built upon their misguided and inaccurate views of worship. Their misguided and inaccurate views of worship leads to incredible excesses of the flesh rather than to a genuine and healthy manifestation of the Spirit of God in worship.

True worship is not generated by ourselves or others but rather it is generated internally by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I remember talking to a pastor of a large charismatic church in our area and he confessed how exhausted he was after the weekend. I can identify with what he was saying but his explanation for his exhaustion was very interesting. He was exhausted because he was trying to get the people in the congregation to worship. Of course he was talking about the effort he expended to get the people in the congregation to experience a certain emotional high. What he was doing was misguided. No individual person no matter how much effort they exert can get a group of people to truly worship God. And no individual person no matter how much effort they exert can produce a genuine worship experience in their own lives. It is totally impossible. They may look like they have but it is all a sham. And yet all around us today we see people working very hard at so-called “worship.”

The world is filled with people who are seen by the world as “worshipping.” Hindus are “worshipping.” Buddhists are “worshipping.” Muslims are “worshipping”, Jews are “worshipping” and unfortunately there are many so-called Christians who are “worshipping” but their “worship” is not prompted by the Holy Spirit. Rather it is prompted by various cultural concerns, or by guilt, or by fear, or by greed, or by pride, or simply by a self deluded ignorance and therefore it is not worship at all.

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True worship can only come from the Spirit of God, because true worship can only come from the Spirit of God two things must be true of your life this weekend if you are going to make a claim to being a true worshiper.

In order to enjoy true worship we must first of all be a Christian because only Christians are indwelt by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9). What does **Romans 8:9** say? **“If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ He does not belong to Him.”** The Judaizers did not have the Spirit of God indwelling them nor did anyone who embraced their message. The only individuals who have the Spirit of God indwelling them are the true circumcision or in other words true Christians. And because of this, only Christians can worship in the Spirit of God.

Does this mean that every true born again Christian in this room this weekend is worshiping in the Spirit of God. And the answer is not necessarily. This leads us to the second thing that must be true of our lives if we are going to enjoy true worship.

In order to enjoy true worship we must secondly place ourselves under the control of the Spirit of God who indwells us (Romans 12:1). What does **Romans 12:1** say? **“I urge you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”** Notice the last phrase, **“which is your spiritual service of worship.”**

Some people think of worship as speaking or singing praises to God. Certainly speaking or singing praises to God can be an expression of worship when it is done in the Spirit. But that understanding of worship is much too narrow and limiting. Let us consider the word that Paul uses in **Philippians 3:3** that is translated “worship.”

The word for “worship” (LATREUO) that Paul uses in this verse always refers to “religious service offered to God” and is not limited to praise and thanksgiving. In fact we see the same word used in **Romans 12:1** near the end of the verse. When Paul speaks about offering up of our bodies as a living sacrifices, what does he call this act? **“Our spiritual service of worship.”** The word that Paul uses in **Romans 12:1** is the same word that He uses in **Philippians 3:3** (LATREUO).

Giving up our body as a living sacrifice allows the indwelling Holy Spirit to take control of our lives. And when He is in control of our lives all of our activity becomes a sacrificial offering to the Lord and therefore worship. When we are Spirit controlled our relationship with our husband or wife is an offering to the Lord and therefore worship. When we are Spirit controlled our relationship with our parents is an offering to the Lord and therefore worship. When we are Spirit controlled our relationship with our children is an offering and therefore worship.

The presentation of our body as a living sacrifice and every other act of obedience offered as a sacrifice, which is prompted and carried out by the Spirit of God, is worship. Many well meaning Christians measure the quality of a worship service by the energy that is expended in the singing or the power of the message that is delivered. These are false standards of what constitute true worship.

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We can have wonderful singing or a powerful message and not have any true worship at all if that singing or that message is not generated by the Holy Spirit. We can have, outwardly speaking, a very subdued time of singing with a very methodical and plain message and be having a terrific worship service. Worship is not what we are doing on the outside but what the Holy Spirit is doing on the inside to promote and empower acts of service as He is in full control of our lives.

Because of this I can't get you to worship this morning. This is the work of the Spirit of God who must prompt you and empower you to offer up your life in service not only on a Saturday night or Sunday morning service but every day of your life. And hopefully this is exactly what is taking place in your lives. Hopefully everything that you are doing is an offering to the Lord that you believe will be well-pleasing to Him. This means that Christians don't come to church so that they can worship. They come to church because they believe corporate worship pleases God.

What is the first descriptive phrase the Paul uses to describe the true circumcision? He describes them as those "who worship in the Spirit of God." Someone might think that this description of the true circumcision presents a rather dreary existence. But Paul takes care of that concern in the very next descriptive phrase.

The second descriptive phrase Paul uses to describe the true circumcision is they "glory in Christ Jesus." This is another very powerful descriptive phrase.

The word "glory" (KAUCHAOMAI) means to boast with joy. Paul uses this term 35 times, this is over twice as many times as all the other New Testament writers combined. Paul loves this term. Boasting may not seem like a good thing to do in the minds of many people but biblically it depends on who you are boasting in. It depends on whether you are boasting in yourself or in the Lord.

When Paul says that the true circumcision "glory in Christ Jesus," he is saying that they have joyfully concluded that life is not about them but about Christ (1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 15:9-10).

Listen to 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; (27) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, (28) and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, (29) that no man should boast before God. (30) But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, (31) that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Paul did not simply instruct the Corinthians concerning the importance of boasting in the Lord he personally modeled it. Listen to **1 Corinthians 15:9-10 "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."** Does it appear that Paul was struggling with his lowly self assessment?

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Not at all. Paul had joyfully concluded that life was not about Him but Christ or in other words “he gloried in Christ Jesus.”

How does Paul describe the true circumcision? He describes them as those who worship in the Spirit, as those who glory in Christ Jesus and lastly.....

The third descriptive Paul uses to describe the true circumcision is “they put no confidence in the flesh.” This is clearly directed at the Judaizers and their false gospel of grace plus works.

The word for flesh (SARX) refers to our unredeemed humanness. The Judaizers were encouraging the gentiles to not only believe in Jesus but to trust in Jewish circumcision and adherence to the Jewish Law. In other words the Judaizers were encouraging gentiles to put some confidence in the flesh. Is putting some confidence in the flesh a mark of the true circumcision. The answer is NO!! That certainly was not a mark of the true circumcision. That teaching of the Judaizers could only lead to spiritual ruin. Listen to **Romans 3:19-20** “**Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; (20) because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.**”

If we are going to put confidence in anything let us put our confidence in Christ and in Christ alone!

CONCLUSION

There are only two groups of people in this world. There are the true circumcision and those who are not. How can you tell whether you a part of the true circumcision? You can look for these three things.....

Do you worship in the Spirit of God, or in other words have you through the prompting and the empowerment of the Spirit of God chosen to serve the Lord?

Do you glory in Christ Jesus or in other words have you joyfully concluded that life is not about you but about Christ.

Do you put no confidence in the flesh, or in other words have you, seeing the futility of self effort put any hope of eternal life solely and completely on the finished work of Christ?

If these descriptions describe you, rejoice and while you are rejoicing..... Don't forget to Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers and beware of the false circumcision.