

# **PHILIPPIANS: REPLACING SELFISH AMBITION WITH GODLY ACHIEVEMENT**

## **Part VIII: Paul's Call To True Versus False Spirituality**

### **(Philippians 3:1-7)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. As we have often noted in this lesson series, the Philippian believers lived in a culture marked by selfish ambition and strife, what tempted them to relate to one another in a sinfully selfish way, cf. Philippians 4:2.
- B. The selfish mindset is mindset of a false spirituality, and the Judaizers who promoted the Mosaic Law's rules and practices particularly represented such an artificial spirituality before Paul's readers at Philippi.
- C. Paul addressed this problem in Philippians 3:1-7, contrasting true versus false spirituality (as follows):

#### **II. Paul's Call To True Versus False Spirituality, Philippians 3:1-7.**

- A. The Apostle Paul directed his readers to rejoice in the Lord, Philippians 3:1a. This command is reflected in Paul's statement in Philippians 3:3b where Paul was contrasting the believer's ideal experience with that of legalistic Judaizers, cf. Philippians 3:2.
- B. What Paul was about to repeat what he had previously told his readers of Jewish legalism was necessary for their spiritual safety (Philippians 3:1b). This indicated that the false spirituality of the Judaizers was not only lacking in joy, but was spiritually harmful to the inner man and to the believer's Christian walk.
- C. Accordingly, Paul urged his readers to beware of "dogs," to beware of "evil workers," to beware of "the concision" (KJV), all three warnings regarding the legalistic Judaizers (as follows), Philippians 3:2:
  - 1. The Jews commonly called Gentiles "dogs," animals considered unclean, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 659. Paul thus applied this term to the Judaistic legalists themselves since they were spiritually unclean!
  - 2. Those of the "concision" refers to "mutilators of the flesh," Judaizers who insisted on one's being physically circumcised to relate to God beyond the Lord's requirement that men are saved by faith apart from works and please God in a life of faith, Ibid. (cf. Acts 15:1-29)
  - 3. The term "evil workers" would thus relate like the other two terms to the evil legalistic Judaizers, Ibid.
- D. In contrast, believers in Christ are of the true "circumcision" of God with its **non legalistic** character, v. 3:
  - 1. True spirituality is marked by worshiping God by means of the Holy Spirit of God, Philippians 3:3a ESV.
  - 2. True spirituality is marked by glorying in Christ versus glorying in physical circumcision, Phil. 3:3b ESV.
  - 3. True spirituality is marked by putting no confidence in the believer's natural pedigree or human works, the "flesh" as Paul termed it in Philippians 3:3c, and what he then explained in Philippians 3:4-7 (as follows):
    - a. Paul had reason from the human perspective to have far more confidence in his "flesh" than others, v. 4.
    - b. To clarify, he noted that from his human pedigree alone, he was of sterling stock, Philippians 3:5a,b,c,d:
      - i. Paul had been circumcised the eighth day, stressing that he was not a proselyte to Judaism who had been circumcised as an adult or an Ishmaelite who was circumcised at age 13 (Gen. 17:25-26), but that he had been born a Hebrew, Philippians 3:5a; Ibid., p. 660.
      - ii. Paul was of the people of Israel, both of his parents being true Jews whose lineage could be traced back to Abraham unlike some of Paul's Judaizer critics, Philippians 3:5b; Ibid.
      - iii. Paul was a Benjamite, a tribe of special honor among the Jews because even when the Davidic kingdom had split between Israel and Judah, Benjamin had remained loyal to the house of David in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Philippians 3:5c; Ibid.
      - iv. Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, not adopting Greek customs like some Jews, but thoroughly knowing the language and customs of the people of God, Philippians 3:5d; Ibid.
    - c. Paul had also made choices in life that meant he was of sterling works from man's perspective, v. 5e-6:
      - i. He was a Pharisee, the most theologically conservative sect of his people, Philippians 3:5e;
      - ii. He was so zealous as a Pharisee that he even persecuted the church, Philippians 3:6a.
      - iii. His zeal also left him faultless in heeding the law from man's perspective, Philippians 3:6b.
    - d. However, Paul counted all his humanly sterling pedigree and works in life as loss for Christ's sake, v. 7.

***Lesson:*** Paul warned believers to avoid the false spirituality of Judaizer legalists who relied on human pedigree and troubling works for righteousness but lacked real joy in the Lord and was harmful to the inner man, and he called them to a walk of worshiping God in the Holy Spirit and joyfully glorying in the Lord Jesus Christ.

***Application:*** May we avoid false spiritualities that rely on human pedigree and troubling works for righteousness but lack joy in the Lord and harm the inner man and worship God in the Holy Spirit and joyfully glory in Christ.