



SERIES: Philippians (May / June) “Finding Joy in the Journey”

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Tuesday, June 1, 2021

Scripture: Philippians 3:2

TITLE: The Dangers of Legalism

There are two major threats to Christianity today: cheap grace and legalism. Cheap grace says, “Salvation is free. So ask Jesus into your heart. Take the ticket and then live for yourself ‘til you die.” It’s cheap grace. It’s powerful enough to save your soul, but impotent because it cannot change your life. The other threat is legalism - that nasty game of religion. It’s the performance trap where you are taught you have to add to your Salvation. Jesus does a lot, but you still have to pull your own weight. Both threats are dangerous and wholly unbiblical.

Paul had to fight off both ideas, but he was passionate about fighting off the false teachers of legalism. Listen to Paul’s words in Philippians 3:2 (NLT).

“Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved.”

Sticks and stones, Paul. Sticks and stones. Paul is coming out with the verbal guns a-blazing. He calls these false teachers some creative names: dogs, evildoers, and mutilators. He wasn’t throwing random insults. He was calling them out for their behavior. Dogs in Paul’s day weren’t cute little companions. They were scavengers and plagued ancient cities. They were despised. They could be unclean and filthy. So were these false teachers. They should be avoided, just like the dogs.

Paul calls them evildoers. Sure, they were religious masters. They knew what to say and how to say it. They knew how to put on a good religious show. Paul did the same thing before meeting Christ. Once Paul was saved, he would say, “All of that, I consider it a loss. It was rubbish.” When you’re trying to save yourself and playing the game of religion, you’re not doing good. You’re doing evil, because it does nothing for God.

Paul then calls them mutilators. He’s referring to circumcision, but he uses a word to mean mutilate. You see, circumcision never saved anyone. Rather it was symbolic of an inward circumcision. But these false teachers were hacking themselves and their converts all for nothing.

Legalism is a real threat to Christianity because it’s a lie. Paul would say in Galatians that this false gospel was really no gospel. It has no hope and no saving power. So, we are called to reject it and reject those who teach it.

Does this negate sanctification or life change? No; it supports it - because real Salvation produces life change. The difference is we obey Christ out of love, not out of adding to our Salvation.

So here's my challenge for you today: rid yourself of any legalism in your life. Remember, I'm not talking obedience. I'm talking about trying to earn or keep your Salvation by your works - doing good out of obligation or coercion with God, rather than out of love.

I struggle with this: "Better safe than sorry," I tell myself. But God says, "You are my masterpiece by grace. Rest in that grace and follow Me." So get rid of any legalism and follow God out of love.

Now let's go win the day.