

Sermon Title: Welcome Or Beware
Scripture Text: Philippians 2:19-3:6 (Philippians #9)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-14-10

I invite you to join me at Philippians Chapter 2, where this week we put in at Verse 19.

If you have been keeping track, paying attention to the speed with which we are progressing through Philippians, prepare for some whiplash as we accelerate today. It is a book that has some *very* deep things and some *very personal* things—I mean "personal" by way of application—that we have spent plenty of time working through, especially in Chapter 2 leading up to this point.

And then, in the middle of the book is some personal news and information about Paul's ministry and his plans and his interactions with the people in Philippi; and woven together right next to them, some of the *strongest* words in this book.

This is about learning to embrace the right people, and learning to beware of the wrong ones; and so, I have entitled it: "Welcome Or Beware"—and you will see why when we get there.

It is a very simple passage, from Verse 19 through Verse 30; and then we are going to go all the way to Chapter 3, Verse 6, this morning. I decided to bite off that much for several reasons: It is not necessary to devote an entire sermon to a passage as straightforward as Verses 19 through 30. And if I deal with this *and* the beginning of Chapter 3, you are going to see a vivid contrast between two very important aspects of what we do: One is tender and kind; the other is forceful and strong. One is about people, and the other is about truth. By dealing with both at the same time, you will see a bigger picture of what it takes to be a spiritually healthy congregation, and to learn more of the variety of things that we need to do together.

So, we are going to look at the "Welcome" section: Welcome Timothy, Welcome Epaphroditus; and then the "Beware" section in the first six verses of Chapter 3: A Warning, and then Paul talks about the things that we ought *not* to boast about—or, we call it "Mock Boasting."

The rest of Chapter 2 divides conveniently into six verses that refer to one of Paul's friends named Timothy, and six verses that refer to his friend Epaphroditus.

So join me right away—let's dive right in at Verse 19. Paul says: "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

Even from his prison in Rome, in a very kind and masterful way, Paul manages to watch over the spiritual terrain that he had cultivated in Philippi. At the top of his "Things to Do" list for when he gets to Philippi is to see their progress that he has been hearing about—probably because Epaphroditus came and told him. He says, "I want to 'learn of your condition,' " and he expects to "be encouraged" by what he sees.

So his plan was to "send Timothy" to Philippi. Now *that* tells you that Timothy was with him in Rome. Paul was under house arrest there; he was able to have visitors (Acts 28:16, 30-31). Timothy stayed there for an extended period of time.

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And [Paul] wanted to send Timothy to Philippi with news of that verdict that he was expecting soon. There have been several reasons—one of them is right here in our passage—that indicate he was expecting a verdict; so apparently, whatever trial or mockery of a trial had already been held, he was awaiting the decision, not the trial.

Choosing Timothy to be his personal envoy was logical and natural and wise. Nobody else on Paul's team had a heart and a spirit like Timothy (see Acts 17:15; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; cf. 2 Cor. 8:22). If you were making the movie of the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, casting Timothy would be very difficult. He was, by temperament, a timid sort of guy (1 Tim. 4:11-14; 2 Tim. 1:6-7), and yet he had been raised in a strong spiritual background (Acts 16:1). He had come to faith in Christ, and he wound up being used, I'm sure, *multiplied* times beyond his own expectations and what he would have thought God would do with him. As a child, he was an eager student of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15), and he was a teachable and obedient son. Three were at least two generations of genuine faith ahead of him in his "mother" and his "grandmother" (2 Tim. 1:5).

As he grew up, he was highly recommended by those who knew him best; we see that in Acts 16. And upon his conversion to Christ, he became a beloved and faithful co-laborer and disciple under Paul's tutelage; First Corinthians 4 tells us that. Later, he became a close assistant and a "fellow worker" with Paul—part of his traveling team, if you will; Romans 16:21 says that. And also, he would go wherever Paul asked; he would remain wherever Paul said he was most needed. And Paul described him as "our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ"; we saw that back in First Thessalonians (3:2). He had played a founding role in the church at Philippi, and he had subsequently visited there more than once; when you put together the chronology of his life, you see that (Acts 16:1-3, 12).

So it was natural to send Timothy there, but it was also a personal sacrifice for Paul to send him *away*; I am sure he very much wanted to keep Timothy with him for encouragement and fellowship and help, but he knew that Timothy was the natural one for taking news to Philippi. And in the process of describing why he chose Timothy to bear news of the verdict that was coming down, Paul describes his disappointment with some other people whom he had discovered were not worthy of the task. Look at the next two verses, 20 and 21, where he said: "For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus."

Remember, he had referred to some people who were preaching Christ out of contention (1:15, 17), hoping to make things worse for Paul by the things that they were saying. It was never an all-rosy thing for Paul to carry on his ministry (e.g., 2 Cor. 6:4-5; 11:23-29; 12:10; cf. 2 Tim. 2:3). It never has been for anybody since, and it isn't today. Everyone who is a leader in ministry understands being disappointed by people; it happens all the time. Probably looking back on this time during his first imprisonment, and then what had happened even after that—later on, a man named "Demas" had deserted him (2 Tim. 4:10), and when Paul writes his *last* letter—interestingly, to Timothy—he says this, in Second Timothy Chapter 4, Verse 16—"At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them." He still wanted grace for them.

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Well, Timothy was a wonderful exception. Maybe Timothy was not *there* for his "first defense," but Timothy was there in the time that Paul was waiting for the verdict.

And so, Paul was sending Timothy back to Philippi to tell them what was going to happen to him; and in Verse 22, it says: "But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father."

Paul was the mentor; Timothy was the disciple. And they knew because they saw, when Paul had helped found the church in Philippi, that Timothy was very much a right hand man. He says: "Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me" (vs. 24). So he sends the letter now, and he is planning to send Timothy shortly after, with news of how things would work. And we get this idea that he *did* expect to be released, because Verse 24 [continues]: "and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly." Paul expected to be released; he expected to follow Timothy soon to Philippi. We surmise from the Book of Philippians: Like I said, he has already been through his trial; now he is awaiting the verdict, and he had reason to believe it was going to be a favorable verdict.

So, like I told you, not too tough to understand it so far: "I want you to welcome Timothy"—Verses 19 through 24. And now, he is going to talk about Epaphroditus in Verses 25 through 30.

Epaphroditus was a man *from* Philippi who had been to Rome, presumably to visit Paul. When we get into Chapter 4, we will see that they had sent some support to Paul there; Epaphroditus had probably delivered that.

Here is what we know about him: He was a spiritual leader in the church at the city of Philippi. He was sent by that church to bring an offering to Paul while he was in prison in Rome, and they had apparently instructed Epaphroditus to remain there as a helper to Paul. While he was engaged in that mission, Epaphroditus had become seriously ill. His friends in Philippi heard about his illness, and they were alarmed. Epaphroditus and Paul had, in turn, heard about the concern of the Philippians over the condition of Epaphroditus in Rome.

Well, as they prayed, as they waited, God graciously restored Epaphroditus back to health, and Epaphroditus yearned to return to Philippi to lay to rest their fears for his health, and to rejoice with his Christian friends there. They didn't have Skype, and so it was a matter of getting on a boat and waiting a long time and walking a long way to get there. Paul agreed with Epaphroditus' desire to return, so he sent him back to Philippi and told them to welcome him with all the joy they could possibly show.

Probably, the reason for this paragraph is for Paul to explain to the Philippians that Epaphroditus was returning with Paul's blessing—that he didn't want them to think Epaphroditus had abandoned his promise to stay with Paul and help him in Rome; he had just gotten so sick that as soon as he was able to travel, [Paul] wanted to send him back home.

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So, six verses describe this. He said: "But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need"—sent from Philippi as their "messenger" to Paul to minister to him—"because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow." How sad would it be if you sent this guy to me, and then he *dies*! "Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me." In other words: "You could not be here personally; you sent one of your best men, and it has been a great blessing to me."

So, quite a contrast! The first 18 verses of Philippians Chapter 2 are downright heavyweight. Now, this newsy, personal kind of stuff—"I want you to welcome these guys."

Now, he *also* says: "I want you to beware of something."

Come with me as we dive into Chapter 3, and it starts with a warning. Chapter 3, Verse 1 sets it up: "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord."

This word "finally" is the first of two "finallys" in Philippians; the other one is in Chapter 4, Verse 8. I do not think it means that Paul was losing his mind and he could not keep it together to remember that he had already said "finally" once, and then he changed his mind later. The phrase that is translated "finally" in English is an idiom that is literally "for the rest," and it is sometimes used to just change from one subject to another. And so he said, "By the way: Now that I am sending Timothy and Epaphroditus back, I have something that I need to remind you about."

So he says: "Finally, my brethren, *rejoice in the Lord*." Don't be worried about things like Epaphroditus' health; don't let that get you off track. He continues: "To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you." How often do we profit from being reminded of something that we knew, making a fresh application of truth that we have known for a long time? And Paul says it is okay that I have to remind you of some things; *be reminded* (see 2 Pet. 1:12-13; 3:1).

And he says: "I want you to *rejoice in the Lord*." There *are* tough things out there. Remember, earlier he had mentioned "adversaries" back in Chapter 1 (vs. 28, NKJV), and he wanted the Philippians not to let the "adversaries" bother them. He had mentioned those people who were preaching Christ to get *him* in trouble. Then there are earthly cares like the health of Epaphroditus, like Paul's physical needs that they had sent an offering to help deal with. But because there is nothing more important than protecting the doctrine—the truth—of the Body of Christ, and preserving the unity of the Body of Christ, Paul says, "It doesn't bother me at all. It is 'no trouble' to 'write' some of 'the same things again.'" And even more important, he says, "and it is a *safeguard* for you."

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Most of what I do in encouraging somebody in an individual conversation is not giving new truth; it is usually, "Remember what the Bible says?"—and showing again and again and again what it says (e.g., Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16; 22:31; Mk. 12:10, etc.). Spiritual leaders—the elders who serve as overseers and teachers and preachers and planners and visionaries—they have the responsibility to protect "the flock of God" from harm (1 Pet. 5:2; cf. Acts 20:28); and so, sometimes that is reminding you of things that you already "know" (Jude 5; cf. Ex. 13:9; Rom. 15:15; 1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Tim. 1:6; 2:14; Titus 3:1).

When there is danger around to the sheep, a shepherd warns the flock; he does what he can to protect the flock. And that is why, in the course of teaching the Scriptures, we always remind and refresh, but we sometimes address dangerous things that are around—movements and teachings which are dangerous and destructive to spiritual vitality (e.g., Matt. 16:6; 2 Tim. 2:16-17; 1 Jn. 2:22; 2 Jn. 7). I haven't decided just yet what, if anything, I am going to do for a New Year's message this year, but that is the one [in which] I usually say, "By the way, here is where the yellow lights are flashing; here is where the *red* lights are flashing. Be careful of what is out there!"

Paul does it here for the sake of the Philippians. He refers again to these "opponents" (1:28). He does not name names, but he precisely describes the attitudes, the general things that they are doing. He uses some powerful metaphors to describe what false teachers and phony spiritual leaders *really are* in the eyes of God. Look at Verse 2 with me. I have never heard anybody choose this verse as a memory verse, to teach their six-year-old a first verse from the Bible—but it is an important one: "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision..."

Get the picture here: The church at Philippi was strong; it was doing well. But Paul was concerned about some influences that he heard were making an impact on some of the people in that area. And based on his love for his Christian friends, he gives them a strong warning: "Beware...beware...beware..." He says it three times, and he attaches three metaphors to it.

The context tells you *who* these dangerous people were. He is not talking about three different *kinds* of dangers, or three different kinds of false teachers under the headings "dogs," "evil workers," and "false circumcision." They are three metaphors for one group.

What did he mean by this? "Dogs" is strong language (Deut. 23:18; Ps. 22:16; Matt. 7:6; Rev. 22:15). The people Paul was warning about were Jews. And by using the metaphor of "dogs" to describe *them*, Paul was calling them a name that they would *especially* hate being called. The Jews considered dogs to be the most despised and miserable of all creatures, so they used dogs to describe Gentiles because *they* despised Gentiles.

You see, in that world, dogs were not the pets that we now consider them. People were not training them to go hunting; they weren't teaching them to sleep at the foot of their bed and be cuddly and cute. In that world, herds of dogs prowled about in packs without homes or owners. They fed themselves on refuse and filth from the streets. They quarreled among themselves; and if you got too close to them, they would, indeed, attack; they were very territorial.

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Now, we don't have anything exactly like that in our culture—except, maybe teenagers at shopping malls; I can't think of a metaphor to *exactly* fit that. Sorry, teenagers—*others* of your ilk that are dangerous...

Paul used "dogs" to describe these people *because*, as the Jews viewed dogs, these people *prowl around* Christian congregations (cf. Ps. 59:6, 14). These are people who *will* come in and gobble things up. They *will* come in and intimidate people.

So he also calls them "evil workers." That describes them in two ways:

On the one hand, the people he is describing *are* "workers." When someone like this comes into a church, they get right to work. I'll tell you what: There is probably no way to please a pastor any faster than volunteering to do something that needs to be done. Some people know that, and use it and abuse it. People like this will come in, and they will immediately involve themselves in any number of activities. They will volunteer for all sorts of things so that they can get to know people and they can begin to influence as many people as possible—and, they hope, achieve positions of even greater influences. In my nearly four decades of ministry, the very worst mistakes I have ever made were letting someone rise too quickly into leadership (see 1 Tim. 3:6, 10; 5:22). There are "evil workers" *sent by Satan himself* to come in and infiltrate [in order to] to ruin or to attack the work of God (Acts 20:29-30; cf. Gal. 4:17).

But he calls them, not just "workers" but "evil workers," because their motive is *not* to point people to the all-sufficient Christ, *not* to teach them to walk in complete obedience to His all-sufficient Word. *Their* efforts are designed to teach people to trust in something else (e.g., Gal. 1:6; 4:21; 1 Tim. 1:2-7; Titus 1:14), or to turn people against each other (e.g., Rom. 16:17; 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9-10). The *worst kind of evil* is the one that comes wrapped in a package that says "Good" (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

The third description is the most specific for allowing us to know precisely what group he was talking about. Thirdly, he says: "Beware of the *false circumcision*." There is actually a pun here; there is a play on words in the Greek. I will refrain from getting too graphic; but, rather than true circumcision, this word refers to an incision that results in mutilation (cf. Gal. 5:12). It is *very* descriptive; it is a downright *gross* word picture. And it means that the group that Paul had in mind is the ones that, over the centuries, have been labeled the "Judaizers." They were Jews who did not openly reject Christ. There *were* the Jews who *hated* Jesus, *hated* His followers, and went after them. There were the Jews who openly embraced Christ—among them, the "three thousand" who were saved on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). But there were *also* some—and mainly they came from that group known as the Pharisees—who *professed* to believe in Christ; but the problem was, they hung onto their own sense of self-righteousness: that *they* could do things *meritorious* that would make God like them. They rejected the simple and complete sufficiency of the finished work of Christ. They wanted to add in a certain amount of Jewish law-keeping, Pharisee-style (e.g., Acts 15:1, 6). If you boil down what it was that they taught, it amounted to saying that a person needs Christ—but *really*, he needs to be a Jew in order to be a Christian; or, he needs to live like we used to live as Pharisees in order to be a *good* Christian.

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We learn a lot about them from the first time their influence appears in the New Testament. Paul took his First Missionary Journey; he made a circle, went to several places, and founded churches. And if you read the Book of Galatians, you get a good idea of what these people were like. They followed him around and corrupted the Gospel by adding things to it!

The Bible says: You are a sinner (Rom. 3:10-18, 23). "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Receive Christ, receive "forgiveness" for your "sins" (Acts 10:43)—that is the Gospel. "Christ died for our sins...He was buried...He was raised on the third day" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). That is the Gospel. He is a substitute for sin (Is. 53:5-8; Matt. 20:28; Jn. 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). The doctrine of the New Testament is very clear: Salvation from the penalty of your sins is "by grace...through faith" plus nothing (Eph. 2:8-9; cf. Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16).

So, the Judaizers followed Paul around and they said, "Oh, you've heard Paul. Well, he is an Apostle. He is a pretty good one. He is one of the better ones. And we are"—they humbly called themselves—"the Super Apostles. And Paul got you off to a good start. Now, what you *really* need to do is: Believe what he told you, *and* keep these rules and regulations!" Well, there was a big flap after that. It was resolved in what is recorded in Acts Chapter 15, at the Jerusalem Council—which was absolutely clear: Salvation is by grace through faith, plus nothing (Acts 15:11). And anyone who *perverts* the simplicity of that statement is a false teacher (Gal. 1:6-9)—*no matter what they say!*

The "dogs" to which Paul's metaphor refers are unclean and filthy; so are the Judaizers and *all* false teachers, as to their motives. "Dogs" howl and growl and snarl; so do false teachers, who undermine true doctrine with their protestations that *they know even more* than *simplistic* ones like Paul. "Dogs" are greedy and shameless; so are false teachers, who will come in and work hard, and will devour a church if [they are] not driven out.

Second Peter Chapter 2, Verse 1, puts it this way: "But false prophets also arose among the people"—referring to Israel—"just as there *will* also be false teachers among you, who will *secretly* introduce destructive heresies..." They don't come in and *announce* that they are doing it! No cultist ever knocks on your door and says, "Good morning! I would like to lead you to Hell." They will never say that! (see 2 Cor. 11:13-14; cf. Rev. 2:9; 3:9) It's *secret!* (see Matt. 13:25; Gal. 2:4; Eph. 4:14; Jude 4) It's *sinister!* (e.g., 2 Pet. 2:18) They "will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them"—that's interesting—"bringing swift destruction upon themselves." They are willing to *talk* about "the Master"! They are willing to *talk* about Christ! They do not have *any problem* using the term "Jesus Christ." There are buildings that represent cults *all over* our part of the world that have "Jesus Christ" *all over* them; it's just that they *redefine* Him, other than what the Bible says (Matt. 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:4).

"Dogs" are insolent, running in packs. They obey no master. They are cunning at getting what they want. They roam wherever they like—just like "false teachers" who "deny the Master who bought them." They worm their way in by whatever means it takes. They roam from congregation to congregation, repeating their damage over and over.

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Some of the things you don't know are that sometimes, we pastors actually talk to each other. I'll tell you: There is a list of people—I could fill most of a page with them—who, if you could get all of the pastors in the Treasure Valley who have been around here for more than, say, ten years, almost all of us have had an experience with almost all of them coming through, leaving wreckage, going on to the next place, talking about how they were mistreated, misunderstood, misrepresented. It happens. Paul knew about it from Rome, that it was happening in Philippi.

They are "evil workers"; and their doctrine, though it uses biblical words, is as false and damning as it can be. They *are* "bringing swift destruction upon themselves."

Now, come with me to Verse 3. He says: "for we are the *true circumcision*..." There are some metaphors here—using some things to represent other things. "We are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

Now, "circumcision" was God's idea (Acts 7:8). He prescribed it in the Old Testament as a symbol of receiving God's "covenant" (Gen. 17:10-14)—symbolic representation of a spiritual truth. But now that Christ has come, *physical* circumcision is *of no spiritual consequence whatsoever!* The New Testament fulfills the prediction of the Old Testament that there would be a *true* circumcision "of the heart" (Rom. 2:29; cf. Ezek. 36:25-27). *That* is a description of a changed life that comes by faith in Christ. Even *in* the Old Testament—even when physical circumcision *did* matter—God said *true faith* is a *spiritual* thing; the physical is only a representation of it (cf. Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26). Deuteronomy Chapter 30, Verse 6—"Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise *your heart* and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live."

So, "Christian Circumcision"—or, what Philippians 3:3 calls "the true circumcision"—is nothing else and nothing less than a life transformed from the inside out by the grace of God, by living out faith in Jesus Christ (see Rom. 4:9-12).

Another passage that says the same thing: it's Colossians Chapter 2, Verses 10-12. And by the way: Paul wrote Colossians from his jail cell in Rome, so it's going on all over! Speaking of Christ, he says this: "And in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him"—in Christ, by faith in Him—"in Him you were also circumcised with a *circumcision made without hands*..." What a *brilliant* word picture! Do you see the metaphor that is there? "You were...circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the *circumcision of Christ*; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." It's all about *faith!* It is the *spiritual* work that He does.

Prescribing *physical* circumcision as having something to do with being *saved*, or with living a life pleasing to God, is nothing more than prescribing mutilation of the body *as if* doing something physical can wash away sin.

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Did you notice: Philippians Chapter 3, Verse 3, has a threefold description of a truly changed life? Here are things that characterize a person who truly believes:

"For we are the true circumcision, who"—Number 1—"worship in the Spirit of God." We don't worship by means of *physical* rituals! When we came to the Communion Table, I said, "This is *not* meritorious! This *does not* make God like you more. This *does not* gain you a relationship with Him. It is something that is spiritual that we celebrate." Like Jesus said in John Chapter 4, Verse 24: It is worshipping Him "in spirit and truth"—not in a temple and by a ritual, but "in spirit and truth" (cf. Is. 29:13; Mk. 7:6).

Secondly, Philippians 3:3 says: Not only are we the ones who "worship in the Spirit of God," we "glory in Christ Jesus." We point to Him! (see 1 Cor. 2:2) It is all about Him, and Him only—*He* is the One who provides complete "redemption" (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12). And then we ascribe to Him the "glory," the praise, the adoration that is appropriate to Him (Heb. 13:21; 2 Pet. 3:18).

And thirdly: We "put no confidence in the flesh." If you are a true Christian, you shun all works *as means to salvation* (Eph. 2:8-9) or "sanctification" (Rom. 6:22; 1 Cor. 1:30)—making you more holy (see Gal. 3:3; 5:16). We reject man's efforts to please God "apart from" Christ (Jn. 15:5). We stand in Christ; we trust in Him—and that's it.

Not a hard passage. "Welcome" the right people—welcome Timothy, welcome Epaphroditus. "Beware" of the wrong ones—the warning against "the false circumcision."

And now, I want to read Verses 4, 5, and 6 to you as a summary for this, and I want to plant the seed for where we are going next time. Paul says that if anyone in his generation *could have* boasted in his spiritual accomplishments, it was him! Paul was *something*! Paul won the Heisman Trophy of spiritual pride and arrogance and self-righteousness—year after year, as a matter of fact. But he rejected it all in order to have the righteousness which *truly* saves, the "righteousness" provided by "God" in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:9; cf. Is. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Here is what he said [in Verses 4, 5, and 6]: "...although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh." Now, here is what he is saying: These guys that he calls "the false circumcision," the "evil workers," the "dogs"—he says: "They are teaching a self-righteousness, a self-made kind of righteousness. I'll tell you what, guys: I have been down that road," he says. "If *anybody* has ever played that game *the best that it could possibly be played*, it was me!" (see Gal. 3:21) "I myself might have confidence in the flesh, if *anybody* could!" He continues: "If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more..."

And now, he starts listing his quasi-spiritual resumé from before he was a Christian:

"Circumcised the eighth day"—Oh, I bet he was proud of *that* one! How many people have chosen to be "circumcised on the eighty day" of their existence on Earth? *Nobody*! So, what he is saying is: "I had the right pedigree! I came from the right family tree! I got off on the right foot!"

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"Of the nation of Israel"—"I was among the *chosen* people!"

"Of the tribe of Benjamin"—"Why, I even know *which tribe* I came from—and aren't I special because of it?"

"A Hebrew of Hebrews"—"*Nobody* was more exalted and appreciated for what they accomplished than me!"

"As to the Law, a Pharisee"—Do you know there were only a few thousand card-carrying Pharisees in Jesus' time? And they were the ones who were *so good*; they had really long arms, because they developed them from patting themselves on the back all the time for all the things that they accomplished (e.g., Lk. 18:11-12). They were the ones who, *not only*—they *thought*—obeyed all the rules of the Scriptures (because they did not understand them correctly), they added *hundreds* more to it—things that God forgot to put in the Bible, to tell you how to be *really* spiritual (e.g., Matt. 23:23; Mk. 7:3-7). That's the Pharisees.

"As to zeal," he says: "Look, I took this so far that when this 'Jesus' guy came along, and when these Apostles came along, and they started *corrupting* what we were teaching, and they started dragging people away—'as to zeal,' I took it to its logical conclusion: I was 'a persecutor of the church!'" What was Paul doing when he got saved? He was on his way to the city of Damascus with papers authorizing him to throw Christians in jail; or worse, to attack them physically (see Acts 22:4-5; 26:9-12; 1 Cor. 15:9).

He says: "As to the righteousness which is in the Law"—now, listen to this—"found blameless." Now, don't get that wrong. Paul *does not mean*: "I had achieved salvation before I came to Christ." He *does not mean* that. He does not mean: "I was not to be blamed before God." " 'As to the righteousness which is in the Law'—what do I mean by that? Ask any Pharisee. As to *keeping their rules*, I was top dog!" But, even being declared "blameless" by the definition of manmade rules and spiritual exercises *falls totally short* of pleasing God (cf. Matt. 23:28).

And when we look into the *next* section—another one of those favorite passages in Philippians that I have been looking forward to since we started, which seems to be always the one that I am studying this week—he says: "Do you know what I thought of all of that when I met the true Christ? *Rubbish!* It means *nothing!*"

Woven into our passage that we just looked at are components of spiritual vitality:

You could make an application here of teamwork. Timothy and Epaphroditus were important team members. They would have probably never been anywhere *near* as effective if they had not teamed up with Paul.

You can make an application about mentoring—building your life into other people.

You can make an application about mentoring—looking for the right mentor.

Sermon Title: Welcome Or Beware
Scripture Text: Philippians 2:19-3:6 (Philippians #9)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-14-10

You can make an application about teamwork—that Paul, though he was in prison in Rome, by means of dispatching Timothy and dispatching Epaphroditus and dispatching others, could accomplish so much.

You could make applications about leadership—Paul caring for the people that had been touched by the Gospel; not only his team right there, but even people hundreds of miles away.

You could make application about Paul's disappointment over those who disqualified themselves from service. That is another aspect of the concern of godly leaders; it's another aspect of the reality of serving Christ.

And the strength of the warning in the beginning of Chapter 3 shows another component of spiritual health: doctrinal clarity and purity. You know, it is just not *posh* today to say, "Beware of those 'dogs'!" But there *are* "dogs." "Beware of those 'evil workers'!" There *are* people who will *work hard to fool you* into thinking that they are doing good things. Good shepherds not only care for the sheep, they also warn them about predators, and they protect them from attacks.

Take your role, whatever it is—to somebody, you might be like Paul was to Timothy or Epaphroditus.

Take your role, whatever it is—you may *be* a Timothy or an Epaphroditus, who extends the influence that someone else could have. You might be a member of the team, like somebody whose name is not mentioned here.

But get on board, whatever it is. We are a *unit*. We are "one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28). Think of us like a flight on its way to soar wherever the pilot desires to take us. How would we feel if we knew we had a terrorist or a saboteur who had slipped on board? We would want to take care of that, wouldn't we? Or, what if we thought we were going to run a little bit short of fuel, and we found out we had a couple tons of dead weight on board? We would want to deal with it, wouldn't we?

You see, even the simple things here are so practical. "Welcome Or Beware." Which one would be said of you if you were to be transferred to another church in another place? "Welcome" or "Beware"?

Let's pray:

Our Father, how we thank You for Your grace that is ours in Christ. Thank You for these who laid the foundation: Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, all the others through which You have done such amazing things. And we know that You will do those same things today, by the power of Your Word spoken truthfully and in love by Your people. So, send us where there are needs, we pray, and put the words of grace upon our lips. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.