

Lesson 13

Warning the Flock

Philippians 3:1-3

How do you respond when you see a sign or hear an announcement with this one word only: “WARNING!”? How we acknowledge and react to a warning has far-reaching effects. Indeed, it can save our life! I once read of a missionary father serving in an African jungle who spotted his little son playing under a tree, a tree with a giant boa constrictor snake hanging out of it over his little boy! His love and concern yelled out the warning that would save the tot’s life... only if he obeyed.

Well, dear friend, Paul begins Philippians 3 with a warning. You see, he loves his friends there in Philippi. And, because of that love, he has their good in mind. As Paul thinks about certain issues in the church and problems that are plaguing the church there, he as much as yells “WARNING!” And, as

with the young boy, the Christians at Philippi would be safe...only if they obeyed.

It’s a brief warning, but give heed as you read it. Your own well-being may depend on it!

Philippians 3:1-3

¹ Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.

² Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh...

Out of God’s Word...

1. What wonderful reminder does Paul give the Philippians (and us!) in verse 1?

As Paul prepares to repeat something, what reason does he give for the repetition (verse 1)?

2. List the 3 warnings Paul gives to his friends (verse 2).

- a.
- b.
- c.

3. What are the three components of “the true circumcision” as described by Paul (verse 3)?

- a.
- b.
- c.

...and into your heart

- In these verses Paul appears to be warning against Judaizing teachers. These teachers were attempting to put the church back under the rigid regulations of the Mosaic law and the traditions of the Jews. In other words, Christians whose salvation was by the grace of Jesus Christ were being re-harnessed by these teachers with the legalism and rules contained in the Old Testament Law, which was handed down by God to Moses in the book of Exodus.

Even though Paul wrote these words

of warning almost 2,000 years ago, there is still a tendency to put man-made “rules” and “works” into our lives that are not necessary for New Testament Christians who have been saved by God’s grace. What are the “laws” and “works” God is interested in?

Matthew 22:36-40—

John 13:34—

Romans 13:8-10—

Galatians 5:22-23—

James 2:8—

- As points of information: “Dogs” was a designation used by Jews in referring to Gentiles. This term carried with it the idea of being impure and unclean. For instance, dogs in the ancient world were scavengers feeding

on garbage and filth, fighting among themselves and attacking those who passed by. The thought is that these Judaizing teachers, like dogs, were eating the garbage (i.e., man-made rules and works) from the table instead of seeking to live a life of obedience sitting down at the banquet table of the grace of God.

“Evil workers” were those guilty of evil deeds. There’s great irony in this term: The Jews, because they kept the Mosaic law, considered themselves to be workers of righteousness. And yet, as they taught those who were free from the law in Christ that they, too, must keep the law to be saved, they became workers of evil.

“Mutilation” is a reference to the law of the circumcision of the flesh as laid down in the Old Testament Law. However, as Christians, our hearts have been circumcised (Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:11)!

- Paul points out that true believers in Jesus Christ—those saved by and whose works flow *from* their salvation—are those of us who worship God in

the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

...we worship God in the Spirit: Our spiritual life is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

...we rejoice in Jesus rather than glory in our own works.

...we have no confidence in the flesh, but joy in the grace of Christ.

I know this is a lot to ponder and understand. The essence is this, beloved: The basis of our union with Christ is never the works that we do, but the work that Jesus did...on the cross! As Ephesians 2:8-9 declares, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Heart Response

Details and definitions! They tend to boggle the mind, don’t they? Let us simply grasp the two clear truths in

these few verses of warning.

First, we must obey God's Word, not man-made religious rules and regulations. We must seek to live our lives *God's way*, to walk in a manner worthy of our calling in Him.

Second, we must put no confidence in the flesh. There is nothing we can ever do to earn or enhance our status with our dear Lord. He, in His gracious love, has secured our son-ship for us. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

This lesson, dear one, calls us to worship. And that's exactly what a woman just like you and me did one Sunday morning back in 1865. As Elvina Hall sat in the choir loft of the Monument Street Methodist Church of Baltimore, her pastor's sermon moved her to grab her hymnal and jot down on the flyleaf of the book the words running through her heart. Her worship became a song many churches still sing today at communion, "Jesus Paid It All." As the chorus to this anthem of our faith so eloquently proclaims:

Jesus paid it all.
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

Prayer to pray:

Father, thank You for the provision You have made for my salvation through Christ. It is all of Thee, and none of me. May I worship in the Spirit of God, glory in Your Son, Jesus Christ, and put no confidence in the flesh! Amen.