

# Signs of Dangerous Teaching: Philippians 3:2-3

Intro: In our society today we are being pulled in hundreds of directions, toward proclamations of Jesus' that do not measure up to the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Bible. There are different Jesus' everywhere around us on t-shirts, in movies, television, books, and music, being made to appear as one who centers Himself on man rather than on His Father. These Jesus' who are presented to us today tell us to trust in ourselves and we'll be fine, to strive hard and be better so that God will love us, to do works of social justice and God will accept you, to "just believe" in whatever you want but do it with enough sincerity and God can't look past the quality of your sincere heart. Do not be taken in, O betrothed Bride of Jesus, Satan is still working to deceitfully trick us into reaching for the fruit of self-reliance, to seek a power outside of the Cross of Christ. He is still trying to create a fear that forgets God's goodness and the sense that there is something more that we need other than the true Jesus and Him crucified for sin. And he will use the image of Jesus and the name of Jesus to deceive us because he is a sinister liar and murderer, the thief who comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. In the name of tolerance we are told that every Jesus presented is equally valid and pragmatic. We are told that those who claim that the biblical Jesus, who died in our place on the cross and rose from the dead three days later, is the only way to God, then we are extremists, the worst of all possible crimes. But, my friends, Jesus is extreme, and His love is an extreme love, and He has chosen you for a bride. He makes promises that He keeps, and proves His love by giving up His life and His honor for you. He speaks tenderly to us when we have gone to other lovers and impatiently concern ourselves with other powerless sweet-talking purveyors of happiness.

Paul was concerned that false teachers were calling the Philippians away from their betrothed groom, Jesus, and were being wooed by a different gospel of Jesus + Law. He fears it greatly as the attendant who is called to present us as the bride of Christ. So, he uses extreme and powerful words, as a mother bear when her cubs are threatened, bearing the claws and teeth of truth he warns us to watch out for those deceivers who would lead us away from singular trust in Jesus Christ alone.

## 1. Watch Out!!

- a. This word is repeated three times, "Watch out! Watch out! Watch out!"
  - i. Strong emphasis, clear and powerful, very important
  - ii. Like the call yelled before explosives are set off: "Fire in the hole!" repeated three times.
- b. There is danger is false teachers and in false gospels
  - i. Paul is speaking of the Judaizers here, not merely Jewish people
  - ii. The Judaizers were a party who believed, taught, and emphasized the requirement of external ritualistic works (according to the Mosaic Law) along *with* Christ in order to be saved
    1. This is different than the Jewish party, who simply denied that Jesus was the Messiah and were seen by Christians as outside the faith
    2. The Judaizers included the necessity of following all the Mosaic Law in order to be acceptable to God but also *included* Jesus as the Messiah, so they were deceptive and seen as insiders to the faith by many Christians
      - a. "Jesus +" circumcision, kosher diet, festivals of Israel, etc.
      - b. They wanted to "judaize" Gentile believers
    3. Paul denounces them strongly here, in Galatians, and in 2 Corinthians where he calls them "deceptive workers"

- c. We are to be on guard for those who emphasize man-centered position or performance as the means by which we are made acceptable to God

## 2. Three Dangerous Aspects of False Teachers

### a. Watch out for the dogs!

- i. The “dogs” (Gentiles) were those who were not participating in the Mosaic ceremonial laws and regulations (they ate pork, etc., came from pagan families with pagan haircuts and clothes)
  - 1. They were intrinsically unclean (note the “fleshly” characteristics of race and tribe that Paul lists in vvs 4-7)
  - 2. They were religiously unclean (note the religious “fleshly” terms Paul uses in the later context, too)
- ii. not simply derogatory term for these teachers
  - 1. “dogs” was the word used by the self-righteous Jews of Gentiles
    - a. (see Jesus in Matthew 7:6)
    - b. The woman did take offense at the term
  - 2. It is a word used of outsiders, of those who were unclean
  - 3. Paul is turning the words that the Judaizers used of Gentiles against them to show that they are the real outsiders of the Kingdom, the truly unclean ones (John 15:3) b/c they rejected the gospel
- iii. We are to watch out for those conniving scavengers who prey on the weak and lead them to boast in their own intrinsic worth or works

### b. Watch out for the evil workers!

- i. literally, "evil workers"
  - 1. not merely evildoers, as in all sinners
  - 2. Those who emphasize works as the means by which we are made acceptable to the Lord
    - a. Thus the emphasis upon circumcision
    - b. Ritual and external performance was the basis for acceptance with God, actually nullifying the grace of God (Galatians 2:21) and claiming that Christ died needlessly
      - i. If we could be righteous by our own performance or our own attainment of religious participation, then Jesus would not have had to die
      - ii. Jesus had to die so that you and I might be made the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21)
- ii. again, Paul is using another word used by the Judaizers
  - 1. "work"
  - 2. These false brothers depended upon their "works"
  - 3. They emphasized their labors and toils as evidence of their spiritually superior position: self-righteous
    - a. Their “righteousness” stemmed from their own performance of religious works and rituals
      - i. Almsgiving
      - ii. Eating habits
      - iii. Circumcision
    - b. Paul calls this labor evil, this toil evil, these workers evil

### c. Watch out for the false circumcision!

- i. Literally “Beware of the mutilation”

1. Mutilation Party
2. Nothing to do with those who are circumcised, but rather of those who are “working” for circumcision
  - a. Not a term denoting race (Paul was Jewish and circumcised)
  - b. Term denoting those who demanded and worked for the external rite of circumcision as the means by which God is pleased with us, rather than the righteousness and atonement of Christ
- ii. Paul turns these false teachers emphasis upon the fleshly rite of circumcision into a pagan word of mutilating the flesh, which, ironically, was prohibited by the Mosaic Law
  1. Lev 19:28; 21:5
  2. Deut 14:1
- iii. All of these words that Paul uses are to show that the dependence upon the flesh is a sign of a spiritual Gentile (one outside the covenant Kingdom)
  1. These ones, though they are of Jewish ancestry, are truly Gentiles outside the Kingdom and those to beware of for their emphasis upon the flesh and not of Christ
  2. Paul says to the Galatians that those who rely upon the law are “severed from Christ” and that Christ is “inoperative” for them
  3. To trust in one’s inherent position or performance of good works as the means by which one is accepted by God is NOT Christianity, no matter how often a person goes to church, Bible studies, or prayer meetings

## Signs of Gospel Messengers

### 1. We are the real circumcision

- a. emphatic "we"
- b. circumcision contrasted with mutilation, Paul is using their terms again to show that the true circumcision are those who rely upon Christ and boast in His works according to the Spirit and place no confidence at all on their own performance

### 2. Three signs of true circumcision:

- a. Those who belong to God worship by the Spirit of God
  - i. "serve as priests", same word used earlier
  - ii. Perform our works of service by the Spirit of God
    1. As opposed to the flesh
    2. That is, by complete and utter reliance upon the Spirit of God and no reliance upon our own strength or self
    3. Even our offerings to the Lord are His already, given by Him, sustained by His grace, offered in His Spirit
  - iii. Spirit vs. Flesh from Galatians
    1. Same delineation here
    2. We serve the Lord and others not by our own strength or inherent goodness, but this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit of God indwelling believers
- b. Those who belong to God glory in Christ Jesus
  - i. "boast" in Him
  - ii. The idea here is of boasting or praising:
    1. Our works and strength?
    2. The works and strength of Jesus?
    3. Our righteousness or His righteousness?

- iii. Some people like to boast in their moral achievements, financial achievements, career achievements
  - 1. These things are just forms of works-righteousness by which we compare ourselves with ourselves and do not functionally rely upon Christ
  - 2. We can see things when we expect other people to succeed as we have succeeded and look down on them when they fail, or fear those who have succeeded better than us
- iv. Some people like to boast of “faith” in and of itself
  - 1. It is not faith which saves us, but Christ through faith
  - 2. Don’t fall prey to Christianese language that is devoid of Jesus as the foundation and the center of all things. He is the object of our faith, the trustworthy Savior in whom we rely and trust (faith)
  - 3. This is true of all Christians words: grace, salvation, repentance, etc.
    - a. If it is devoid of Christ as the source, foundation, and means to God, then it is sub-biblical and therefore to be rejected
    - b. All true biblical doctrine finds its center and its fulfillment in Jesus, therefore we boast in Him, not in our faith or our salvation or our repentance, etc.
- v. Christians boast in the works and strength and righteousness of Christ
  - 1. None of our own, all of Him
  - 2. His worth, His beauty, His glory
  - 3. Life of great praise of HIM, not merely His benefits or even our inclusion into the family of God unless that benefit is used to glory in His grace and His unwarranted goodness toward us
    - a. We glory in Him and gratefully extol His greatness in all of His glorious character and works
- vi. It is really a statement of VALUE
  - 1. We boast in what we treasure the most:
    - a. Family
    - b. Career
    - c. Athletics
    - d. Wealth
  - 2. Paul is showing us the immense treasure of Christ, His intrinsic value to the soul that makes everything else crap in comparison
- c. Those who belong to God put no confidence in flesh
  - i. "don't rely upon"
  - ii. The flesh is the part of us that works to prove ourselves acceptable, being “under the law” in the Galatian sense
    - 1. When we are under the law, we are attempting to live up to a standard (God’s, self-defined, or other-imposed) as the means by which we are “good”
    - 2. Relying upon ourselves to achieve and perform well enough to be OK with God
      - a. Circumcision
      - b. Social justice
      - c. Niceness
  - iii. To not rely upon the flesh means that the Christian does not trust his right living, perceived or real, as the means by which God smiles upon Him
    - 1. This leads him to great humility even when successful, for he knows that his acceptance and approval by God is based not upon his success but upon the success of Another
    - 2. This also leads her to be less competitive and comparative with others, knowing that being better than another is also not the means or basis of her righteousness, but Christ alone through His Spirit working in her

Brothers and sisters, God isn't merely calling out for you and I to "get it together." His smile and love and acceptance is not predicated upon your perfect heart or your outward performance of religious endeavors. He wants you to trust Him completely. To boast in Jesus and His works, His perfect heart and His performance of righteousness on your behalf. Jesus Christ is a SAVIOR, not a guide to salvation. He is the way, the truth, and the life. We are accepted by God because of His work alone: His death for our sins and His righteousness imputed to us so that we are received as blameless. Let us put no confidence in the flesh because it is weak and self-reliant, it boasts in itself and expresses no need for the Cross. But we need the Cross! Oh, we need the Cross of Christ! And we have it!! Jesus has loved you so much that He didn't leave you in your sins to strive according to your flesh, but He has emptied Himself and come down to redeem you by His grace, bearing up the wrath of His Father so that you and I might be free. Oh, the deep, deep, love of Jesus: vast, unmeasured, boundless free!

This is the Gospel: Nothing in my or done by me is worthy of acceptance by God. I am dead in my sins and under the just wrath of the holy God. All of my inherent privilege in this life is worthless before God, all of my self-attained morality or my portfolio of good and beneficial religious works are worthless before God. Nothing that I could present to Him by which I hoped to be accepted was sufficient to provide for my redemption. But, even though I am dead, God sent His Son, Jesus, to atone for my sins through His death on a cruel Roman cross and to bear up my shame. In this He has satisfied God's justice and given me His perfect righteousness so that I can stand before God blameless and full of righteousness. This is all done by His grace and is received by faith in Jesus alone. His resurrection proved God's acceptance of Him and therefore His acceptance of me by faith, so that I now treasure Jesus more than anything or anyone else in this world. He is my greatest desire, my greatest treasure, my soul's sole goal and dream. He is worthy of our love and our praises, for His love is the best.

LET US TREASURE JESUS AS OUR GREATEST DESIRE