

Broomfield



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The Attributes of a Deceiver

Philippians 3:2

Acts 5 gives this account of Gamaliel's counsel regarding the imprisoned apostles:

Acts 5:35-39, "And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

Gamaliel's counsel was that this is but one of many groups of individuals who have come on the scene claiming a new religion. Each has risen, attracted its followers, and then died. Let them alone. If this is of man it will perish, and if it is of God, we ought not to oppose it.

This was wise counsel coming from Gamaliel. However it was counsel which reflected the Roman culture of the first century A.D. Dr. Franzmann wrote this:

"Paul and his companions were not the only propagandists and pleaders for a cause that traveled the Roman roads in those days; they were part of a numerous and motley troop of philosophers, rhetoricians, propagandists for various foreign and domestic cults, missionaries, charlatans, and quacks who went from town to town, all intent on getting a hearing, all eager for money or fame or both. These usually came and went, never to be heard from again."

And so, the ancient world was saturated with gurus, philosophers, holy men, and more. All of them were pleading for a cause.

Now as long as these "pleaders" stayed in the realm of philosophy or pagan religion that was fine. However, when they began creeping into the church — using Christ as a means to gather a following — the alarms started going off.

Acts 20:29-31a, “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember.”

Jude 4, “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 John 7, “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

From these warnings it is obvious that even at the start of the New Testament era, deceivers had infiltrated the church. We see them in the churches of Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and Thessalonica. Consequently, we know them by a variety of names: Pleadings with a cause, super saints. Super Apostles, Judaizers, and deceivers.

Now it was against these deceivers that Paul wrote Philippians 3:2.

Philippians 3:2, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.”

Scholarship is quite united in its belief that this passage is describing one and the same person: The "Christian" pleader for a cause, the false teacher, and the DECEIVER.

Unfortunately where there isn't a unity today in the church is whether or not the deceiver actually exists in our generation. We are such a gullible people. As long as it has a "fish" sign on it, it must be Christian. Besides, who am I that I should judge another person or church? As long as their heart is in the right place, what's the big deal?

This makes it easy to read a passage like this, affirm how serious it is, but then fail to see how it applies. However Paul gives us a description of a deceiver with the intention that we not only will see how this passage applies, but we will also be warned against the many who in the words of Paul are “enemies of the cross of Christ.”¹

Deceivers Consume Other People

Philippians 3:2, “**Beware² of dogs³**, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.”

In Paul's day dogs were not “man's best friend.” They were wild scavenging animals that plagued ancient cities. The Romans hated them, and so did the Jews. And they had good cause.

Dogs roamed in packs. They ate whatever street garbage and refuse they could find.⁴ And occasionally if

¹ Compare Philippians 3:18

² βλέπω blepo

³ κύων kuon

a weak or helpless individual was out alone at night, a canine pack also could be known to attack and eat them!

Today in a country that spends millions each year on its pets, few of us view dogs in this manner. However, still it is not unheard of to read of a pack of common, ordinary house dogs roaming and attacking the unsuspecting.

Insofar as a pack of dogs is dangerous, vicious, and unpredictable, we also must be aware of "dogs" when it comes to Christianity. And yet, what is a "dog" when it comes to the church?

Clearly the Scriptures reference any and all of the "Christian" charlatans of Paul's day. There is a pattern in Scripture when referencing "dogs" which indicates an emphasis when it comes to this word.

Psalm 22:16, "For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet."

Psalm 22:19-21, "But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog."

This Psalm is one of the most vivid prophecies of the crucifixion of Christ. And whether you take this passage in reference to David's enemies or those of Christ's we must conclude that dogs are enemies. They opposed David. They opposed Christ. In other words, though they may be well-intentioned, nevertheless they are enemies of Christ!

Yet again we have another text which references *dog*.

Proverbs 26:11, "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly."

The significance of *dog* in this context is in realizing that the *fool* in Psalms and Proverbs represents a certain kind of person. The wise man is as the believer who knows and understands the truth. The simpleton or the naive is as the immature believer who though saved lacks discernment. The fool is as the non-believer who has set himself against God.

Psalm 14:1, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good."

In light of these passages I want you to notice that Proverbs 26:11 equates the fool — the non-believer — with the dog. In other words, according to this passage, the deceiver — the dog — not only is an enemy of God, but clearly is a non-believer.

Matthew 7 gives us a New Testament description of the deceiver from the mouth of Christ.

Matthew 7:6, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

Dogs and swine are one in the same. They are people who oppose God's truth and view it contemptuously. Not only is a dog an enemy of the cross of Christ — an unbeliever — but he is also one

⁴ Compare Exodus 22:31, 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:23-34

who looks contemptuously upon the things of the Lord. Therefore it is no wonder that we read this in Titus.

Titus 3:10-11, “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.”

This is a description of the final state when we shall see the Lord face to face. Notice the words of Revelation 22:14-15:

Revelation 22:14-15, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.”

From this passage we conclude that dogs are not only enemies, unbelievers, and people who look contemptuously upon the things of God, but also people whom God hates!

This is the description of the deceiver⁵. As dogs are unclean and filthy, so are deceivers in their motives. They howl, snarl and raise angry voices against the true doctrine of God. They eat and devour people. These false brethren live off the people of God.

Now you say, "This is such a graphic description! Who couldn't spot a deceiver?" Yet, the fact that Paul has to warn the Philippians about them indicates that at first glance their appearance will not betray them. Indeed, from all outward appearances they will be fine men and women who may even profess a love for the Lord. What will set them apart will be their eventual consuming, biting, and devouring of people.

To a dog, the church is just another meal. The people of God present another opportunity to feed their pride, egos, and their appetite for the praises of men. They come to a church offering much. They want to do this and that. They can sing and serve. And thus are so quickly accepted into the ministry of a church. The problem is that for them, that is all the church is for — a platform for **their** service.

They are not disciples of the Lord. They are not men and women with a genuine hunger and thirst for righteousness. They are not men and women who hate sin and cling to righteousness. Rather they are one's who attend church to get in the name of "giving." We must "beware of the dogs!"

Deceivers Aspire to Positions of Authority

Philippians 3:2, “Beware of dogs, **beware of evil** workers⁶, beware of the concision.”

Once again as with *dog*, the nomenclature that Paul uses here finds its explanation in the Psalms⁸. For example Psalm 13.

Psalm 13:3-4, “Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; Lest mine **enemy** say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice

⁵ Compare Psalm 59:6, 14

⁶ κακος kakos

⁷ εργατης ergates

⁸ Compare Psalms 58:2, 5

when I am moved.”

To “rejoice when someone is shaken” truly is an evil working. As that is the case, notice how David refers to the evil workers of his day: enemy. This is just like the title *dog*. However, there is a distinction with the description of an *evil worker*.

Psalm 35:11-14, “False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not. They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.”

Clearly the *evil workers* that David mentioned were his enemies. We learn that they evidently were at one time close companions. They had been people for whom David even prayed and called a brother! And this is where our focus of the deceiver is sharpened. As a *dog* they consume the church. As an *evil worker* they are subtle in their consumption. They creep in unaware. They are wonderful in their appearance — so much so that we may even consider them our friends. In fact, it is their subtlety that opens the door to their modus operandi.

Psalm 52:1-4, “Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually. Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah. Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue.”

Again the evil worker is betrayed by his tongue. The Psalmist says, “YOU LOVE ALL WORDS THAT DEVOUR, O DECEITFUL TONGUE.”

Here the evil worker is identified as one who leads people astray with their tongues/mouths. The deceivers are not just pew-sitters, they eye positions of authority which empower them to exert their authority via their tongue. They are much like their father, Satan, who attempts to conquer the world with a deceitful tongue.⁹

Matthew 7:15-16, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”

The focus of an *evil worker* is that he seeks a following. He wants to be in leadership. He is a false prophet/teacher that feeds off other’s allegiance. As a dog, he consumes people. As an evil worker, he consumes their minds!

You might be tempted to think that the deceiver would be easy to spot. Yet that obviously isn't the case which is why Paul exhorts here, "Beware of the evil worker!"

In fact, as Christ said in Matthew, the only way to identify a deceiver/evil worker is by their fruit. And that is the scary part. If the only way to identify a deceiver is by his fruit, then that means they first will have some sort of a ministry in the body of Christ. That being the case, the potential is there for them to create a following and thus to do great harm!

⁹ Compare Revelation 20:3-7

This brings us to the final attribute that Paul gives us here of the deceiver.

The Deceivers Proclaim a False Gospel

Philippians 3:2, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, **beware of the concision**¹⁰.”

Literally this means “beware of the mutilation.” The word for *circumcision* in the Greek¹¹ means “to cut around.” Here the word *concision*, *mutilation* means, “to cut to pieces.” It is this very derogatory word that Paul uses throughout his writings to refer to ones who specifically base their salvation on circumcision. Let me give you the background.

Shortly after the resurrection of Christ, a very difficult question was raised in the early church: How can a Gentile become a follower of Christ? Recall that the early church was first made up of Jews. They were the ones who claimed to be the sons of Abraham. They were guides to the blind and the teachers of the foolish. Now, many professing Christians answered the question by saying, “before you can get to the New Testament, you have to go through the Old Testament.” This meant that for a Gentile to be saved by Christ — the Messiah — they first had to be circumcised.

This debate came to a head in Jerusalem around 50 A.D.

Acts 15:1-2, “And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, **Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.** When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.”

Acts 15:4-5, “And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, **That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.**”

After a couple of speeches and an obviously lengthy debate, the apostles and elders all agreed that the Gentile could only be saved through faith alone in Christ alone! And thus they ended the council with this speech.

Acts 15:19, “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:”

Now you would think that this would have settled the problem, but it didn't. Instead sects of Jewish "believers" held to the former, claiming that Christ would only be of benefit if you were circumcised. As such, everywhere Paul went these false circumcision, these DECEIVERS — or as Paul called them — these mutilators followed him.

Were they in Philippi? If they hadn't arrived already, they soon would be there. And thus, Paul warns the Philippians to look out for the mutilators. Now translated to our day, what/who are the false-

¹⁰ κατατομη katatome

¹¹ περιτομη peritome

circumcision?

1 Timothy 4:1-3, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”

Whatever else we might say about the deceiver, they clearly are ones who promote moralism as the avenue of God's blessing. As the dog (the deceiver) feeds off the people the evil worker will aspire to positions of authority. These mutilators of the flesh (the deceiver) endeavors to place burdens upon the backs of people too heavy to bear.

They can be heard saying, "For a man to be accepted before God they must not touch, taste, do this or that. Rather they must say such and such and do this or that. Go here or there." This family of God is the rhetoric and teaching of the deceiver — “If you want God’s blessings, you must do this or that!”

And that brings us to ourselves, this church, and our walks with God.

This passage is sobering. Not only because it describes the characteristics of the deceiver — of whom we ought to beware — but it also requires that we examine ourselves so that we can identify within ourselves their characteristics, practices, and teachings.

Who here has not been offended at being neglected by others? How many of us have not received the praise that we think is our due? How many of us have not sought a platform for disseminating our opinion? Who among us has not related to God on the basis of some standard of moral conduct? Who has said Christians don’t do this or don’t do that? Who hasn’t thought that because I have neither done this or that, God must love me? Who among us hasn’t viewed the church as a means of blessing? Who hasn’t thought “Because I have done such and such, God owes me?”

Though Paul is describing Deceivers in this passage of whom we ought to beware, nevertheless as fallen individuals we can be found at times relating to God and one another in much the same way as the deceiver.

Now this ought not to plunge us into despair, but it should sober us and cause us to examine ourselves, our conduct, and our beliefs against the word of God. In further chapters we are going to do exactly that — we are going to examine the elements of Authentic Christianity as found in Philippians 3:3. But until then, I want to close by asking you a simple question why?

Why are you reading this today? Why do you go to church? Have you chosen to commit yourself to a church? Is the church a means to your gain? If the church were taken away from you, what would you miss? To answer these questions from the perspective of the genuine child of God, I want you to turn with me to John 6.

It is so easy to get caught up in our twenty-first century mentality which views the church as little more than a country club. Church is viewed as a means to get. However, this passage gives the words — not of a dog, evil worker, or of the false-circumcision — of a genuine child of the living God.

John 6:53, “Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of

the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”

John 6:60, “Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?”

John 6:66, “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”

For many days people flocked around Christ because of what they could get from Him.¹² But when the teaching got tough and thus threatened the comfort of many of the *dogs* and *evil workers* that had come after the Lord, these false believers left. It was at this point that Christ spoke these words:

John 6:67-69, “Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Family of God, while we are going to examine the elements of Authentic Christianity in the next chapter, notice that a genuine follower of God approaches the Lord not for entertainment, excitement, the lust of the flesh, or for his own agenda. The genuine follower of Christ comes because they are relying upon Christ alone for salvation. The genuine believer wants to hear words of life. Thus, if you are one who fellowships with believers because you believe and want to meet with the Savior and hear His words then you have all the markings of a child of the living God!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 2, 2003. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

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¹² Compare John 6:26