



Beware...

Coming out of a reminder to **rejoice in the Lord always** (if you missed that one [you can read it here](#)), the apostle Paul moves into a new phase in his letter to the Philippian church, one of warning and exhortation, but clearly wrapped in a deep and profound love for these believers.

***Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 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.*** [Philippians 3:2-3](#)

Paul warned his dear church to be on the lookout for bad guys. Before we exposit this, we must remember that we are not to judge the unsaved, but instead to judge the works and fruit of those who claim a faith in Christ (see: [1 Cor 5:12](#)). So the following warnings must be viewed with the mind that we are not to beware atheists and agnostics, but instead flee those who claim Christianity yet pervert and corrupt the true gospel.

Paul pulls no punches by telling the Philippians to **beware of the dogs**. Unlike today, in biblical times dogs were not mans' best friend, but were considered filthy, mean animals. Jesus referred to those who rejected the gospel as **dogs** (cf: [Matt 7:6](#)), and we see that those called dogs are locked outside and forever unable to enter the new heaven and new earth, along with all those practice evil deeds (cf: [Rev 22:15](#)). I believe the context here suggests these dogs are people inside the church who stir up dissention, gossip, and all sorts of trouble for believers. Like dogs, they bite and attack those seeking truth, all the while pretending to be holy and upright.

Paul continues with a warning to **beware of the evil workers**. This seems to refer to those inside the church who are working against the gospel. We must be on guard against those who actively tear down the truths of the bible, twist scripture's teaching for their own gain, and lead people astray with false doctrines and "new age" beliefs. They are working... but working against God and His Christ.

And finally, Paul warns the church to **beware of the false circumcision**. As we find in many places in the New Testament, early Christians were often told they had to follow Jewish laws and customs in order to be saved. In [Acts 15](#) we read that Paul and Barnabas strongly argued against this teaching early in their ministry. In his letter to the Galatians ([v5:6a](#)), Paul said, "**in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything.**" And in his letter to the Romans, he talked about how circumcision is of the heart, not the flesh ([Rom 2:29](#)). It seems this errant teaching was quite pervasive in the early church, likely because of Jewish influences and tradition.



Why does this matter? Paul says, ***“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.”*** In the context of the passage, we see that Paul was being a good shepherd and warning the believers of bad teaching which would put them at risk of shipwrecking their faith. False doctrines often revolve around the insistence of outward works and physical acts to gain favor with God. Yet this was never the intention. God always wanted the Israelites to circumcise their *hearts* ([Deut 10:16](#)) and the same is true with us today. The physical act instituted in the Old Testament was an outward sign of something *inward*. It is therefore of no value to put ***confidence in the flesh*** for our redemption, as we will read more about in the coming verses of this chapter.

Instead, we see that believers ***are the true circumcision***, meaning that our sinful hearts are transformed (circumcised) by God, and we now can ***worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus***. Yes, our behavior and conduct matters a great deal, but self-righteous, man-made works and ostentatious humility are of no use in saving the soul (ref: [Col 2:18-19](#)).

Remember, Christ paid a great ransom for us. His saving work was completed on the cross. We do not need to add additional religious rites to stay saved, and we certainly can't be more saved than we already are if we have put our faith in and ***glory in Christ Jesus*** alone.

Taking this all together, we should heed the warnings of the beloved apostle. Beware of teachers who add or subtract from the scriptures. Beware of those whose fruit does not match their words. And beware of those who insist that certain physical acts must be done to earn or maintain your salvation. As Paul similarly warned the Corinthians: ***“for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds,”*** ([2 Cor 11:14-15](#)).

Be careful. Stay watchful. Test every spirit and word of man against scripture ([1 John 4:1](#)). Read, study, and learn the bible for yourself. Take in the whole of God's word contextually and prayerfully, and lean on the Holy Spirit Who has graciously given us everything we need to know Christ and what He expects of His disciples.

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece

This text may be freely distributed or broadcast with credit to the author, but may not be sold or included in any content for sale without written consent.