**APOSTOLIC OPTIMISM AND OTHER SERMONS - SERMONS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**03. BEWARE OF THE DOGS by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision: for we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."*

*Philippians 3:2,3*

"Beware! Beware! Beware! For:" ... There we have an urgent warning associated with a primary truth. On the one hand are things to be avoided; on the other hand are things to be pursued. The text enshrines the presentation of a contrast -- on one side dark, forbidding, and revolting; on the other side radiant and alluring. "Beware of the dogs; beware of the evil workers; beware of the concision." There is no mincing sensitiveness in the apostle's speech. "Beware of the dogs." Has the apostle temporarily lost his delicate courtesy, and have his heated feelings led him into the use of a somewhat coarse and violent speech? Look at the suggestion of the figure. The dog of the Eastern city was a home-less outcast, sniffing in accumulated garbage with the intent of finding its food. Its home was the street. Its food was the refuse. Now, that is how the Jew thought about the Gentile. He was a dog. He had no home privilege in God. He was an outcast. He was a tenant of the streets, and he fed upon the crumbs which were thrown out from the more favoured nation's table. The Jew was the home-child; the Gentile was the creature of the gutter! That is how "the circumcised" felt and thought and spoke about "the uncircumcised," and they carried their conceptions even into the domain of the Christian Church. The circumcised Christian conceived himself as being in the home of the Lord, and he regarded the uncircumcised as being in the streets. And now Paul takes up the figure, and reverses the application. "Nay, nay!" cried the apostle, "you are living in the outsides of things. You are magnifying ceremonies and ordinances and institutions. You are dwelling in the external. Yes, you are in the streets! You are the dogs. You are moving in the narrow channels of the senses, when you might abide in the spacious home of the spirit. You are picking up the crumbs when you might sit down to the feast. You are the dogs. Beware of the dogs!"

"Beware of the evil workers! " the spies, working so subtly, so insidiously, so speciously, with the purpose of bringing you into the bondage of an external ceremonialism. They will promise you home-life, while in reality they lead you into street-life; out of the spirit into the flesh; transforming you from children of liberty and festival into dogs, creatures of bondage and restraint. "Beware of the evil workers!"

"Beware of the concision!" There the apostle uses more pointed and definite speech. "Beware of the concision!" Beware of those who imagine that by "concising," by excising a little flesh, they fulfil the conditions which entitle them to the plenteous heritage of the Kingdom of Grace. Beware of those who imagine that by merely curbing the flesh they can become heirs to a spiritual kingdom. "Beware of the concision."

"Beware of the dogs; beware of the evil workers; beware of the concision." What is all this but a solemn and urgent warning against externalism, against all dependence upon outward ordinance and form? It is a grave reminder, that it is possible for a professing Christian to be an inhabitant of the streets, and to be satisfied with the scrappy and precarious living of a dog. It is a powerful protest against mere religious outwardness by a man who had experienced the mighty suctions of its temptations, and who knew the compromising inclinations of the human heart. Is the protest inopportune in our own time? Is it an interesting relic of a submerged antiquity? Is this Epistle to the Philippians fusty and musty, with the rank smell of a primitive day, or may we regard it as a contemporary document with pertinent applications to our own time? Is there any danger that our souls should live the vagrant life of the streets, and mistake the streets for the home? May we come to regard a ceremony as our Father's house? May we through formalism lose our birthright? May the flesh receive more emphasis than the spirit? These questions are not irrelevant. They belong to our own immediate day. There is a peril that we may be bewitched into the streets, and lose our place at the great feast. Let me put together half a dozen words, and let me ask you if their order and relationships do not describe a sequence which has been the besetting seduction of every age -- forms, ritualism, sacramentarianism, priestism, a Christ with barriers between Himself and His people -- the streets! Let us beware of anything which would put a wall between us and the Master of the house. "A certain man made a great supper," and we are entitled to sit down with him at the feast. Let no one confine us to the streets by the imposition of forms, ceremonies, and sacraments. Let us go directly and immediately to Him, and let us "beware of the dogs, and of the evil workers, and of the concision," who would bind us down to an externalism which would rob us of the nourishment of life's eternal feast.

Let us now pass to the other part of my text, in which the apostle turns from a starved and starving externalism to the fruitful inwardness of all true religion. What are the marks of true religion? Paul enumerates three, and they appear to me to be full and all-sufficient. Let us glance at them.

The first characteristic of true religion is worship. -- Yes, but what kind of worship? "Worship in the spirit." Not a ceremonial act, not the curbing of the flesh, not the eating of a wafer. These may be the signs and symbols of worship; they do not constitute the worship itself. Worship is in the spirit. It is not the attitude of clasped hands, of reverent prostration of the body; it is the posture of the spirit. "Know ye not that ye are the temple?" That is a great word. Mark it. If I am a temple, a church, the worshipper is within. If this body is a cathedral, what sort of service is going on within? Is the Holy Place dark and silent, or is service proceeding? I know the kind of service which was observed in Paul's temple. We have one or two little glimpses, as through an open doorway, into the nature of his daily services. Here is an instructive view: -- "We give thanks without ceasing." That is part of the worship which proceeded in the apostle's temple. Not only at matins or vespers, but ceaselessly! "We give thanks without ceasing." Inside that temple the worshipping spirit told the daily tale of the Lord's mercies, and sent back to the Lord a continuous thanksgiving. That is worship in the Spirit. Here is another glimpse of the apostle's temple service: -- "We pray without ceasing." Inside the temple the spirit was always on its knees. Always? Yes; when Paul went from Mars Hill to tent-making his spirit did not alter its posture. It remained upon its knees. When Jesus of Nazareth passed from the temptation to the marriage in Cana of Galilee, His spirit did not change; the service proceeded, the spirit remained upon its knees. That is the very glory of spiritual worship. We can pray without ceasing. We can even now be like the angels; we can "serve Him day and night in His temple." When we pass into our places of business, our soul can retain its reverence, and even in the commonplace we can be possessed by the consciousness of the presence of God. We can hallow all the varied experiences of the common day, -- our home, our business, our recreations, our politics, our economics, our aesthetics -- we can hallow them all by a spirit that never asserts itself in presumption or vulgarity, but which remains upon its knees, as ever in the presence of the Eternal and Holy God. "Know ye not that ye are the temple?" Have, then, a temple service where prayer proceeds without ceasing. What else went on in the temple of the Apostle Paul? If he were a temple, who was the priest? "He hath made us kings and priests unto God." ... Then in his own temple Paul was his own priest. Then did the priest offer sacrifices in his temple? Yes, the fire was never out upon the altar. What did he sacrifice? Himself. "I am poured out upon the altar." He offered himself as a ceaseless consecration to his God. These are the temple services of the Apostle Paul. "We give thanks without ceasing." "We pray without ceasing." "I am poured out upon the altar." Thanksgiving! Supplication! Sacrifice! This was the temple service that knew no ending. This is the nature of true religion. This is "worship in the spirit." This is the deep, secret home-life as opposed to the uncertain life of the streets. "Know ye not that ye are the temple?" Let your soul be a ceaseless worshipper. "We worship God in the spirit."

The second characteristic of true religion is exultation, " We glory," we rejoice, we boast! The Jews of the circumcision, the dogs of the street, had their boast and exultation. In what did they glory? They gloried in externals; they revelled in crumbs. They gloried in distinguished lineage and high descent. They gloried in the exclusiveness of their own peculiar caste. They gloried in their aristocracy of culture, and in their isolation from the vulgar herd, whose minds were void of the law and its traditions. They gloried in their own exclusive covenant, and in the sealing bond of circumcision. These were the glories, and in them they found their exulta- tion. These were the boast of externalism, and over against them Paul proclaimed the glory of a true and inward religion. "We glory in Christ Jesus." In Him we find our crown of rejoicing. In Him we make our boast. Not in forms; not in ordinances; not in privileged exclusiveness; not in remote descent, and in distinguished succession; we glory, directly and immediately, in Christ Jesus our Lord. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." This is the boast and exultation of true spiritual religion. When anything else is exalted to the throne of glory, the spaciousness of religious life is contracted, and the soul is imprisoned in a carnal bondage. Again I ask, is the danger imaginary, and is the warning gratuitous? I do not know that we hear much glorying in Abrahamic succession, nor is there any attempt to impose that succession as a bondage upon our souls. But I think I have heard men glory in what they call apostolic succession, which at the best is only a ceremonial lineage, and through it the attempt is made to bring all men into carnal bondage. By whom do we obtain access into grace? By the ministry of the last product of apostolic succession? Then in apostolic succession let us glory. But listen to the Apostle Paul; -- "by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." By whom? By Jesus Christ. By faith in Jesus Christ we have access into grace. "I am the door." "By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Then we pay homage to no man-appointed doorkeepers. We glory in no ceremonial succession. We rejoice in the largeness of our spiritual liberty. We glory in the free spaciousness of our home-life in Christ, and we will pray to be delivered from all minor gloryings which may lead us to the precarious externalism of the streets. "We glory in Christ Jesus."

The third mark of true religion is spiritual assurance. -- "We have confidence, but not in the flesh." "We have confidence" -- that is one of the characteristics for which we must seek in all deep and true religious life. But where shall we gain our confidence? Where must assurance be sought? The apostle answers -- "Not in the flesh." Where, then, can our confidence be found? Back in the Christ! "We know that our sins are forgiven us for His name's sake." "We know!" Confidence, but not in the flesh. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." "We know!" Confidence, but not in the flesh. "We know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "We know! " Confidence, but not in the flesh. Our confidence is born out of our fellowship with the Lord. In our spirits we have the witness. "God is a Spirit," and all lasting treasure must be sought in the realm of spirit. "They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."