

Message #16**Philippians 3:1-3**

One of the most impacting church leaders in church history was the man born in 1483 and who died in 1546. He became the father of the Protestant Reformation. His name was Martin Luther.

Luther had been educated by the Roman Catholic Church and he was a very devoted monk and priest. While studying the Bible, specifically Romans and Galatians, he came to realize that the Bible taught things the Catholic Church did not teach:

- 1) It taught that justification was by faith alone apart from works.
- 2) It taught that the Bible was the sole authority, not the Catholic Church.
- 3) It taught that every believer was a priest of God, not just Catholic Clergy.

When Luther saw those things, he believed those things; he began to teach those things. When he did, two things happened:

- 1) He made many enemies and alienated himself from the Catholic Church.
- 2) He gained a great following of people who loved him and the truth he was teaching.

Martin Luther was mightily used by God to “Reform” theology in the 1500’s. Now it is said of Luther that he had an explosive temper that exploded over false doctrine. In fact, Phil Melancthon, who preached Luther’s funeral, said, “God had given a violent age a violent physician.”

Now this is seen in two wishes he specifically made to his followers before he died. Just before Luther died in Eisleben in February 18, 1546, he gave two wishes and hopes to his followers:

- 1) That they would receive all of the blessings of God.
- 2) That they would continually hate the Pope, whom he called an “instrument of the Devil” (H. A. Kennedy, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, The Expositors Greek Testament, p. 448).

Now most reading that think that is harsh. That isn’t Christian. That isn’t nice.

Before Luther died, he had a final hope for the church. He gave a strong appeal to the believers to spot those who were not presenting the truth and hate that for which they stand. If you don’t stand for something, you will fall for anything.

There are some very misguided believers who think you should never make any judgments, never name names, never point fingers and never call out theological heresy. There are those who believe you should just keep your mouth shut, don’t make waves and wait on God to save the church. Luther did not believe that and neither did Paul.

Paul never wanted the church to become a fickle hodgepodge place of theological thinking and debate. That is one reason why he wanted Timothy in this church (2:19-21). He wanted the N.T. church to be a place that was doctrinally solid. He did not only want the people to know what they believed so they could defend what they believed, he wanted them to be able to spot those and mark those who did not believe the same doctrinal points.

Keep in mind that the church of Philippi was the dearest church to the heart of Paul at a time when he did not know whether he would live or die. He did not want this church to be some free-for-all place where doctrine was up for grabs. He wanted these believers strong and solid.

We may notice in **verse 1** that the verse begins with the adverb “finally,” which is repeated again in **4:8**. This is a way of saying in Greek, let me now introduce you to the rest of what I want to say to you. Let me now introduce to you some final, remaining subjects that are very important to this church. What Paul says is this:

THE KEY SAFEGUARD OF THE CHURCH IS THE JOYOUS TRUTH THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS FOUND BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AND NOT BY WORKS; AND THOSE WHO TEACH OTHERWISE ARE TO BE SPOTTED AND SILENCED.

Most people believe God will accept them and take them to heaven if they do the best they can. If they try real hard and do good things they will make it. Paul says no you won't.

H. A. Ironside used to tell the story of a time when he was preaching the Gospel on the street of a Californian city. He said a man kept interrupting him saying, “Look here sir, there are hundreds of religions in this country and each one says they are right, how are we to know who is telling the truth?” Dr. Ironside said, “There are not hundreds, there are only two.” The man responded and said, “Surely you will admit there are hundreds of religions.” Dr. Ironside said, “There are various shades of opinions, but there are only two religions: 1) Those who teach you must be saved by doing something; 2) One who teaches you may only be saved by something already done for you.”

Religion says you can save yourself by your works and the Bible says only Jesus Christ can save you. One is a system of faith and all the rest are systems of works. One man told the story of a time that he inadvertently got stuck with a counterfeit bill. He did not know it. But he learned. No matter how good the bill looked, it was no good. No matter how good your works look to you, you need to know they are not good enough before God to get you into heaven.

Paul's final message to the Philippians is the church better know that, you better know that, and you better believe that and you better spot those who don't believe that.

Now in these three verses there are three theological safeguards Paul gives to the church and to every individual in the church:

THEOLOGICAL SAFEGUARD #1- The theological safeguard of rejoicing in one person.

3:1

The word “joy” is an emotional word. It speaks of a glad, joyful, cheerful spirit (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 477-478). Dr. Homer Kent writes: “Paul's exhortation to “rejoice in the Lord” should be understood as belonging to what follows.”

In other words, when Paul challenges the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord, he does so in the context of guarding the church from those who would teach a “works salvation.”

What Paul is stressing to the Philippians is I want you to remember that everything that brings a person joy will be found in Jesus Christ. Only in the sphere of the Person of Jesus Christ is where joy will be found. **Salvation and joy are only found in Jesus Christ.** This will not be found in anyplace else or anyone else. The church needs to always know that.

Now there are two applications that may be made in view of this:

Application #1 - The application to the unbeliever.

Those who have never trusted Jesus Christ as Savior need to realize that true emotional joy comes from Jesus Christ. When you believe on Jesus Christ and invite Him into your life, He comes in and forgives all your sins and makes you His child and that certainly begins the process of producing joy.

Application #2 - The application for the believer.

Our great joy will be when our faith is focused on Jesus Christ. It is our relationship with Him that can give us joy no matter what we are facing. God gives many good things in life to enjoy and those things will be enjoyed only in the context of Jesus Christ.

THEOLOGICAL SAFEGUARD #2 – The theological safeguard of recognizing the false Teachers. **3:2**

The Apostle Paul wanted false teachers spotted and marked. Notice how this begins “beware.” That verb “beware” which shows up three times in this one verse is one that emphasizes that we need to look at and carefully put our sights on those who are false.

Now Paul uses three distinct titles for these false teachers, which has never been debated or questioned. What has been debated is whether or not these three titles refer to three distinct types of false teachers or whether they refer to one type with three distinct features.

The majority of commentators believe it is a reference to one type of false teacher stressing three warnings. This is grammatically based on the conjunction “for” which begins **verse 3** that seems to explain that Paul was targeting the Jewish legalist who said you were right with God by keeping the O.T. law ritual of circumcision.

But whether this is one teacher with three names or three teachers each with a name, the fact is Paul wanted the people in the Philippian church to spot these false teachers and he warns the church to be on the lookout against them:

Warning Feature #1 - Beware of dogs. **3:2a**

With us a dog is a loved animal. But the term was not the same in the first century. Dogs were despised. They roamed the streets, they roamed in packs, they hunted for food in garbage dumps and they snapped and growled at all they met.

To the Jewish mind there was nothing lower than a dog. It was a term of extreme contempt. Dogs were savage and greedy. Isaiah used the term “dog” to refer to false shepherds who look out for themselves, not for the truth of God. They were more interested in self-pleasure rather than true righteousness (Is. 56:10-12).

Peter used the term to describe false prophets who lived licentious lives and pulled others into the same practice (II Pet. 2:1, 22). Moses, in the O.T. law, uses the term in the same context as a harlot (Deut. 23:18).

Now dogs are loyal to their master. Religious dogs are very loyal to their religious works system. They are loyal to their religion, to their church and to their traditions. They look good and they appear to be so pious, but they are nothing but dogs.

What Paul is saying to the church in Philippi is that those works teachers are dogs. They need to spot those heretics who proclaim their works system because they are only interested in their self-gain and self-pleasure. These are dangerous men who can attack a church and rip it to shreds.

Now we have a new threat and that is they sneak into people’s lives on TV or internet. They are not interested in you getting truth; they are interested in getting your money. Be on the lookout for those dogs.

Warning Feature #2 - Beware of evil workers. **3:2b**

From an outward perspective, works teachers look good. They talk good and they appear to be moral. They are very zealous of their religious beliefs and they are achievers and accomplishees. But do not be deceived, they are evil. They are “evil workers,” which suggests two things:

(Suggestion #1) - They do evil works.

There are people who pretend to be right with God who behind the scenes are continually involved in evil things. They are not really what they profess to be. They are corrupt and they do not practice what they preach. The church needs to be watching out for this.

(Suggestion #2) - They teach an evil works salvation.

Dr. Richard Lenski called these types of people “fanatic errorists” who believe that by their active works they can earn salvation.

Salvation is not of works; it is by grace and those who teach otherwise are presenting an evil doctrine. **This is not just a confused doctrine, it is evil.**

Those Pharisees codified the law into 365 prohibitions (don'ts) and 250 commandments (dos). They taught you could be saved by works. Paul says you spot those and mark those; they are evil.

Warning Feature #3 - Beware of the false circumcision. **3:2c**

False teachers put a lot of emphasis on religious rituals. They put on a good religious show and it moves the focus away from Jesus Christ.

The word “false circumcision” (κατατομην) is a word that means incision and mutilation (*Ibid.*, p. 239). This is a rare Greek word only found here. What Paul means by using this word is that there were those teaching that if you made an incision and mutilated yourself with circumcision, you were right with God. The true circumcision is the circumcision of the heart that comes the moment one believes on Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:29). It is a circumcision without hands (Col. 2:11).

Paul said the church needs to be on the lookout for those who would propagate that by doing something physical you can be made right with God. A true minister must warn his flock about all this religious junk.

Those who teach such things are false and evil. Today there are those who do the same thing with baptism. They say it is baptism that will make you right with God. This is false teaching. Paul wanted this Philippian church well-grounded in grace.

THEOLOGICAL SAFEGUARD #3 – The theological safeguard of knowing the right teaching. **3:3**

Paul says a key to safeguarding the church is knowing the truth about Jesus Christ. The key to any true relationship with God is Jesus Christ. Paul says there are four truths God's church needs to know:

Truth #1 - We who have believed on Jesus Christ are the true circumcision. **3:3a**

Believers in Jesus Christ are the true circumcision.

Truth #2 - We who have believed on Jesus Christ worship God by His Spirit. **3:3b**

We have the Spirit of God in us that enables us to worship God. If one does not have God's Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ, one does not have a relationship with God.

Truth #3 - We who have believed on Jesus Christ glory and boast in Jesus Christ. **3:3c**

We do not boast in our works. We boast in what Jesus Christ did for us.

Have you ever boasted about Jesus Christ? Do you ever tell anyone how wonderful He is or do you boast about yourself? Boasting about ourselves is nothing but arrogant, delusional pride. Do you really want to know what we can boast about in ourselves? We are sinners. In fact, we are great at sinning. Before God we are not great, but we have a great Savior. There is only One Person who is great and it is Jesus Christ and it is in Him we boast.

Truth #4 - We who have believed on Jesus Christ put no confidence in our flesh. **3:3d**

Most religions teach you to trust in yourself. Most religions teach you that you are worthy and you are great. Frankly, we are worth nothing; it is Jesus Christ who is everything.

Most people trust in themselves to take them to heaven. But we do not trust our flesh works; we trust totally and only in Jesus Christ and the grace of God.

To a true believer in Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is everything. In Him we are complete (Col. 2:10-11).

The church is to defend that, believe that and beware of those who don't teach that.