

The Judaizers

Philippians 3

I want to testify on this Father's Day Sunday, that my marriage to Cindy and becoming the father of five children have been two of the greatest blessings of my life. And a third great blessing is having grandchildren, whom you can love and then send home to their parents at the end of the day. However, because of the Corona Virus and doctor's orders, Cindy and I have been under strict quarantine two weeks before the arrival of our newest grandson Titus, and four weeks afterward. The plus side for Cindy and I is that we have been able to spend a lot of time with our children and grandchildren. The plus side for you is that you did not have to see me for six weeks.

Pastors Jeff and Ken have walked us through the first two chapters of Philippians, the epistle of joy. However, in Philippians 3, we are introduced to a group of Jewish false teachers, who were wrecking havoc in the early church [Titus 1:10-11]. This did not bring joy to the Apostle Paul, who directs some of his harshest condemnation against this group of people. And so we need to understand more about these false teachers and discover why they were so severely condemned. By doing this we can gain insights as to how to protect ourselves from false teachers today, who are like the Corona Virus we have been contending with for the last few months. Let's begin by reading Philippians 3:1-2,

"Finally, my brothers [and sisters], rejoice in the Lord [do not veer away from the salvation you enjoy by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone]. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. 2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh."

The terms dogs, evil doers and mutilators of the flesh refer to the Judaizers, who first appear in Acts 15:1-5,

"But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the [Gentile] brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question . . . 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them [in reaching Gentiles for Christ]. 5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses'" [kosher diet, feast days, etc].

I want you to notice first that the Jews who insisted on circumcision for Gentile believers, were members of the Church at Jerusalem and are referred to as believers. We meet them again in Galatians 2:11-12,

“But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch [a predominately Gentile church], I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James [who was the half brother of Jesus and a leading elder in the Jerusalem Church], Peter was eating with the Gentiles [partaking in nonkosher food]; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.”

Why did the circumcision party have so much clout? To understand, we need to go back to Genesis 17:9-13,

“And God said to Abraham [the father of faith], ‘As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant . . . every male among you shall be circumcised . . . 11 and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner [paid workers who became a part of Abraham’s household] . . . 13 shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting [end of the age] covenant.”

Circumcision of the flesh was given by God to Abraham, as an outward testimony of their covenant agreement. In this agreement, God promised to love and bless Abraham and his descendants, and use them to bless all the nations. The responsibility of Abraham and his descendants was to love and obey God. Hundreds of years later, circumcision of the flesh continued to be commanded by God for all Jewish males living under the Mosaic Covenant. Listen to Exodus 12:43-48,

“And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron [just before God delivered the Jews out of their slavery in Egypt], ‘This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, 44 but every servant that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him . . . 48 If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land [fully apart of Israel]. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it.’”

And so it was the understanding of some of the early Jewish Christians that circumcision in the flesh was to be a sign for Gentile Christians, indicating that they too had become descendants of Abraham and a part of believing Israel. Did they trample upon God’s Word in order to conclude that? No. But here is what became the defining issue: Was circumcision necessary for salvation? James and other true believers within the circumcision party said no, it is not required. But other members of the circumcision party said yes – it is. One of the biblical proofs that physical circumcision is not a requirement for salvation is found in Romans 4:10-11,

“How then was righteousness counted to Abraham? [how did Abraham become a part of God’s eternal family?] Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but [14years] before he was circumcised. 11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.”

Another reason why James and the rest of the Apostles knew that physical circumcision did not impart salvation is because the majority of Jewish males, who were all circumcised in the flesh, were as lost as lost could be. There were times in Israel's history when the spiritual condition of the Jewish people was more deplorable than the Gentiles. This is why God told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 10:16, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn." The real need of mankind is to be circumcised of heart, and only God can do that. We see this in Deuteronomy 30:6, when God promised, "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

Salvation has always been a work of God's grace upon the hearts of unbelievers, changing us from being at enmity with God – to being grateful lovers of God. In Philippians 3:3, Paul assures believers in Christ that we have true circumcision – the circumcision of the heart – which God performed when we repented of our sin and put our trust for right standing with God in Christ alone.

Let's go back to the issue of physical circumcision. In Philippians 3:5, Paul tells us that he was circumcised at eight days old. So were all the other Apostles. And because ALL the Apostles were Jewish, they grew up eating kosher and observing Israel's religious festivals – such as Passover. And there is no doubt in my mind, that the Jewish believers who made up the Jerusalem Church, including the Apostles, continued to circumcise their sons, eat kosher and honor the festivals of Israel. They did this – NOT in order to be saved, but because they were still Jewish and keeping those rites helped them to remember their Jewish history.

But another vital reason why the Apostles observed their Jewish rites is because it helped them maintain relationships with unbelieving Jews, in order to point them to Christ. In I Corinthians 9:20, the Apostle Paul testifies that he did this, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews." When Paul was with Jewish people, he ate kosher. But when he was with Gentiles, he didn't. As a Jew, why did Paul have the freedom not to eat kosher? Because the kosher diet was a part of the Ceremonial division of God's Law. One of the specific reasons the Ceremonial Law was given to Israel was to help the Jews remain Jews – because Christ was to be born of the Jews.

Friends, some of the laws God gave to Israel had nothing to do with what is morally right or wrong. Let me give you an example recorded in Leviticus 19:19,

" . . . You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind [don't breed an Angus with a Hereford]. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material" [polyester/cotton blends were forbidden to Old Testament Jews].

These commands were given to the Jewish people as a way of daily reminding them that they were to be a separate people. But now that Christ has been born of the Jews, of the tribe of Judah, those laws have served their primary purpose and are no longer necessary.

God also gave a multitude of Ceremonial Laws that dealt with how the Levitical Priests were to carry out their various temple responsibilities, the most important being the offering of animal sacrifices. Now that Christ has offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin, the stone temple – and animal sacrifices – offered by Levitical Priests – have all been made obsolete.

The Judaizers, whom Paul refers to as dogs and evildoers, ignored the decision of the Jerusalem Council [see Acts 15] by insisting that the Ceremonial Laws of Israel had to be kept by Gentile Christians if they were to be saved. They blatantly ignored the fact that Gentile Christians were receiving the Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in Christ, apart from keeping the Ceremonial Law. This is Paul's point in Galatians 3:2, when he asked Gentile believers, "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the [Ceremonial] law or by hearing with faith?" It was by hearing with faith. Listen also to what Paul says Gentile Christians in Colossians 2:16-17,

"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink [kosher diet], or with regard to a festival [observing Israel's feast days] . . . or a Sabbath [there were many Sabbaths connected to Israel's religious feasts]. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

Now that Christ has come, the shadows of the Ceremonial Law are no longer necessary. This brings me to a problem the Church is wrestling with today. Many Christians claim that if any part of God's Old Testament Law has become obsolete, then it is all obsolete. Pastor Andy Stanley, who has become a role model for many pastors, has said to Christians, "You shall not keep the Ten Commandments!" Why? Because pastor Andy says God gave them to Old Covenant Jewish people, and not to New Covenant followers of Christ. Pastor Andy says our responsibility is to trust the Holy Spirit and follow the law of love.

I agree that we should trust the Holy Spirit and follow the law of love, but when we love God, we are going to love what He loves, and hate what He hates. Let me give you an important example of that truth. Job was a righteous man who feared God and turned away from evil. He lived before God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and long before the birth of Christ. Job did not even have a Bible, and yet he honored God's Moral Law. In Job 31, beginning at verse 1, Job says,

"I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." The 7th Commandment says, "You shall not commit adultery." When Jesus spoke about lust in our hearts as being a form of adultery, He was not raising the bar of God's Moral Law. He was just making clear what Job already knew: Sinful thoughts lead to sinful actions – if we do not deal with them while they are still in the heart.

Job 31:5-8, “If I have walked in falsehood or deceit . . . 8 may my crops be uprooted.” The 9th Commandment says, “You shall not lie [or give false testimony about your neighbor].” Job believed that and lived it out.

Job 31:13-15, “If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants when they had a grievance against me, 14 what shall I do when God confronts me . . . 15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them?” Friends, we would not need labor unions if all employers and employees lived according to Job’s morality of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Job loved his neighbor because he knew his neighbor was made in God’s image, just as he was.

Job 31:17-22, “If I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless . . . 19 If I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing . . . 20 and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep . . . 22 then let my arm fall from the shoulder” God’s blueprint for helping the poor has always been through voluntary generosity, never by forceful redistribution of wealth.

Job 31:24-28, “If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, ‘You are my security’ . . . 28 I would have been false to God above.” [Job would have violated the first two commandments, which forbid idolatry]. Job had a lot of money, but he did not love money.

Job 31:29-40, “If I have rejoiced at my enemy’s misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him . . . 40 let thorns grow instead of wheat, and foul weeds instead of barley.” [Job did not fail to love his enemies as Christ commanded us to do – in Matthew 5:43-44].

Job 31:33-40, “If I have concealed my sin as men do, by hiding my guilt in my heart . . . 40 let thorns grow instead of wheat, and foul weeds instead of barley.” [Job honored the 10th commandment – not to covet in his heart anything that belonged to his neighbor].

God’s Moral Law was the standard of right and wrong for Job – before God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. And God’s Moral Law continues to be the standard of right wrong after Christ has come. In Mark 7:21-23, Jesus gives us a list of evil things God hates, and tells us where they originate,

“. . . out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit . . . 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

That list echoes what the Ten Commandments condemn. Do we think God did not hate these things before He gave Moses the Ten Commandments – or that He has stopped hating them now that Christ has come? Of course not. Friend, if you are a Christian, then your hope for eternal life is that Jesus Christ perfectly kept God’s Moral Law and has imputed His

righteousness to your account. And if you are a Christians, then you are in the New Covenant [Luke 22:20], and according to Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:10, God's Law is written on your heart. Which means it is not just God's Law, it is our Law, which we eagerly embrace, rather than reject.

And what law is written on our hearts? Not the Ceremonial Law. Christ made that obsolete. It is God's Moral Law that is written on our hearts. You will not find any where in the book of Job where he says, "May my arm fall off and my crops fail, if I wear clothes made of mixed materials." Has your conscience ever bothered you for wearing cotton/polyester blends?

God's Moral Law directed Job's life. Did that make him legalistic? No, he was a joy to God. Pastor Andy Stanley says that the only part of God's Moral Law that Christians need to heed, is the law of love. Love is the proper motive for keeping God's Moral Law, but it is God's Moral Law that defines what love looks like. Please do not tell me that you love your neighbor if you lie about him and steal from him – without remorse. Physical circumcision, eating kosher, and not wearing clothes made of mixed material, does not define what love looks like.

I know pastor Andy has said a lot of good things, but I also know after Peter declared that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God – he turned around and rebuked Jesus for saying He was going to be put to death at Jerusalem. And how did Jesus respond to Peter's rebuke? He said, "Get behind me Satan . . . you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" [Matthew 16:22-23].

This brings us back to the Judaizers. The Apostle Paul says the following about them in Philippians 3:19, "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is their shame. Their mind is on earthly things." Let me close by telling you what happened to the Judaizers and other false Jewish teachers, who without repentance, brought division and confusion upon the early Church. About five years after Paul wrote Philippians, unbelieving Jews revolted against the Roman Empire and Jewish people became the public enemies of Rome. Josephus testifies that over twenty thousand Jews were put to death in one hour at Caesarea and the survivors were sent to the galleys. In Alexandria, Egypt – fifty thousand Jews were slaughtered in a matter of hours. These actions caused Jews from all over the Roman Empire [including the Judaizers] to flee from their homes and seek places of refuge. The greatest place of refuge was Jerusalem. But it was eventually conquered and destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. The Jews who survived, were carried off as slaves [including the Judaizers].

What did all this mean for the Church? After the Jewish false teachers were purged from it, the Church was greatly strengthened – resulting in many lost people coming to faith in Christ. The fact that unrepentant false teachers were judged by God should not have surprised the Christians of Paul's day – nor should that be surprising to us. Why? Because of what we read in I Corinthians 3:16-17,

“Do you [followers of Christ] not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

Those who twist God’s Word in order to gain a following for themselves – are in a very bad place. In Philippians 3:8-16, the Apostle Paul’s remedy for protecting ourselves against false teachers is to mature in Christ – by growing in our understanding and obedience to God’s Word, so that we are no longer tossed and turned by every wave of false doctrine. Let’s pray.