

Subject: *Why Religion Can't Save You*

Scripture: *Philippians 3:1-11*

Millions of people go to places of worship every week because they are religious. But many of them are lost and will eventually die and go to hell. They are religious, but not saved. Vance Havner said there are many people in church that are starched and pressed, but they have never been cleaned. There was a time in Paul's life when he was exactly like that. He was very religious, but lost. In this part of Philippians the apostle gives his testimony and he tells us how to be saved and why religion is not the answer.

1. PAUL'S CAUTION (vs. 1-2)

"Finally" doesn't mean that Paul is concluding his letter, but he is nearing his final thoughts. He is writing to warn fellow believers ("my brethren"). He used "beware" three times in verse 2. He urged them to rejoice in the Lord (see 4:4). Compare Luke 10:17-20, where Jesus cautioned the 70 disciples to find their primary joy in salvation, not in their ministry. The apostle warned them once again about false teachers. It was not a burden for Paul to remind them of this and it was safe for the Philippians to have this repeated warning. Spiritual leaders have a responsibility to warn God's people of false teachers and their teaching.

A. Paul warns about the dangerous character of false teachers

They were like wild pack dogs, scavengers that went around from place to place stirring up trouble. The Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs, and now Paul uses this term to describe these Judaizers (Jewish false teachers).

B. Paul warns about the evil work of false teachers

They were evil workers, spreading false teaching. Any person who works against the gospel is an evil worker. The worst kind of evil is false teaching because it does the greatest harm.

C. Paul warns about the religious ritual of false teachers

They were "the concision" (cutters) because they taught that people must be circumcised to be saved. They taught that a person had to become a Jew to be a Christian. They were teaching legalism, that you must do something in addition to believing in Christ for salvation.

Acts 15:1 *And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*

Today we must beware of legalism, any attempt to mix religious rites or deeds (baptism, communion, or good works) as a part of salvation. Legalism is an attempt to mix grace and works as a means of salvation, a false teaching that Paul refuted. In Philippians 1:18 Paul stated that he rejoiced in those who preached the Gospel with wrong motives, but he always rejected and refuted those who preached a message other than salvation by grace.

Romans 11:6 *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

Ephesians 2:8-10 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

2. PAUL'S CONFIDENCE (vs. 3)

Paul refuted the false teachers by stating the reasons for our confidence in Christ.

A. Believers are confident because we have a new heart

Romans 2:28-29 ²⁸ *For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: ²⁹ But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

B. Believers are confident because we offer spiritual worship

John 4:24 *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.* He rejoiced (boasted) in Jesus alone, not in who he was or what he had done (1 Cor. 15:10).

C. Believers have NO CONFIDENCE in ourselves

The flesh is our sinful human nature. Human nature is inherently sinful and cannot be improved.

Romans 7:18 *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.*

The Jews placed their confidence in being circumcised, being descendants of Abraham, and performing the external rituals of the Mosaic law, but these things could not save them.

3. PAUL'S CREDENTIALS (vs. 4-6)

Paul referred to his impressive list of credentials that could never provide salvation. At one time Paul was proud of heritage and accomplishments because he thought they made him right with God. Look at what he used to be proud of...

A. He took pride in his religious ritual – He was circumcised the 8th day as required by the OT law (Gen. 17:10-12).

B. He took pride in his family roots – He was of the stock of Israel...of the tribe of Benjamin.” Paul could trace his family line all the way back to Israel (Jacob). He was from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin and Judah were the two tribes that stayed loyal when the other 10 tribes broke off and formed the Northern Kingdom.

C. He took pride in his national race – He was a true-blooded Jew. There was no mixed blood in his family line.

D. He took pride in his religious party – Paul was one of the strict Pharisees (“separated ones”), the conservatives of that day. He was orthodox in his theology.

- E. He took pride in his zealous persecution – The Jews considered religious zeal to be the greatest virtue. Zeal combined love and hate. Paul loved his Jewish faith and hated anything that threatened it. Paul proved his zeal by arresting Christians and persecuting them to the fullest extent.
- F. He took pride in his moral reputation – He was blameless in the eyes of men, but not sinless in the eyes of God. The worst form of human badness is human goodness when it becomes a substitute for the new birth (Rom. 10:1-4).

No one is saved by ritual (circumcision, baptism), by family roots (godly parents or grandparents), by race or nationality (being a Jew or an American), by religious denomination, by reputation, or by any form of human goodness (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10).

4. PAUL'S COUNTING (vs. 7-11)

In filing his annual tax return one man counted his wife's trips to the beauty parlor as an itemized deduction. The IRS questioned him about it: "Sir, you can't do that." But he said, "Why not, they were a total loss." In this passage of Scripture the Apostle Paul is counting gains (profits) and losses. Some things he once considered valuable were now worthless. Now he knew that Christ was worth more than anything else. Paul was proud of his past, but after his conversion to Christ he considered all his earthly accomplishments as nothing but garbage, dung, or manure.

- A. He gained the personal knowledge of Christ

Paul described salvation at "the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord."

John 17:3 *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

- B. He gained the perfect righteousness of Christ

Salvation is being united with Christ and having His righteousness, God's perfect righteousness imputed (credited) to us through faith. Faith is the confident, continuous confession of total dependence on and trust in Christ for salvation from sin and entrance into God's kingdom.

- C. He gained the present suffering and future resurrection of Christ

Paul already knew Christ but he desired a deeper knowledge and intimacy, to share in His sufferings, and to become more like Him through those sufferings. Though Paul's sufferings were not redemptive as Christ's, they were for the purpose of preaching the gospel of Christ.

Paul says he "suffered the loss of all things," but what he gained in Christ was so much more than what he lost. Missionary Jim Elliot wrote these words inside the front of his Bible: "He is no fool to give up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Religion couldn't save Paul and it can't save you. Only Christ can save you and He will save you if you will repent of your sin and your self-righteousness and put all your trust in Him and His perfect righteousness. (The Solid Rock...*When He shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found, dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.*)