

Dear Philippians, IX

Legalism: A Real Killjoy

March 30, 2003

ROMAN LATRINES

The purpose of the history lessons is to remind us that we're not studying fairytales; today's lesson really brings this home!

This is a public latrine at the ancient Agora in Philippi and it was most likely patronized by Paul, Timothy, Luke, and Silas.

The Roman waste management system was so sophisticated that some parts are still in use today in Italy.

- Running water under the seats flushed away the scubalon.

A narrow floor-trough of running water rinsed communal sponge-tipped washing-sticks, which were then "sanitized" in buckets of saltwater.

Now Paul launches an aggressive attack against those who would rob Christians of their joy through the poison of legalism.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh – ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. – Philippians 3:1-11 NIV

THOSE DOGS!

- The “dogs” Paul is warning about are Judaizers.

They pressured Christians to follow the Law of Moses, as well as believing in Christ, so as to complete their salvation.

- They strictly advocated circumcision.
- These were Paul’s greatest opponents.

As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves! – Galatians 5:12 NIV

Paul is very graphic and passionate because he considered them the worst kind of wolves in sheep’s clothing ... Emasculate means castrate.

- They perverted the very essence of salvation by grace.
- And they’re teaching Paul’s converts to do so as well.

These evil men prided themselves on being kosher (ritually pure) so Paul labels them as dogs, a very un-kosher (unclean) animal.

TRUE CIRCUMCISION

- Paul says they are merely “mutilators of the flesh.”

The true law-keepers, the genuinely pure, according to Paul are those who find their righteousness in Christ alone.

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh ... - Philippians 3:3 NIV

Circumcision was a symbolic mark of God’s people. But now the work of Christ unites God with man – that is the reality that circumcision simply symbolized. True Israel is not a state of birth, but a state of grace.

... a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. – Romans 2:29 NIV

Paul didn’t take the way of grace because he couldn’t handle the law; on the contrary, he far exceeded the expectations.

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more ...
- Philippians 3:4 NIV

DANGERS OF LEGALISM

Many Pharisees were sincere God-fearing men. So much so, that they took the Ten Commandments and expanded them into 619 rules.

- A good Pharisee wouldn't eat an egg laid on the Sabbath!
- A good Pharisee wouldn't scratch an itch on the Sabbath!

But they put their eternal confidence in their own ability to gain God's acceptance through their external actions.

You couldn't walk more than 2000 cubits to a neighbor's house, unless you had connected it to your home with a rope; making it technically part of your house; and God would overlook it!

- Paul's encounter with Christ turned his life upside-down.

Legalism tries to change God's attitude toward me; Jesus wants me to change my attitude toward God.

- Obedience in response to His acceptance is worthy.
- Obedience to secure God's acceptance is worthless.

I can't influence God's love and acceptance; but by changing my attitude and walking in obedience I can change the opportunities He has to bless me and work in and through me.

LEGALISM IS RUBBISH

I should feel gratification and satisfaction from my obedience to God. But I must not think it changes how He feels toward me. I must always keep in mind:

- Religion is mankind's attempt to get to God.
- Jesus Christ is God's attempt to get to man.

Q: In your life, do you tend to focus more on what God has done for you, or the things you must do for God?

Q: Do you ever feel like you're scoring points through obedience?

When I'm unsatisfied with my walk, I might assume God's a little less accepting. But, He *really* adores me when I'm doing well.

Legalism can creep into our lives. That's why Paul says to watch out for those dogs!

Be on guard against anything in your faith that causes an inner sense of self-importance or insignificance. What Paul once believed to have eternal value (circumcision, heritage, adherence to 619 rules) he now realizes only served to displace Christ and therefore disqualify him from grace.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish ... - *Philippians 3:7-9 NIV*

- They're more than useless in this respect, they're offensive.

Rubbish is a polite translation. Can you guess what Paul actually considered them? Scubalon, this is the stuff that was flushed away. It's a vulgar term that stresses the force of renunciation Paul was making in regard to striving for self-righteousness.

- From one who can easily beat the Judaizers at their own game comes this emphatic declaration that it's the wrong game!

Now that he's given up what he once counted as profit, he looks back and realizes he was holding onto all the wrong things.

- What he really gave up was struggle, guilt, and shame.
- He gained forgiveness, cleansing, and clear conscious.

KNOWING CHRIST

- Paul now has a singular goal:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death ... - *Philippians 3:10 NIV*

His obedience has been super-charged with the understanding that he's already loved and accepted.

- There is a power, resilience, and an assurance that can only come through response-based obedience.

There are no rules, rituals, or religious regulations that can substitute for an authentic relationship with Christ.