

# The Three Negative Aspects of Religious Judaizers Versus The Three Positive Aspects of Spiritual Believers

**Scripture Reading: Phil. 3:1-6**

## **I. REJOICE IN THE LORD AND BEWARE OF THE JUDAIZERS**

1. After speaking of the mutual fellowship between him and the believers in Philippi, Paul speaks of sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to Philippi. Remarks about the sending of co-workers to visit the saints are usually found at the very end of Paul's Epistles. This may indicate that Paul was planning to close this Epistle at the end of chapter two. However, instead of ending his epistle, Paul goes on to speak of other matters, which he refers to as "the rest" (**3:1**). His burden still was not discharged. Deep in his heart he was deeply troubled by the activity of the Judaizers. He knew that the Judaizers were disturbing the churches, damaging the church life, and trying to turn the saints away from the faith.
2. So Paul charges the saints to rejoice in the Lord. (**3:1**) For Paul to write to the saints about rejoicing in the Lord was not irksome or wearisome, but to them it was safe. To rejoice in the Lord is a safeguard, a security. Paul's use of the word **safe**, points to the connection between 3:1 and 2. There must have been a situation in Philippi which required a safeguard, some kind of protection. The situation Paul had in mind was the trouble caused by the Judaizers.
3. Therefore, after telling the believers to rejoice in the Lord, he charges them to beware of the dogs, the evil workers, the concision (**v.2**). The Greek word for **beware** means "to keep a watchful eye ever upon." On the one hand, the apostle advises the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord; on the other hand, he warns them to beware of, to keep a watchful eye ever upon, the Judaizers.

## **II. THE THREE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE RELIGIOUS JUDAIZERS**

In using the word **dogs** Paul was very strong. Paul, however, was not the first to be so bold in his utterance. Both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus referred to the Pharisees as the offspring of vipers (**Matt. 3:7; 12:34**). The Pharisees truly were the offspring of vipers, and the Judaizers really were "dogs." Paul says, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision." Since there is no conjunction used between these clauses, they must refer to the same class of people. Dogs are unclean (**Lev. 11:4-8**), the workers are evil, and the concision are contemptible. (Concision, meaning mutilation, is a term of contempt, used in place of circumcision.) The "dogs" refer to the Judaizers. In nature they are unclean dogs, in behavior they are evil workers, and in religion they are the concision, people of shame. Although they gloried in their religion, Paul regarded it as an object of shame and contempt. He wanted the believers to beware of the dogs, the evil workers, the concision.

## **III. THE THREE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL BELIEVERS**

1. In contrast to and absolutely different from the Judaizers, the New Testament believers are the genuine circumcision, circumcised by Christ's crucifixion. Because we deny our old nature, we are the true circumcision. The denial of the flesh is the real circumcision, the true cutting off of the flesh (**Col.2:11**) Consequently, the believers serve as priests by the Spirit of God, not by the ordinances of law; they boast in Christ, not in the law; and they have no confidence in the flesh, but have their confidence in the Spirit. (**v.3**) The believers who serve by the Spirit of God are in contrast to the dogs; the believers who boast in Christ are in contrast to evil workers; and the believers who have no confidence in the flesh are in contrast to the concision. Our boasting, glorying, and rejoicing are not in our outward deeds, not in our behavior or conduct, but in Christ alone. The Judaizers had confidence in the flesh, whereas the true believers in Christ have no confidence in the flesh.
2. The flesh in 3:3 comprises all that we are and have in our natural being. The fact that the Judaizers had confidence in their circumcision was a sign that their confidence was in their flesh. They trusted in their natural qualities and qualifications, not in the Spirit. Their confidence was in what they were by nature. They trusted in the fact that they were Jews. By contrast Paul says strongly

that we who believe in Christ do not have any confidence in the flesh. Our confidence is wholly in the Lord.

#### IV. SAUL OF TARSUS AS A MODEL OF THE JUDAIZERS

1. According to verses 4 through 6, Paul had been a model of the Judaizers. When Paul used to be among the Judaizers, he had been very active and had many outstanding qualifications, giving him more confidence in the flesh (v.4; Gal.1:14) The following are some of the things of which he could boast:
  - Circumcised the Eighth Day (**Phil.3:5**) - says that he was circumcised the eighth day, the day for a genuine Israelite to be circumcised (**Gen. 17:12**). This day distinguished him from the Ishmaelites and proselytes, who were circumcised later. Paul was a typical Jew, not a proselyte. This gave him ground to boast when he was a Judaizer.
  - Of the Race of Israel - Paul was also of the race of Israel, God's called race, the genuine seed of Abraham (**Rom.11:1; 2Cor.11:22**). He was not a descendant of the proselytes grafted into the race of God's covenant.
  - Of the Tribe of Benjamin - Paul could also be confident in the fact that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. This was a lovely and faithful tribe, among whom was the royal city of Jerusalem with the temple of God (**Deut. 33:12**).
  - A Hebrew of the Hebrews - Paul also says that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents with Hebrew ancestry on both sides. He could boast that he was of pure Hebrew blood.
  - A Pharisee Keeping the Law - In verse 5 Paul tells us that, as to the law, he was a Pharisee, the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (**Acts 26:5; 23:6**), a sect exceedingly zealous for the law of Moses. The Pharisees were proud of their superior sanctity of life, devotion to God, and knowledge of the Scriptures.
  - Persecuting the Church out of Zeal for the Law - Out of zeal for the law of Moses and the Jewish religion (**Gal. 1:14**), Paul persecuted the church. Those Jews who persecuted the church were certainly among the leading ones in Judaism. No one could surpass them in their zeal. Paul boasted in his zeal in persecuting the church.
  - Blameless according to the Law - Finally, Paul says that "as to the righteousness which is in the law," he was found, or proven, blameless. This, of course, was in the eyes of man according to man's judgment. In the eyes of God, according to His righteous law, no flesh is blameless (**Gal. 2:16**).
2. Paul presented this list of qualifications for the purpose of showing the Philippians that they should not have any trust in the Judaizers. Paul once had been a leading Judaizer, but a radical change had taken place in him. Now he was very different from what he had been before. This was a strong indication to the believers in Philippi not to follow the Judaizers.
3. Had Paul remained a Judaizer, it would have been impossible for him to experience Christ. But because he became another kind of person, one who served by the Spirit of God, boasted in Christ Jesus, and had no confidence in the flesh, he could enjoy Christ and experience Him in a very rich way.
4. Although we are not Judaizers, in principle we may actually be the same as the Judaizers were. Even though we have been regenerated, we may continue to live in our fallen nature, boast in what we do in the flesh, and have confidence in our natural qualifications. We need the Lord's light to shine on us concerning our nature, our deeds, and our confidence in the flesh. Yes, we have a right to proclaim the fact that we are children of God. But if this declaration is contrasted with our daily experience, it may be little more than a doctrine to us. One day, when the light shines on you concerning this, you will want to prostrate yourself before the Lord and confess how unclean your nature is. Then you will condemn everything you do by your fallen nature. You will see that in the eyes of God whatever is done in the fallen nature is evil and worthy of condemnation. Only when we have been enlightened by God shall we be able to say truly that we have no trust in our natural qualifications, ability, or intelligence. Only then shall we be able to testify that our confidence is wholly in the Lord. After we are enlightened in this way, we shall be able to experience Christ.