

Your Place in His Plan

The Road to Heaven Part 2
Philippians 3:1b-3a 7-10-2016

Summary: Paul gives yet another strong warning about the Judaizers because they are a major threat to the most important thing – knowing Christ. God’s spiritual protection is not automatic. It comes through the warnings. If we fail to heed the warnings, we forfeit the protection. Teachers who fail to warn bear the responsibility for those who fall to deception. God’s plan to fix what is broken in the world is to call a special people who would bring salvation to the whole world by producing the Messiah. After the Messiah came, inclusion in the people of God no longer involved Jewishness. If you know Christ, you are one of his people.

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Philippians 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Watch out for those dogs, watch out for those men who do evil, watch out for the mutilation. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who have put (perf) no confidence in the flesh

Introduction

Be Careful!

On Friday I took my family rafting through the Royal Gorge, and we had a pretty bad accident. I was over-confident in my abilities as a boatman, and so I didn’t take several of the normal safety precautions that should always be in place. But I was so sure of myself that I just bypassed several safety precautions. That was a huge mistake that could have cost us our lives. Right under the Royal Gorge Bridge there is a Class IV rapid that is especially dangerous because the whole current of the river slams into an undercut cliff. I made a critical error in judgment in the way I approached that rapid and I hit a rapid at the top that

is way too big to hit. The boat folded in half, Nikki washed out the left side, then hydraulic just whipped the boat upside down and we all took a very nasty swim. No major injuries, thankfully – just cuts and bruises, but it could have been much worse. That’s the kind of thing that happens when you don’t take proper precautions.

Warning!!!

We have been studying through the book of Philippians and last week we just started chapter 3, which begins a new section. The word translated “**finally**” at the beginning verse 1 doesn’t always mean “finally.” The word literally means, “As for what remains...” and in a context like this, it’s not signaling the end; it is just signaling a transition to a new topic. And the new topic in chapter 3 is this: *knowing Christ*. Paul doesn’t want a righteousness of his own that comes from the law. What he does want is to know Christ, to gain Christ, to be found in Christ, and to have the righteousness of Christ that comes through faith in Christ.¹ So this is a chapter about knowing Christ. But before describing to us exactly what it means to know Christ, and how a person can come to know Christ, Paul gives a warning about a serious threat to knowing Christ. If somebody told your spouse a bunch of lies about you, and your spouse believed those lies, that would be a threat to your marriage relationship. Or if your spouse became attracted to someone else beside you, that would be a threat to your relationship. All relationships are vulnerable to threats, and your relationship with Jesus Christ is no exception. So in a chapter about how to know Christ, the whole thing begins with a warning about a huge threat. Three times in one verse Paul repeats the warning: **Watch out... Watch out... Watch out!** The threat is real, and the danger is severe. The warning sirens are going off, and this is not a drill.

The Threat

And what is this terrible threat? Legalism - trying to be a good person by living up to some ethical standard. Putting your confidence in yourself, or in some earthly thing. Legalism is the dominant philosophy in all other religions; it is the dominant philosophy of atheists, agnostics, and secularists. And it constantly tries to worm its way into Christianity. And when it manages to do so, it is not a little, minor problem. It puts your very relationship with Christ in jeopardy.

The Protection (Warning)

So how can we keep ourselves safe from this horrible threat? Is there some kind of safeguard that can protect us from it? Yes, there is a safeguard.

1 ...It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.²

The safeguard that will protect us from threats to knowing Christ is yet another warning, and so in verse 2 Paul breaks out of his very positive, happy, joyful tone that dominates the entire letter, and in this one verse there is a fierceness and the hardness in his voice that is downright scary.

2 Watch out for those dogs, watch out for those men who do evil, watch out for the mutilation.

That is very strong language. And not only was it strong, it was also repetitious. It is so repetitious that he feels like he has to give an explanation in verse one for why he is repeating it yet again.³ Look

¹ **8 ... I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ**

² Some believe that the “same things” refers back to the call to rejoice, instead of referring forward to the warnings. Hawthorne makes a good argument for how a call to rejoice could be a safeguard, but given what follows (“Beware! Beware, Beware!”), it seems more likely that it’s a safeguard against the things he is warning us to beware of. Secondly, it doesn’t seem likely that Paul would feel the need for an apology to explain why he is calling them to joy again. And thirdly, if he were referring to the call to rejoice we would expect the singular (“It is not trouble for me to write the same *thing* to you again.”)

what he says down in verse 18: **I have often told you before and now [I] say again even with tears...** So he keeps warning them, even though it sounds like there wasn't any current problem with these people in the church in Philippi at the time Paul's writing this. But he writes it anyway as a safeguard. And we can learn from that.

Prevention

Paul knows from experience that when it comes to people being deceived and misled by false teachers, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It is much better to warn people ahead of time, even if you have to be somewhat repetitive about it, than to try to retrieve people who have already bought into some false teaching.

I think we would do well not to just breeze over verse 2. I was tempted to because I'm eager to get to the rest of the chapter, but God put verse 2 in here for a reason. He wants to keep us safe. God has loaded up the Bible with warnings from front to back to keep us safe. It is important for us to understand that because there are so many Christians in our day who see the promises of protection in the Bible, and they see the promises that God will preserve our faith and hold on to us, and he won't let anyone snatch us out of his hand, and then they figure, "Well, if God made all those promises to protect us, then that protection must be automatic. It doesn't matter what I do or don't do, if my faith is real today, then there really isn't any actual risk." They figure that because of the promises of eternal security, the Christian life is like a ride at an amusement park. There are some things that are scary and appear to be dangerous, but in reality you could just sleep your way through the whole ride and you would be just fine, because the car will never come off of the track.

That is not the picture that God paints for us in the New Testament about our salvation. Yes, God will protect you. But that protection is not automatic. One of the main ways that God protects you is by giving you warnings about threats. He doesn't lock you into a track. But he does give you warnings: "slow down here, and put up some guardrails there, otherwise you'll go flying off the edge."

Matthew 7:15 Watch out for false prophets.

Matthew 10:17 Be on your guard against men

Luke 21:34 Watch out, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

Luke 12:1 Be on your guard against the [teaching] of the Pharisees

Luke 17:3 Watch yourselves.

Luke 20:46 Beware of the teachers of the law.

Acts 20:28 [Elders] Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock

Hebrews 2:1 We must pay more careful attention ... so that we do not drift away.

Matthew 24:4 Watch out that no one deceives you.

Mark 13:33 Be on guard! Be alert!

Acts 13:40 Watch out that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

Galatians 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

³ It was not earlier in this letter that Paul had already given these warnings, but in previous interactions, which is clear from v.18. Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John, wrote a letter to the Philippian church in the Second Century and in that letter he referred to the letters (plural) that Paul had written to that church (ch.3: "...Paul, who when he was among you in the presence of the men of that time taught accurately and steadfastly the word of truth, and also when he was absent wrote letters to you ... - <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/polycarp-lake.html>).

Ephesians 5:15 Be very careful, then, how you live

Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy

Hebrews 3:12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

2 John 1:8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for

Romans 16:17 watch out for those who cause divisions ... Keep away from them.

1 Corinthians 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, watch out that you don't fall!

2 Peter 3:17 be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

That is a small sample, but it doesn't even scratch the surface of all the warnings just in the New Testament. There are entire chapters devoted to giving warnings. In fact, one whole book - Hebrews. If you ever hear someone downplaying the warnings in the New Testament, don't listen. God devoted a huge amount of space in his holy Word to giving us these warnings; don't listen to anyone who tries to downplay them or who tries to tell you that they don't really apply to you. You will always hear teachers who want to say, "You don't have to worry about those warnings. You are protected by God from spiritual threats." And what they fail to realize is that yes, you are protected by God, but the protection that he gives you is the warnings. If you ignore the warnings, you forfeit the protection.

For Bible Teachers

This is a very important principle for those of us who are Bible teachers. One of the responsibilities of a Bible teacher is to continuously warn God's people about the false teachings of the day. In Ezekiel 33 God told the preachers of that day that if they failed to warn the people, and those people ended up turning away from God, the people would be punished, but God would hold the preachers responsible for their blood. And so Paul went out of his way to make sure that didn't happen to him.

Acts 20:26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

And if it required some repetition, Paul would repeat it however many times necessary for them to get it.

Acts 20:31 ... for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Those weren't phony tears. They were real tears of sorrow that came because Paul was warning them about a threat that he knew to be absolutely lethal spiritually.

So, beware. Be alert to spiritual threats. Watch out for anything that diminishes your desire for spiritual things. Watch out for people who want to impose the laws for becoming Jewish – Sabbaths, feasts, kosher dietary laws – steer clear of those movements. Beware of any movement or teaching that pulls you away from the Bible. If they make it sound like fresh, new revelations from the Holy Spirit are better than the old stuff in the Bible – stay away. Watch out for those. And watch out for anything that pulls you away from the body of Christ. It happens all the time - people get into King James only, or Hebrew roots, and they lose sight of the big, important things in the faith. You talk to them, and within two minutes you are talking about that thing – never anything else.

Why Not Circumcision?

And of course, watch out for legalism – trying to be a good person by living up to some standard. As I said, Paul is warning them once again about that, because the most important goal is knowing Christ, and legalism is a huge threat to that. We don't have people running around today telling us we have to be

circumcised in order to have a place among the people of God, but we do face the constant threat of something very similar. If you think a passage about circumcision is irrelevant for your life, let me see if I can show you how relevant it is.

Let's start with this question: Why was circumcision set aside because that was definitely a command in the Old Testament?

Genesis 17:10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

Circumcision was a medical procedure performed on Jewish males where they would remove the foreskin from the male organ. Doing that procedure symbolized full devotion and loyalty and submissive obedience to the God of Israel.⁴ And it was the primary mark of Jewishness. More than anything else, that made you Jewish.

Genesis 17:11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 ... every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised ... 13 My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

So if a Jewish person didn't circumcise his son, that was their way of saying, "I am no longer loyal to the God of Israel." He would not only be renouncing his Jewishness, but he would be renouncing the God of the Jews. If you wanted to be one of God's people, you had to be circumcised.

And so when they wanted to make a point about a Gentile not being in a covenant relationship with God, they would mention the fact that the person was uncircumcised. Like when David heard Goliath mocking Israel and said, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he would defy the armies of the living God?" All Philistines were uncircumcised, but David throws that in to emphasize the fact that this man was not one of God's people and therefore had no promise of protection from God. David's point was, "Why be afraid of him? He's uncircumcised. He's not in any kind of special relationship with God. He has no promise of protection from God, and we do, so he doesn't stand a chance against us."

So circumcision was like shorthand for having a good relationship with God. And over time, the Jews developed a disdain for the uncircumcised. Very often they would refer to Gentiles as dogs, because dogs were an unclean animal. The Jews would call Gentiles dogs to highlight their uncleanness before God.

So all that to say the Bible commanded circumcision. So if that's the case, why does Paul speak so negatively about it?

Galatians 5:2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

Why was it commanded by God then, and now it's bad? And if circumcision is so bad, what does Paul mean here in Philippians 3 when he says **it is we who are the circumcision**? To answer those questions, and to understand this passage, we need to have a basic understanding of the message of the whole Bible.

God's Great Plan

So let's break away from Philippians 3 just briefly, and I am going to attempt to give you a summary of the message of the entire Bible under 10 minutes. I think you could summarize the whole thing with one word: rainbow. Let me show you what I mean:

⁴ Being circumcised in heart breaks up the unplowed ground in the heart (Jer.4:3), brings humility before God (Lv.26:41) and results in whole-hearted love for God (Dt.30:6). It is the opposite of godlessness (Jer.9:26) and stiff-necked rebellion against God (Dt.10:16).

The Problem

Chapter 1 of the Bible says that God created everything good. Each day of creation it describes what God created, and then says this, “And God said, ‘It is good.’” “It is good,” “It is good,” “It is good...” and then at the very end of the whole thing:

Genesis 1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

At the beginning, everything was very good. Nothing was bad. But is everything good now? No. Definitely not – lots of terrible things in the world now. So what happened? Genesis 3 happened. Genesis 1 is about the creation, Genesis 2 is about marriage, and Genesis 3 is about how mankind fell. God had only given one command:

Genesis 2:17 you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.

One command: Don’t eat from that tree, and if you do, the consequence will be death. Well, they ate from it, and God cursed the whole creation, and death became a reality for the human race. And not just death, but all the things that go along with death like disease and decay and sorrow and suffering and sadness and sickness and trouble and strife. And the next couple chapters just unfold what that looked like. Chapter 4 is about the first murder, and chapter 5 is all about death. Chapter 5 is a genealogy, but not a normal genealogy. Normal genealogies just say, “This person was the father of this person, who was the father of this person, etc.” But this genealogy says, “This person had this son, and then he lived to such-and-such age and *he died.*”

“The son lived to this age, then *he died.*”

“And his son lived to his age, and *he died.*”

If you highlight the phrase “he died” each time it occurs in Genesis 5, this is what it looks like:

And not only was death ravaging the human race, but so was evil. Things got worse and worse really fast. By chapter 6, the human race hit bottom.

Genesis 6:5 The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

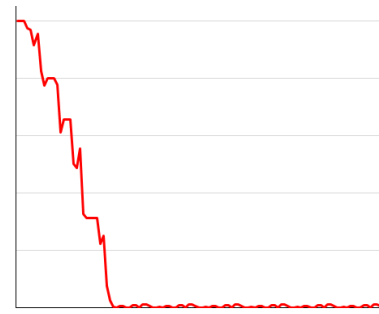
So if you were to graph the level of goodness in the world on a chart beginning at the creation, and going to Genesis 6, it would look something like this:

And so God has to bring judgment on the entire human race. He sends a flood, and everybody dies except for Noah and his family – the only righteous people left in the whole world.

The Rainbow

And right after the flood, God makes a promise that he will never allow humanity to get that bad again. He let it happen once so that we could understand how severe our depravity is - God wanted us to understand that the human condition is so dire that unless God takes some action to slow down our sinfulness, then the whole human race will go from perfect innocence to the worst possible wickedness in just two chapters. God let it happen once so we could see that, but then he promised, “I’ll never let that happen again. I’ll never let the human race ruin itself so severely, that it has to be destroyed by a flood again.” And what was the symbol that God connected to that promise? The rainbow (Gen.9:15). God says, “From now on, whenever it rains, you’ll see a rainbow in the sky. That is a symbol of this promise that I will preserve the human race from ever dropping down into total wickedness again.”

Genesis 5:3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own image, in his own likeness, and he named him Seth. 4 After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 5 Altogether, Adam lived 730 years, and then he died. 6 When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. 7 And after he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. 8 Altogether, Seth lived 912 years, and then he died. 9 When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. 10 And after he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters. 11 Altogether, Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died. 12 When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel. 13 And after he became the father of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and had other sons and daughters. 14 Altogether, Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died. 15 When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he became the father of Jared. 16 And after he became the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters. 17 Altogether, Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died. 18 When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. 19 And after he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 20 Altogether, Jared lived 912 years, and then he died. 21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. 22 And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Altogether, Enoch lived 263 years. 24 Enoch walked with God; there he was no more, because God took him away. 25 When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech. 26 And after he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 752 years and had other sons and daughters. 27 Altogether, Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died. 28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. 29 He named him Noah and said, “He will comfort me in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed.” 30 After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. 31 Altogether, Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died. 32 After Noah was 100 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.



How are you going to do that, God? What method would God use to keep mankind from getting so evil again? Would he just strike people dead as soon as they crossed a certain threshold of wickedness? Would he make sure that when two evil people marry each other they're not able to have children? What was God's plan?

Fixing the Problem

A People

You can see his plan by the next major thing he does in the Bible. He creates for himself a special people: the Jews. He calls a guy by the name of Abraham and tells him "Your offspring are going to become a nation, and they will be my special people." God would reveal himself to mankind through this special people, and they would serve as a light in the darkness, to keep the world from going completely dark again. The people of God would be a preserving influence.

Isaiah 49:6 ... I will also make you [Israel] a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Israel will bring salvation to the whole world! So that is part one of God's plan to fix this broken world – a special people. And anyone could become one of God's people – all you had to do is become a Jew. So part of the Old Testament law is the rules and regulations and procedures for how to become a Jew so you could join the number of God's holy people.

A Provision

But what about when God's holy people aren't so holy, and they commit sins? That is the next part of God's plan – to make special provision for sin. God came up with a way for all the sins of his people to be forgiven and wiped away forever. He didn't give the full details in the Old Testament, but he did provide a system that illustrated the basic idea. It was a system of offering sacrifices in the temple. Those sacrifices didn't actually pay for sin, but they served as illustrations and pictures of the thing that would actually pay for sin, namely, Jesus' death on the cross. So a major portion of the Old Testament law is devoted to spelling out the regulations for those sacrifices. That was part two of God's plan.

A Promise

Part one a people, part two a provision, and then one more piece – a promise. The farther you read into the Old Testament, the more it becomes evident that the general population of Israel isn't going to get the job done. They aren't going to bring salvation to the whole world. But when you read the prophets you find out that it was going to happen through Israel, but not through the general population. Rather, Israel would produce the Messiah, and the Messiah would be the one to bring salvation to the world. The Messiah would be the fulfillment of everything the Jewish nation was supposed to be. And he would also be the fulfillment of the whole sacrificial system. He would be punished for our sins in our place, and would die and then rise from the dead.

Summary

So that's the Old Testament. The problem is sin and the curse. The solution: God's three-part plan: a people, a provision, and a promise. That's covers most of the Old Testament. The rest is instruction on how to live as God's people – the moral law (don't murder, don't steal, don't commit adultery, be honest, love God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself, etc.).

The New Testament

So that's the message of the Old Testament. What about the New Testament? The New Testament is the story of the Messiah accomplishing all the stuff the Old Testament promised he would accomplish. It is the story of how Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system by dying on the cross, and how he fulfilled the purpose of Israel by bringing salvation to the whole world – every nation, tribe, people, and language, so now the people of God will include Gentiles, not just Jews. So the new people of God won't be an ethnic grouping like in the Old Testament, but will be people from every nation scattered all over the world. And the Messiah will ultimately bring all of human history to consummation, judge all mankind, reverse the curse, eliminate all evil forever, and create a new earth where he will live with his people forever in paradise. That is the message of the New Testament.

All of that is the unfolding of the promise of the rainbow. So now you have an overview of the whole Bible - what does all that have to do with our text here in Philippians 3? Keep in mind: when Jesus Christ comes back and finally eradicates all evil, everyone who is not righteous in God's eyes will be sent to hell to be punished for their sins forever. But the holy people of God – his chosen people, will live with him forever in glorious, everlasting joy. So the huge, 64,000 question is this: in our time, in the age of the Messiah, how does one go about becoming one of God's special people? When humanity is divided into evil and good and evil is going to be done away with, how do you make sure you're on the right side of that thing? How is one included in the new people of God - spiritual Israel? In the Old Testament you got circumcised, started observing the Sabbath, followed the kosher dietary rules – you followed the aspects of the law that had to do with becoming Jewish.

So what about now? It is important to understand that Jesus did not introduce a new religion. He didn't cancel Judaism. He came to bring about the fulfillment of biblical Judaism – the final phases of God's plan to fix what's broken. So if this is the fulfillment of Judaism, who are the people of God? What is the relationship between the new, spiritual people of God (the church), and ethnic Israel (the Jews)?

The New People of God

Must We Become Jews?

That question was, without a doubt, the biggest controversy in the church throughout the whole New Testament. When God commanded circumcision in the Old Testament, and he said this is an everlasting thing, and it had been an absolute, nonnegotiable rule for 2000 years – that's not something you are going to just set aside lightly. And the New Testament doesn't take it lightly. There is a lot of space in the New Testament given to showing how much of an agonizing process this was for the church to figure out. It wasn't like someone just announced, "Oh, we don't have to bother with circumcision anymore," and everyone said, "Oh, ok." No, it was a major controversy, and the argument about it became so heated that finally, in Acts chapter 15, all the apostles and the elders and church leaders came together in Jerusalem for a major counsel to hammer out this issue.

So everybody shows up for this counsel, and both sides make their speeches and give all their arguments, and then the apostles finally come to a conclusion. And here is what they said – God has made it very clear that when it comes to salvation, he is making no distinction between Jew and Gentile. The Gentiles are getting the same Holy Spirit as we are getting. And so circumcision (Jewishness) is not required anymore. Those portions of the Old Testament law that governed how to become Jewish – we don't have to do those things to become the people of God. The only thing that is required is knowing Christ through faith.

Well, that answer didn't sit well with a lot of folks. They didn't accept the apostles' decision. They went around saying, "Yes, salvation is through Jesus, but you also have to be circumcised, and follow the kosher food laws, and observe the holy days, and live like a Jew." We call these people the Judaizers, and they wreaked havoc on the church. Even Peter and Barnabas were led astray at one point and Paul had to

rebuke Peter and set him straight. They just couldn't imagine that Gentile dogs who don't perform the works of the law could possibly be numbered with God's holy people. What they didn't understand was that God commanded those external things like circumcision and dietary laws as illustrations of internal realities – what the Bible calls circumcision of the heart. If they would have understood that, it wouldn't have seemed so unthinkable that God would bring in a new era and say, "Ok, now the heart issues will stay the same, I'm doing away with the external pictures." God wanted his new people to infiltrate every nation in the world, and so every part of the Old Testament law that had to do with the external, physical aspects of identifying a particular ethnic group is now set aside.

And this gets to that question of why we consider some Old Testament laws binding and not others. The moral law is binding on everyone in every country in every context in every era. Even in Old Testament times, God didn't want anyone anywhere in the world to murder or steal or lie or commit adultery. Those kinds of laws apply universally and so they are just as binding on us as they were for ancient Israel.

But there are other Old Testament laws that had a temporary purpose. We don't observe the sacrificial regulations today because the whole sacrificial system was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. We don't follow the national, civil ordinances for governing the nation of Israel. Things like the tax code, the justice system, penalties for various crimes, property rights, contracts, law enforcement, etc. Those laws were never binding on any other nation other than ancient Israel. And that is our answer to those who wonder why we oppose homosexuality based on the Bible, but we don't stone people for various crimes. Homosexuality being evil is part of the moral law. Punishments for various crimes are part of the civil government regulations. And now that God's people are not a national entity, but a spiritual entity scattered among all the nations, God wants his people to just go by whatever civil laws exist in his country where he lives.

Romans 13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities ... 6 This is also why you pay taxes...

For Christians living in the Roman Empire God said, "Go ahead and just follow the laws of Rome rather than the Old Testament Jewish civil laws." So there is nothing inconsistent about us saying homosexuality is wrong morally, but not stoning anybody for it. It is wrong morally because it violates God's purposes in marriage. But as Christians, it is not our place to punish it as a civil crime, because the law enforcement codes in the Old Testament were for ancient Israel, not other governments – even back then.

The True Dogs

So now back to Philippians 3. Look at Paul's description of these people.

2 Watch out for those dogs, watch out for those men who do evil, watch out for the mutilation.

Normally, if you start calling someone names, it's for the purpose of insult. But that is not Paul's purpose here. These names have a theological purpose. These Judaizers regarded uncircumcised Gentiles as dogs, and Paul takes their own epithet and applies it to them. They are the dogs. He is saying, "These Jews who are saying everyone has to become a Jew in order to be saved – those people are the real Gentiles. They are the real Gentiles, and we are the real Jews."

Next he calls them **evildoers** – literally, **workers of evil**. They talk about doing the works of the law – Paul says, "Those works of the law are works of evil if you think they make you one of the people of God."

And then he calls them **the mutilation**. That is a play on the word *circumcision*.⁵ The Greek word for circumcision is *peritoma*. *Toma* - to cut; *peri* – around, so it means to cut around. They thought they

⁵ Hawthorne points out that Paul uses numerous figures of speech in this brief paragraph: (1) anaphora, the repetition of the same word (watch out) at the beginning of three successive clauses; (2) paronomasia, the clever play on words that are similar in sound

were the circumcision (the true people of God), and Paul says, they aren't the *peritoma*, they are the *katatoma*. *Peritoma* is to cut around; *katatoma* is to cut to pieces, or to mutilate. It is the word that is used to refer to pagans – like when the prophets of Baal started cutting themselves to get their god to respond. Paul says, “Your circumcision is nothing but pagan mutilation.”

Paul takes their greatest source of pride and interprets it as the surest sign that they have no share among God's people. So these three descriptions Paul gives are not just insults. They are three ways of saying the same thing: “The Judaizers are really spiritual Gentiles. And we are the true people of God.”

Conclusion

3 For it is we who are the circumcision

The true people of God are the people who know Christ. If you know Christ – that's you. But there is a threat that I need to warn you about. The threat is that someone would use the Old Testament law, or some other bad teaching, to confuse the issue of where you fit in the grand scheme of things. What your place is in God's ultimate plan for the universe. If you know Christ, and you have the righteousness of Christ credited to your account rather than having your own righteousness, you are the true circumcision! We are the people of God who function as the body of the Messiah who is going to bring about the culmination of all things, in large part, through us!

So if you think your life is insignificant or small, think again. Think of the big picture of the message of the whole Bible. If you know Christ, you are a major player in the final phases of God's glorious plan to bring all of human history to its culmination. Everything else in your life is tiny compared to that. I would urge you – once or twice this week, just spend enough time thinking about your place in God's big picture, and keep thinking about it until the relative importance of all the troubles of your life fades, and you are encouraged in the Lord.

And please, beloved, don't do what I did on the river with your spiritual life. Don't become overconfident so that you fail to take proper precautions against spiritual dangers. Knowing Christ is your only lifeline in the deadly rapids in a dangerous, spiritual world. Take every safety precaution you possibly can to guard your heart against anything that would threaten your relationship with Christ.

Benediction: Revelation 22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life ... 3 No longer will there be any curse. ... 12 “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. ... 14 “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs ... 17 The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” ... 20 He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) What do you believe are the greatest threats to your relationship with Christ?
- 2) What threats have you seen harm or ruin other people's relationship with Christ?
- 3) What impact does it have on you emotionally when you think about your place in God's ultimate plan?

(*katatoma/peritoma*) but set in opposition to each other so as to provide heightened antithetical force; (3) polysyndeton, the repetition of the same conjunction (and) in close succession; (4) alliteration in all three descriptions (dogs, evildoers, mutilation) starting with the same letter (*kunas, kakous, katatoman*); (5) short disjointed cola, sentences of approximately the same length; and (6) chiasm, where the noun phrases alternate positions in a crisscross fashion with the participles—all employed for rhetorical effect. Thus Paul, who prefers not to use the clever rhetoric of the sophists (cf. 1 Cor. 2), is nevertheless quite able to do so. In fact, it appears that his passionate reaction to those who wish to lead the Philippians astray breaks down whatever rhetorical restrictions he might normally place upon himself and allows him to give verbal vent to his feelings.