

Group Study Outline

Launching

Your house is on fire, and you're about to be air-lifted from it to safety. In these last 60 seconds in your home, what would you try to take with you? Make a list on the LHS of a large sheet of paper.

Questions

Recap: why is Paul writing to the Philippians? what does he want them to do?

Read Philippians 3:1-11

What were the *dogs* (1) trying to do? why?

Read Galatians 6:12 (and cf notes).

Why is circumcision attractive?

What do these Jewish Christians put their confidence in? why?

What kind of things do we Christians tend to put our confidence in?

How do we put confidence in such things? why do we?

When is it OK to put confidence in such things? when is it wrong?

What does Paul glory in? why?

Why does he have this attitude in 4b-6?

What does he mean by 'put confidence in' and 'glory in'?

Knowing Christ (8) is obviously the key thing Paul values.

Why is Christ so central for him, according to verse 9?

Why is Christ so central for him, according to verses 10-11?

If we were *like him in his death*, what would we be like? (cf 2:5-11)

What was his path to resurrection from the dead?

So what will be our path to resurrection from the dead?

I know we ought to be able to say verse 8, but why is it hard to say?

How does this passage help us to see that Christ is so worthwhile?

If I had more of this attitude towards knowing Jesus, how would I be different?

Conclusion

Look back at the list we made at the start of things we value most. Alongside them, make a list of everything that this passage says is found in a relationship with Jesus. Paul says one list is 'profit' and the other list is 'loss'. Which do we think is more valuable?

Do we need to change our values? how?

Philippians 3:1-11



Theme Sentence

Paul values nothing compared to the gospel of what Jesus has done and will do.

Story Board

It's vital you get this gospel focus to your lives.

Others put an emphasis on the kind of things I used to value, like Jewish pedigree and observance. Such things do look impressive, and certainly earn respectability with others. But I now see that they're all useless compared to Jesus. Why, he is the gospel that I'm on about. It's in him and only in him that I can be right with God. It's in copying his concern for others' salvation, even to the point of suffering and death, that we are living the gospel that promises us resurrection life.

Everything else in my life matters not at all compared to him.

Application

- do I value Jesus, and Jesus only, as much as Paul does? I need to think more about the heart of the gospel - why righteousness and resurrection are so important - for these are the things Paul emphasises to explain why he values Jesus so much.
- Paul's religious pedigree, privilege and performance gave him a certain level of acceptance and status among the Jewish and Roman establishment. There are presumably equivalent things for us. Could I say the same as Paul, that all such things are utterly worthless?
- we all want a comfortable life, a life that works well for us and our family. Of course. But Paul is describing the Christian life as going the way of cross alongside Jesus: it's sharing in his suffering now in order to share in his resurrection. In what ways do I try to avoid going this way of the cross?

Verse by verse

Some theologians have claimed that ch 3 was written not by Paul but added later, or pasted in from some other context. The main reason for this view is that *rejoice* (1) seems an odd introduction to the *dogs* (!), and fits much better with 4:4. So ... is there any logic here?

Paul has been talking about the personal cost involved in *partnership in the gospel*: following Jesus' obedience/going the way of the cross means not only believing in him, but suffering for him (1:29). The OT background for 2:14-15 suggests that *grumbling and questioning* are particularly about the temptation to avoid the hardship of the wilderness and the clamour to return to the comfort of 'easy Egypt'.

In this chapter, Paul describes three ways in which Christians avoid going this way of the cross. Dick Lucas describes these as

pressures from	the mutilators	2-11
	the perfectionists	12-16
	the compromisers	17-21

Heeding the warning of this chapter is how to *stand firm* (4:1).

2 The *dogs* are probably Christian-Jews telling Gentile Christians to be circumcised in order to show their total commitment as one of God's people. Of course millions of people (and not just Jews) trust in religious pedigree, privilege and performance. But given how demeaning and painful adult circumcision would be, why would it ever be attractive to a Gentile convert?

Galatians 6:12 is a helpful cross-reference. Circumcised Jews could shelter under the protective arm of Roman syncretism, so circumcision is a way to avoid the hostility that the gospel will bring, a way to social acceptance and respectability.

3-9 Paul draws up the accounts (just as Epaphroditus did in 2:30 where *having gambled with his life* (lit) means that he weighed up possible outcomes and opted for what would best serve the gospel, even if it cost his life). On one side of the balance sheet is Paul's Jewish CV. Although 4b-6 may not seem very important to us, it showed that he was out of the spiritual top drawer. This impressive list added up to a sizeable credit total of 'in with God'. But when Paul does the maths, he makes it a deficit, and scribbles over the whole lot: *dung!* It's a remarkable renunciation of everything that mattered to the *dogs* and that Paul had spent his life accumulating. On the other side is all that now matters to him, two lonely words: *knowing Jesus*.

9-11 We must be clear on this phrase 'knowing Jesus' so that we do the sums right too. Paul isn't saying that he wishes he knew

Jesus better. (He may well wish that, and does indeed pray for growing *knowledge* in 1:9). Rather, Paul is talking here about conversion (as an alternative to confidence in the flesh): he values what comes to him from Jesus far more than any religious pedigree. He gives two reasons why he values Christ:

the righteousness reason (9)

Paul once-and-for-all renounced reliance on the flesh in favour of right-with-God-ness from God, received as a gift (rather than earned), in Christ. Paul's maths will seem daft unless I realise how important this righteousness is, and that I can only get it *in Christ*. When Paul says that he's *blameless* (6), he's not saying that he was already righteous in God's eyes by law-keeping, but that he'd scrupulously adhered to the pharisaic interpretation of the law. If anything it's a point about his religious standing before others rather than before God. The law called for painstaking effort; Paul had made 'the grade, only to discover that it did him no good' (F. F. Bruce).

the resurrection reason (10-11)

Jesus has mapped out the path to *resurrection from the dead*, and if I want it I must copy what he did. I must *become like him in his death*, and what this means has been spelt out for us in 2:5-11: his death was about obedience to God's method of saving people, putting their salvation ahead of personal comfort. And as a result of that obedience, God raised and exalted Jesus (2:9-11). That is the only path to our resurrection too. So, *sharing* (lit. 'partnership') *in his suffering* is the same as *partnership in the gospel* (1:5). It's about standing firm for the gospel, which includes suffering for it as well as believing it.

Put these two reasons together. Paul is saying is that the only thing that matters in his life any more is the gospel: being right with God himself, and living for the salvation of others. And if it seems like Paul is repeating what he's already said, that's right (cf 1b): urging gospel-centeredness is what this letter is about!

10-11 But there may be a further point here. Grammatically, *knowing him* is explained by 'the power of his resurrection / fellowship of his sufferings' (where these two ideas are linked together as closely as possible). It seems that Paul may be targeting those wanting a pain-free Christianity. No, says Paul, it is as I experience sufferings and endure them, then I am experiencing the power of his resurrection, the resurrection life of Jesus is being manifested in our mortal bodies (cf 2 Corinthians 4:10-11). So our Christian future lies in suffering for the gospel, not in safe, religious conformity in 'easy Egypt'.