

Watch out for Works Salvation

Text: Philippians 3:1-6

Introduction:

1. A new section of the Epistle opens before us with the start of chapter 3. Much of it is autobiographical where the Apostle uses his own testimony as a part of the argument against the Judaizers and their false message of works salvation. This is one of several passages where Paul recounted his conversion from Judaism to Jesus.
2. This chapter deals with salvation past, present and future which can be summarized in the Bible's three great salvation words:
 - Justification (Vs. 9).
 - Sanctification (Vs. 10).
 - Glorification (Vs. 20-21).
3. Our outline for the messages from this chapter will be as follows:
 - I. Paul's Admonition (Vs. 1-6)
 - II. Paul's Ambition (Vs. 7-11)
 - III. Paul's Attitude (Vs. 12-13a)
 - IV. Paul's Aim (Vs. 13b-14)
 - V. Paul's Appeal (Vs. 15-21)
4. We will deal with the first point in this message – **Paul's Admonition (Vs. 1-6)**. The Apostle issues a warning in these verses against the Judaizers and bolsters his argument with a discussion about his own religious past and its insufficiency to make him right with God. We will break this admonition into two parts:

I. THE EXHORTATION (VS. 1-3)

A. Be Cheerful (Vs. 1a)

1. "Finally" = an indicator that Paul is progressing towards the end of the Epistle. However, there is another 'finally' to come in 4:8 so this first instance serves more as a transition to a new train of thought. It "marks a transition to the final matters, to be taken up in the letter, not the conclusion. It means 'as for what remains to be said'." (Fee)
2. "rejoice in the Lord" = the warning to follow is in the context of joy. Paul is going to deal with the threat of false teaching which is a joy stealer. Concerning how to have Christian joy, F.B. Meyer writes, "The joy of the Lord arises from leaving all our burdens at His feet; from believing that He has forgiven the past as absolutely as the tide obliterates children's writing in the sand; that nothing can come which He does not appoint or permit; that He is doing all things as wisely and kindly as possible; that in Him we have been lifted out of the realm of sin, sorrow, and death into a region of Divine light and love; that we have already commenced the eternal life, and that before us forever, there is a fellowship with Him so rapturous and exalting that human language can only describe it as unspeakable."
3. "in the Lord" = Christian joy is centered the Person of Christ who never changes (Heb. 13:8) rather than the ever changing, shifting events of life. "We may not be able to rejoice in our circumstances,

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friends, or prospects, but we can always rejoice in Jesus Christ".
(Meyer)

B. Be Mindful (Vs. 1b)

1. "to write the same things" = Paul was about to write to the believers about things he had taught them before. They were already familiar with these truths but the Spirit of God leads the Apostle to put them in writing to remind them.
2. "is not grievous" = Paul did consider this responsibility to warn the flock an irksome inconvenience. He understood the importance for God's people to be reminded of the truths they had already been taught. To be true to your calling as a preacher, you must embrace the God-given mandate to warn the flock regularly of sin, error and false teachers.
3. In order to qualify as a "good minister of Jesus Christ", you must have a ministry of warning as a preacher – 1 Tim. 4:6 "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, **thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ**, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained." What "things" is Paul referring to? The warning of apostasy in the last days of the previous verses (See Vs. 1-5).
4. "but for you it is safe" = a ministry of warning is an essential part of the spiritual safety of the saints. Pastors who won't warn the flock under their care are putting the spiritual safety of the sheep on the line. It is a treacherous dereliction of duty. Pastors and teachers are given to the church to help the believers come to maturity so that they will not be tossed about by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:11-16). This is a big job in the internet age when just about every false teacher has the digital world at his disposal to disseminate his heresies worldwide.
5. Paul had a good track record in this area:
 - a. Acts 20:29-31 "For I know this, that after my departing shall **grievous wolves** enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not **to warn every one night and day with tears.**"
 - b. Col. 1:28 "Whom we preach, **warning every man**, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:"

C. Be Watchful (Vs. 2-3)

The Apostle speaks of:

1. The character of the false teachers (Vs. 2)
 - a. The three-fold repetition in the warning. The Apostle repeats the word 'beware' three times for emphasis. The Greek word is 'blepo' (to behold, see). In essence he says "watch out!" It is right and proper for a preacher to identify spiritual dangers to God's people.
 - b. The three-fold description in the warning. The Apostle describes the Judaizers in three ways:

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- i. Beware of Dogs – a description of their character. The Orthodox Jew would call the Gentile a “dog” but here Paul calls orthodox Jews “dogs”. Christ and the Apostles did not mince their words when it came to false teachers. They were plain spoken and direct.
 - Listen to Christ’s words to the Pharisees – “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matt. 23:33) “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” (Matt. 7:15)
 - Listen to the Apostle Peter – “But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog *is* turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” (2 Pet. 2:22)
 - False teachers are likened to dogs, pigs and snakes in the Bible!
 - Meyer writes, “We are bidden, therefore, to beware of men of a quarrelsome and contentious spirit, who under the guise of religion hide impure and unclean things; and who are not only defiled, but defiling in their influence. If, in our circle of friends, there is one whose influence lowers the tone of our own life, who suggests and arouses thoughts and desires that tend to the gratification of the flesh, the tendency of whose conversation is towards the kitchen of our lower nature, rather than to the observatory of our spirit life, it is our duty to be carefully on our guard, and, if possible, to break of from familiarity and even acquaintance.”
- ii. Beware of evil workers – a description of their conduct. The true nature of their activities is unmasked. False teachers are self-deluded into believing they are doing a service for God by spreading their teachings. In reality, they are involved in an evil work.
- iii. Beware of the concision – a description of their creed. This identifies the specific group of false teachers the Apostle Paul has in mind in this passage. He is referring to the Judaizers who zealously came behind the Apostle’s missionary endeavours, teaching that “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).
 - Paul uses a unique word for circumcision here, not used anywhere else in the New Testament. The usual word for circumcision is ‘peritome’ which means “to cut around” whereas this word is ‘katatome’ which has the idea of a thorough cutting, a mutilation.

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- The Complete Word Study Bible explains: “The words ‘katatome’ and ‘peritome’, circumcision, seem alike. However, *peritome*, ordained by the law of Moses, has a spiritual significance distinguishing God’s people (Israel in the OT) from the heathen. When this spiritual meaning is forgotten, then *peritome*, circumcision, becomes a *katatome*, a mutilation, a butchering up, a mere cutting away flesh which in itself is of no value. Paul thus calls the Jewish teachers ‘butchers’, because after the coming of Christ they taught that outward circumcision of the flesh was necessary to salvation while at the same time they were destitute of the circumcision of the heart.”
 - Paul’s use of this word is “designed to highlight the stark contrast to those who rigidly proclaimed fleshly circumcision as essential for salvation compared to the true believers who knew spiritual circumcision.” (Gromacki)
2. The contrast to the false teachers (Vs. 3)
- Paul now shows that believers represent the true circumcision in sharp contrast to the false teachers who made so much of the physical rite of circumcision. See Colossians 2:11-12. True believers stand in contrast to these false teachers in three areas:
- a. They worship God in the spirit – a different emphasis. True believers know what it is to worship God in “spirit and in truth” as opposed to a mere external form of worship with no inward reality and no relationship with God. “True circumcision removes the sin of the heart, not the skin of the flesh.” (Gromacki)
 - b. They rejoice in Christ Jesus – a different focus. The word ‘rejoice’ here means “to glory or boast”. In fact, the same word is translated ‘boast’ multiple times in the New Testament. For example, “...lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:9). The believer does not boast/glory in his own works but in the finished work of Christ. There is only one “work” that God Almighty will accept and that’s the perfect, finished work His Son Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross. You are presented with a choice – trust your works and be lost or trust in Christ’s work and be saved.
 - c. They have no confidence in the flesh – a different trust. The believer’s confidence for salvation is not in self or in works but in Christ. No confidence means zero confidence in one's own works. The ‘flesh’ refers to the “old nature” and the Bible has nothing good to say about the flesh. “All through the Epistles the flesh stands for self – the self that seeks to justify itself, that endeavours to sanctify itself, that is always fussily endeavouring to win men for God, but has never learned to be submerged beneath the mighty tide of God’s Spirit.” (Meyer) Yet religion is all about what man has achieved in the strength of the flesh.

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Any confidence in human works is a false Gospel. The believer's confidence is also not in the flesh for sanctification.

II. THE EXAMPLE (VS. 4-6)

The Apostle Paul now turns to his own story to illustrate and demonstrate the truth of the instruction he has just delivered. He uses himself as an example of salvation from gospels to the true Gospel. He discusses:

A. The Religious Confidence he might have (Vs. 4)

1. Paul points out that if confidence in one's own achievements were the basis for salvation, he would have far more grounds to trust works than others.
2. "I more" = Paul didn't just match the Judaizers, he surpassed them so far as works were concerned. If you could line up all the religious people in the world, Paul would have stood head and shoulders above everyone. He would have been at the head of the line. In fact, you could have dubbed him "the world's most religious man" and yet he is about to describe all his own works as "dung" (Vs. 8). If religion couldn't save Saul of Tarsus, then it definitely can't save the rest of us!

B. The Religious Credentials he did have (Vs. 5-6)

The Apostle Paul now gives a summary of his past religious achievements. It was his seven-point brag sheet (resume) that he thought would make him acceptable before God. It is a summary of his "own righteousness" which he would eventually reject in order to receive God's righteousness in salvation. We will group them together under three headings:

1. Pride in Judaistic Ritual (Vs. 5a). Significant that Paul puts circumcision at the top of the list in light of the fact he is exposing those who were going around preaching circumcision as being essential for salvation. Circumcision for the Jew was like what infant baptism is to many today (or other religious rites).
2. Pride in Judaistic Roots (Vs. 5b). It is a master stroke of the devil to bind people's national identity up with their false religion. Three statements are made in this connection:
 - a. Of the stock of Israel – the word 'stock' comes from the Greek word 'genos'. In Australia we use the expression "I'm a dinky-di aussie" meaning a "true aussie". Paul was not a proselyte to the Jewish religion. He was born of Jewish stock and could trace his genealogical ancestry to the patriarchs.
 - b. Of the tribe of Benjamin – as a tribe, Benjamin had some claims to fame. Benjamin gave Israel her first king – king Saul. Benjamin also stayed loyal to the line of David rather than defecting with the 10 northern tribes. Jerusalem, the holy city, fell within Benjamin's geographical area.
 - c. An Hebrew of the Hebrews – Paul was not a Hellenistic Jew who had adopted the Greek culture. He was a Hebrew speaking son of Israel. He would later receive his rabbinical education under the famous and highly respected Gamaliel (Acts 22:2-3).
3. Pride in Judaistic Religiosity (Vs. 5c-6)
Paul had:

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- a. A religious position – “a Pharisee”. He was a part of the strictest sect of Judaism (Acts 26:5), adhering not only to the written law but the burdensome oral law based on the exaggerated interpretations of the rabbis. Paul was the most zealous member of the Pharisaic party – Gal. 1:14 “And profited in the Jews' religion **above many my equals** in mine own nation, being **more exceedingly zealous** of the traditions of my fathers.” “To the Jews of Paul’s day, a Pharisee had reached the very summit of religious experience, the highest ideal a Jew could ever hope to attain.” (Wiersbe)
- b. A religious passion – “concerning zeal, persecuting the church”. Paul had a burning zeal for the God of Israel and Judaism but his zeal was misguided and misdirected. He thought he was doing God a service by persecuting the believers but would later come to the tragic realization that he was wrong.
- c. A religious perfection – “touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless”. Paul is not claiming to be sinless. This statement is in the context of external religious works. Paul lived a life of outward conformity to the external demands of the law. “This final item brings the catalogue to its climax; everything else is pointing here. He had scrupulously adhered to the pharisaic interpretation of the Law, with its finely honed regulations for Sabbath observance, food laws, and ritual cleanliness.” (Fee)
- d. Wiersbe writes, “Like most “religious” people today, Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven.”

Conclusion:

1. How do you respond to the ministry of warning? What is your attitude towards it?
2. What are you trusting in for your salvation? Your imperfect, insufficient works or Christ’s perfect, all sufficient, finished work on the cross?