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# LEGALISM

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Welcome to chapter three! Hopefully you've learned a great deal of new spiritual truths from chapters one and two of Philippians! Chapter three is just as insightful! Paul is transitioning from the mind of Christ, the believer's attitude and his protégés Timothy and Epaphroditus in chapter two to the differences between spiritual and carnal operation in chapter three. He uses many examples including himself to illustrate the differences between the spiritual and the carnal. Let's read our verses in Philippians 3:1-3 which say,

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

Paul begins chapter three with a command to “rejoice in the Lord.” He is still speaking to believers, his brethren, and instructs them to rejoice. In the Greek, the word for rejoice is ‘chairete’ which comes from the word grace. Part of rejoicing is living with an attitude of grace. To be technical, Paul uses the present tense which is a continuous action. We are to have a continuous attitude of rejoicing! It is a command! Let's look at 7 points that will help us understand the mechanics for having an attitude of continual rejoicing.

## Mechanics for Continuous Rejoicing

1) Our joy is to be “In the Lord.” There is no real joy outside of Christ. All things outside of Him will pass away. (Philippians 3:1, 4:4, 4:10)

- 2) Joy is a relaxed mental attitude that knows and claims the promises of God with confidence. When we have confidence in those promises, we have peace and joy because we know the character of the One making those promises. (Romans 8:28, 1 Thes. 5:18)
  
- 3) That confidence, or faith, is required to have peace. Peace is the prerequisite to joy. The first phrase of Romans 8:28 is “...And we know...” When we have confidence in Him, peace and joy are the result.
  
- 4) Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Therefore, we must be spending time studying the Word of God.
  
- 5) The absence of joy is in reality the absence of peace. The absence of peace is the absence of faith, and faith comes by hearing the word of God, so if we lack joy, it is probable we aren't in the Word enough.
  
- 6) The doctrine of faith is the key factor if we lack of joy. Therefore Paul's admonition to have continual joy comes wrapped in an admonition to have continual faith.
  
- 7) In order for faith to be productive, the believer must be oriented to grace. The object of our faith must be God's grace.

In conclusion, Paul's command to have an attitude of continual joy is also a command to be continually oriented to grace so much so that our faith is in the provision and resources of God. It is only when we completely rely on and trust in God that our joy will be found. It will be because of who He is and not who we are!

**In your own words, explain what it looks like to be continuously joyous. How is grace intertwined in joy?**

Let's look at Paul's next statement. "To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you." Have you ever been frustrated at your kids after having asked them to do the same thing over and over again? Or told them something over and over again? I know I have. Here, Paul is recognizing that he is repeating the doctrine he is about to give them, but it is not frustrating to him. He has patience with them. We know he is looking out for their best interest because he says, "it is a safeguard for you." He is not worried about how the repetition affects him, but is focused on helping the believers.

**Are you focused on yourself or on others? At home, at work, at church, in the community, who is your focus?**

The things Paul says he is repeating are concerning legalism and legalists. First Paul instructs us to have a continual attitude of joy. It is impossible, if we are being legalistic, to remain joyous. Like we looked at, joy demands an attitude of faith and orientation to grace. Legalism does not fall into either of those categories. In fact, Paul tells us to 'beware' of legalism and legalists. The Greek word is 'blepete' which means 'to see with understanding.' Paul wants us to know and understand what legalism looks like so we can avoid it. Let's look at what Paul says about the legalists.

#### Qualities of a Legalist

1) He calls them Dogs: According to the Mosaic Law dogs were considered unclean animals. The Jews also used this term for the gentiles because they weren't fit for the kingdom. Here, Paul is using the same term to describe the legalistic Jews. They depended on their own righteousness which is unclean to God. Romans 10:1-3, Isaiah 64:6

2) He calls them Evil Workers: Paul is referencing behavior. During the writing of his letter, Jews were content to practice ritual religion without letting it affect their relationship with God. Christ taught against these practices. Matthew 23:13-16, 23-33

3) He calls them false circumcision: Let's take a quick look why this was a legalistic term.

a) God used circumcision with Abraham and Abraham's family as a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant in which God promised He would multiply his offspring and provide land. Genesis 17:1-14

b) Circumcision, the cutting of the foreskin of the male reproductive organ, was used to emphasize the seed of Abraham.

c) It was symbolic of separating oneself from the flesh. We use 1 John 1:9 today.

d) It was a sign of imputed righteousness according to Romans 4:11.

e) To the Jew circumcision, in some ways, would be similar to water baptism to the believer. (1 Peter 3:21) Water baptism is a sign of a spiritual covenant with God for a believer.

f) Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham and was performed on the male on the eighth day. The number eight is the number of new beginnings.

In conclusion, the Jews performed circumcision as a ritual but did not attach its spiritual significance to the practice.

Paul warns that legalism, like false circumcision is ritualistic and not spiritual. As Christians we should practice spirituality through fellowship and not just the rituals we perform in church or when others are watching.

**How is legalism present in your life?**

Let's take a quick look at verse three before we close. Paul says that those who perform rituals without spirituality are the false circumcision while those who worship God in Spirit and truth are the true circumcision. Without spirituality and fellowship with God we would not be able to worship God. It is only when we are controlled by the Holy Spirit that we can worship God and our actions will bring Him glory.

In the next part of the verse, Paul tells us that the true circumcision will “glory in Christ Jesus.” The word for glory means ‘rejoice.’ Remember our examination of a continual attitude of joy? This comes in the sphere of Christ Jesus. The true circumcision, those who practice true spirituality, have a continual attitude of rejoicing because they are in Christ Jesus.

Lastly, Paul says that those who are part of the true circumcision “put no confidence in the flesh.” We should not put confidence in our own abilities the way legalists do.

**Read Ephesians 2:8-13.**

Nothing we do earns salvation. Nothing we do keeps us righteous. Nothing we do will put us back in fellowship apart from confession of sin. It is all God, His mercy, faithfulness and righteousness that give us salvation and the resources to live the Christian life. Let us remember that legalism will get us nowhere. Let us recognize and understand that living on our own resources won't bring joy.

**How can you remove legalism from your life?**

**End today by thanking God that He knows all things and will give you His strength to do what He asks you to do.**

REVIEW

~ Rejoice in the Lord – Continuous action done only when we are in Christ, in the Word, with faith and peace resulting in joy. Philippians 3:1, 4:4, 4:10, Romans 8:28, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Romans 10:17

~ Paul is concerned for the believers and not for himself.

~ Legalists are dogs: Unclean animals unfit for the Kingdom.

~ Legalists are evil workers: Their behavior is ritualistic and not spiritual.

~ Legalists are the false circumcision: They perform the ritual but do not let it affect their spiritual life.

~ The true Circumcision worships God in Spirit.

~ The true Circumcision rejoices in Christ Jesus.

~ The true Circumcision puts no confidence in their own abilities. Ephesians 2:8-13