

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



"All Other Ground is Sinking Sand"

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 3:1-9; 1:26; Gal. 3:1-9; 6:12-15; John 4:23-24; Rom. 2:25-29

There are some things we simply need to hear again. We may think we already know them. We may have heard them preached, underlined them in our Bible, and even lived by them for years. But some truths are so foundational that we cannot afford to assume they are settled merely because they are familiar. Anyone who has raised children knows the feeling. You begin saying something you have said a hundred times before, and you can almost see the eyes beginning to roll: "Yes, yes, I know." But sometimes the response has to be, "No, you need to hear the heart of what I'm saying." That is something like the way Paul opens chapter 3: *"Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! To keep writing the same things to you is not troublesome for me—but for you it is a safeguard"* (Phil. 3:1). Paul is saying, in effect, "I'm happy to preach this again, because you need this."

The word translated "safeguard," *asphalēs*, carries the idea of keeping someone from falling or being tripped up. Paul repeats himself because there are things that can trip believers up, and one of the most dangerous is the temptation to move our confidence away from Messiah and begin placing it in ourselves. That is why he immediately follows with three sharp warnings: *"Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil workers! Beware of the mutilation!"* (Phil. 3:2). There were people telling the Gentile believers at Philippi that faith in Yeshua was good, but somehow not enough. They needed something more. Paul says, "Watch out." The moment we begin building our confidence on something other than Yeshua, we are on sinking ground.

1. WE WORSHIP BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Paul begins by saying, *"For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship by the Ruach Elohim..."* (Phil. 3:3). This is not about Jews being replaced by Gentiles. Paul himself is Jewish, and within the next few verses he emphasizes his Jewish identity strongly. The question here is not, "Are you Jewish or Gentile?" The question is, "Upon what are you depending for righteousness?" Paul says that the people of God are marked by a life lived and offered to God through His Spirit. Yeshua had said, *"But an hour is coming—it is here now—when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth"* (John 4:23). The worship Paul describes is bigger than what happens when a congregation gathers and sings. It is the service of God expressed through the way we actually live before Him.

That brings us directly back to everything Paul has already been teaching in Philippians. Worship by the Spirit looks like putting the interests of others ahead of ourselves. It looks like refusing selfish ambition and empty glory. It looks like having the mind of Messiah Yeshua. Ritual can never substitute for that. Religious activity can never replace the transforming work of the *Ruach* within us. That is why Scripture speaks of circumcision of the heart. Paul writes, *"Rather, the Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—in Spirit not in letter. His praise is not from men, but from God"* (Rom. 2:29). The real question is

not merely what outward things we do, but whether the Spirit of God is forming the likeness of Messiah within us.

2. WE GLORY IN MESSIAH YESHUA

Paul continues, “...and glory in Messiah Yeshua...” (Phil. 3:3). The word translated “glory” carries the sense of boasting, confidence, or putting our full trust in something and therefore glorying in it. Paul is not talking about conceit. He is talking about where we locate the thing in which we ultimately trust. What allows us to stand before God and say, “Here is my confidence”? Paul’s answer is unmistakable: Messiah Yeshua. Not my religious résumé. Not my heritage. Not my discipline. Not how much Scripture I know, what congregation I belong to, or how many practices I keep. Those things may have value when they flow from love and obedience, but they are terrible foundations for righteousness. Our boast is Messiah.

That is where religiosity becomes so insidious. We can take beautiful things intended to draw us toward God and slowly begin using them to measure ourselves against other people. “We do this. They don’t. We understand this. They don’t.” Before long, the thing that was supposed to be worship has become a reason to feel superior. Paul will have none of it. He told the Galatians, “*But may I never boast—except in the cross of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah*” (Gal. 6:14). The things we do in obedience to God should be acts of worship, never trophies we hold over someone else. We worship, obey, study, serve, and walk faithfully because we belong to Him—not so that we can prove ourselves more righteous than somebody else.

3. WE PUT NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

Paul completes the thought by saying that we “...have not depended on the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). Then, almost as though someone might respond, “That is easy for you to say,” Paul lays his résumé on the table. “*If anyone else thinks he might depend on the flesh, I far more—circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel; from the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the Torah, a Pharisee*” (Phil. 3:4–5). He goes on to speak of his zeal and of being found blameless in regard to Torah righteousness. Paul is saying, “If we are going to turn this into a competition about religious credentials, I can play that game. If anyone could build a case for confidence in the flesh, I could.”

And then he does something remarkable. He takes the trophies and throws them away. “*But whatever things were gain to me, these I have considered as loss for the sake of the Messiah*” (Phil. 3:7). Once Paul saw Messiah clearly, all of those things changed value. Compared with Yeshua, the trophies became a pieces of plastic. Compared with knowing Messiah, the résumé became worthless as a foundation for righteousness. That does not mean everything Paul had done was evil or worthless; it means none of it could carry the weight of his confidence before God. And neither can ours. Our accomplishments cannot hold us. Our religious practices cannot save us. Our knowledge cannot make us righteous. There is only one foundation strong enough to carry the weight of our lives: Messiah Yeshua. All other ground is sinking sand.

CONCLUSION

Paul says he is willing to preach this again because he does not want the Philippians to be tripped up. He knows how easily human beings drift from grace into comparison, from dependence into self-confidence, and from worship into religion. We start with the Spirit and then begin trying to finish in the flesh. We begin rejoicing in the Lord and, almost without realizing it, start rejoicing in our accomplishments. Paul says, “Watch out.” Rejoice in the Lord. Worship by His Spirit. Glory in Messiah Yeshua. Put no confidence in the flesh. Hear it again and again, because this truth is a safeguard.

Perhaps that is where some of us need to come before the Lord today. Ask Him honestly, “Where have I placed my confidence?” Maybe you have quietly begun believing that you are acceptable to God because you have been good enough, disciplined enough, knowledgeable enough, or religious enough. Or perhaps someone else’s credentials have made you feel second-rate. Bring all of that to Yeshua. Lay down the trophies, and lay down the shame. Stop standing on ground that was never meant to carry you. Let the Spirit search your heart, and put your full confidence again in Messiah Yeshua. He is enough. His work is enough. His grace is enough. Build there—and nowhere else.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Paul say that repeating these truths is a “safeguard” for the Philippian believers? What danger is he trying to protect them from?
2. According to Phil. 3:3, what three characteristics identify those whose lives are truly centered in God?
3. What is the difference between practicing something as an act of worship and depending upon that practice as a source of righteousness or spiritual superiority?
4. Are there accomplishments, religious practices, traditions, knowledge, ministry roles, or personal disciplines that you are sometimes tempted to use as evidence that you are more acceptable to God—or more spiritual than someone else?
5. Have you ever allowed another believer’s background, knowledge, practices, or spiritual résumé to make you feel “less-than” or second-class? How does Paul’s message in Phil. 3:1–7 speak to that feeling?

CLOSING PRAYER

ADONAI, search our hearts and show us where our confidence truly rests. Forgive us for the ways we have tried to build our identity on our accomplishments, our religious practices, our knowledge, our heritage, or the approval of others. Keep us from being tripped up by anything that would move our confidence away from Yeshua. Teach us to worship You by the Your Spirit, to glory in Messiah Yeshua alone, and to put no confidence in the flesh. Deliver us from comparison, pride, and the fear that we are somehow not enough. Form the likeness of Messiah within us. May our obedience flow from love, our service flow from Your Spirit, and our confidence rest completely in what Yeshua has done. Everything else is sinking sand. Keep our feet firmly planted upon Him.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.