

Philippians 3

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 July 2018

Preacher: Gethin Jones

[0 : 00] Do turn back in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 3. You'll find that on page 981 and 982 in the church Bibles.

! And if you remember from last week, Philippians is a group project for the church in Philippi, IPC Philippi, to study together, for them to learn together and grow together.

So as you're finding the chapter, do notice the people around you as well, the people that you're here to learn and listen with. Philippians chapter 3.

Well, different families have different tactics and strategies for dealing with salespeople, don't they? Philippians chapter 3. Whether it's the door-to-door salesman or somebody calling on the phone, which I imagine they aren't allowed to do anymore that much.

But there's the obvious sort of no thank you, isn't there? You can try that. But how do you get them to go away and not come back? That is the challenge.

[1 : 10] I know somebody who I won't name. She's not here, so it's fine, but I won't name her.

Whenever she gets a call to sell new windows, she'll say, oh, I've got people coming next week to put them in.

No, she hasn't. I think the favourite one I've heard is one of my teachers from school, who whenever she got a call up in windows, just simply said, but I like my windows.

Dare somebody suggest that her lovely windows would need for placing. Well, believe it or not, there is a sense in which Paul is encouraging Philippians to do something similar in this chapter.

In response to people who come calling to peddle false teaching. They want to give you new teaching, but we like the teaching we have. In chapter 1, we saw him helping the Philippians confront the trials and the pressures of suffering and death.

Chapter 2, we saw him teaching them how to confront the internal struggles and the fights that they might have between them. And here in chapter 3, he's teaching them what to do in the face of false teachers.

[2 : 25] And that's who he's referring to in verse 2. When he speaks of the dogs, the evildoers, and the mutilators. Paul clearly has no time for these people.

And later on from verse 18, you'll see that these are not innocent, interesting salesmen. They are enemies of the cross of Christ. And we need to think a bit about what they were teaching a bit later on.

But these false teachers were basically promoting that as Christians, you should also keep these Old Testament food regulations and the Old Testament laws and keep to circumcision.

That's basically what they were looking at. But we'll look at that in more detail. But Paul wants to help these people in Philippi to handle the challenge of these false teachers.

And all this is in the context, you'll remember, of his prayer for them in chapter 1, verses 9 to 11.

This is his prayer. It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

[3 : 46] The key thing that Paul wants for the Philippians overall is to be increasingly united in a real, dynamic, living way.

And he specifically wants their love to grow as they learn and think together. As they get their minds around the truth together. As they chew on it together.

As they figure things out together. And decide what to do together. So there's been a pattern that he's been teaching, all throughout the book, if you'll remember.

And we're going to follow that very same pattern today. Very unimaginative three-point sermons. And they're all the same points every week. Do you remember what that pattern was from last week? They need to look first at what they need to know.

Then what they need to figure out, what they need to discern. And then what to do. What they need to know. Then what do they figure out?

[4 : 48] What is the excellent thing they prove based on what they know? And then what do they do? It is not just a bunch of stuff to know. And it is not just a bunch of stuff to do.

It all goes hand in hand. So, let's again start in chapter three with what we need to know. What do the good folk of IPC Philippi need to make sure they know if they want to face these false teachers? Well, they need to be like my teacher who said, but I like my windows. We need to see, we need to know, that knowing Jesus is better. That's what we need to know.

Knowing Jesus is better. Always better. Look at verse eight. Now, Paul tells us that knowing Christ Jesus our Lord is of surpassing worth.

Whatever you offer me, Jesus is better. The worth of knowing Jesus surpasses, is much better than anything you want to offer me.

[5 : 56] Gaining Christ, and then look in verse nine. Being in Christ. Being righteous in Christ by faith in him. And verse ten. Knowing him and the power of his resurrection.

And yes, even sharing his sufferings. And being raised with him. All that is better than anything else. That is the Christian message. It is coming to know Jesus Christ.

Being what we call in Jesus Christ. Being united to him by faith. Receiving his righteousness. His good report becomes our good report.

And his death is our death. And his resurrection is our resurrection. That is our great hope. We have died in him. And we are risen in him.

And we look forward to a great resurrection at the end. And knowing that, and knowing him, is much better than anything else. Paul is saying you need to know that that is the most privilege, the most precious privilege anyone can have.

[7 : 01] Knowing Christ, knowing Christ, knowing Jesus, is the best thing there is. Nobody who offers anything that is apart from Jesus, or even in addition to Jesus, is not offering me anything better.

That is what you need to know. That is the basic thing you need to know. So, secondly, what do you need to figure out? That's the next thing.

What do you need to figure out? Well, very simply, compared with Jesus, everything is rubbish. If knowing Jesus is always better than anything else, compared with that, is rubbish.

If I hear something that's new to me, I need to ask, is this helping me know Jesus better? Is this helping me know him more? Or am I being told that I need something extra?

And then figure out, any extras you might want to offer me, they are rubbish. And they need to be ready to figure this out, because there were these false teachers lurking about.

[8 : 12] So, in verse 2 we saw, they are the dogs, the evildoers, the mutilators. Now, what are these people teaching? Well, it's probable that Paul is deliberately using these terms as ironic titles for these teachers, to give us a clue as to what they're teaching.

And his response to them in verse 3 does the same thing. So, it's probable that these teachers were telling them, it's great that you've come to believe in Jesus, welcome, that's lovely, but you've really got some way to go, frankly.

There are three main extra things that you need. You need to keep the old covenant food regulations, you need to obey the old covenant laws, and you need to be circumcised.

Paul is using ironic language here to say, these men who want to keep the old food regulations, they are like dogs who just eat scraps. These men who want you to abide by old covenant laws, they are evildoers.

These men who want to get you circumcised are mutilators. And in verse 3, we don't need circumcision, because we are the circumcised, we are the circumcised ones, the ones who belong to God, and I can prove that by the fact that we worship by the spirit of God.

[9 : 33] Verse 3. We don't need to keep the old rules that were given to Israel as a nation, because we glory in Christ Jesus. And we don't need to keep food laws, because we put no confidence in the flesh.

If the spirit of God has come, and we worship in him, says Paul, and Christ has come, then we have all the things that those old covenant realities pointed to.

One day, John is told by his boss that he needs to go away on a business trip for about a week. And just before he leaves, his wife Jane gives him a recent picture of her and the children, kisses him on the cheek, and asks him to carry that photo around with him all the time, everywhere he goes.

And he does. He carries the picture everywhere. It's in his pocket of his suit jacket. And when there's a break, he takes a quick look at the picture, and he smiles. And when he's at dinner with his colleagues, he shares the picture around to show how lovely his family is.

And it's all going really well. And several weeks later, John is back home. And it's a Saturday morning. He and Jane are downstairs playing with the children in their pyjamas.

[10:55] Is Jane going to say, I thought I was pretty clear. Where's the picture? Why haven't you got your photo with you? No, of course not.

It would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? John doesn't need to keep the photo with him, because he's got Jane and the kids with him right there. He has the reality that the photo was pointing to.

But that's what these false teachers are saying. They're asking, why haven't you got your photo? I want to think of it another way. Last week, lots of us had the privilege of visiting the building site for the new church building.

It was very exciting. And when we went, there were some rules we had to follow. That you must wear closed-toed shoes. You must wear a hard hat.

You must wear a bright, luminous yellow jacket. You may not go in, in groups of more than 14 people at a time.

[11:57] And we stepped to those rules. And we went in, and in our groups of 14, we had a lovely time, looking around the new building. Now, in October, Lord willing, at that first service, are you going to see those rules printed on the service sheet?

Is someone going to get up before the service and say, it's nice you're all here, thanks for coming. But we've got some serious issues here. Something's missing.

I've seen several people here with open-toed shoes. I've not seen a single hard hat or yellow jacket. And there are far too many people in here.

There's way more than 14, hopefully. And while we're on the subject, could the person who took the scaffolding down, please return it and put it back up? Is anyone going to say that?

Of course not. Now, they were rules that were appropriate and good for that time when we went for a visit. Last week, they were really good rules that helped us enjoy the building in that condition.

[13:04] But in October, they will not help you enjoy the building, will they? They will be an unnecessary burden that actually distracts you from enjoying the building. And it's the same thing here.

Now that Christ has come and he has sent his spirit in whom we worship, we have the realities that those old laws pointed to. Laws which were good and fitting in the old covenant but have no place today.

So, figure this out. When someone comes along and says, you need X, your job is not to say yes straight away or actually to say no straight away but to ask the question, is this thing designed to help me know Jesus more?

Or is it an addition? Is it something I'm told I need as an extra? And remember that knowing Jesus is better. Then, maybe some of those false teachers might say, well you're just saying that because you're jealous.

You wish you had what we have, our special extras, and you're just trying to make yourself feel better by saying you don't need it. You're just taking the childish approach of I don't care, I didn't want it anyway.

[14:21] But he's very clear, isn't he, from verse 4 onwards, that that is not the case. You see, if I wanted to boast in my Old Testament legal credentials, I would beat every last one of you.

If I wanted to rejoice in my Old Covenant CV, I could. If you look in verse 5, I was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel and of the tribe of Benjamin, I am as Hebrew as they get.

I studied the law inside out and backwards. I was so super committed to the people of God, to the law, that I persecuted any new thing that popped up, including these groups of Christians.

I was blameless. I didn't allow any new thing to come along. But all that, when I compare it with what I know now, knowing Jesus, all that is rubbish.

It's a loss on my account. John Calvin writes when he comments on verse 10, Christ is rightly known when we feel how powerful his death and resurrection are and how effective they are in us. [15:35] Now, all things are provided for us. Expiation, that means clearing away of sin and destruction of sin.

Freedom from condemnation. satisfaction, victory over death, the attainment of righteousness and the hope of a blessed immortality.

When we know that that is what we have in Christ, you know Christ. Paul is encouraging the Philippians to respond to this teaching by saying, do you not understand how precious Jesus is? Do you not understand how powerful his death and resurrection are? Do you not understand that I have everything I could possibly want in Jesus? So how will these rules, how will going back to the Old Testament food regulations, how will these old covenant laws and how will circumcision, how will they all help me know Jesus better?

There is no good answer to that question. And that is the key difference between that and the practices that we do keep as new covenant Christians.

[16:48] It is good, for example, to be baptised in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Why? Because it points you to the privilege of union with Christ. It points you to Jesus being better.

It's good to come to worship the Lord each Lord's Day. Why? Because it's put there to drive you to Christ. It's good to live in fellowship with the church.

Why? Because this is where we grow together in knowing and loving Christ and in glorifying and enjoying him. It's good to come to the Lord's table.

Why? Because that's where you feed on Christ in your hearts by faith. So, know that to know Christ is better and figure out that you have everything you need in him and so all extras are rubbish.

That uses a stronger word in the original but we ought to go there. It's rubbish. We can say that. So then finally, what should we do? We know what we need to know and figure out on the basis of that what should we do.

[17:56] There's a few things we can say here. Firstly and clearly in verse 1, rejoice in the Lord. Don't rejoice in anything else he means.

But do rejoice in the Lord Jesus and all that he has done for you. He's not just saying furthermore my brothers cheer up. He's saying specifically rejoice in the Lord because that will keep you safe. If you are happy with your windows you're not going to let people come in and replace them.

Contemplate what you have in Christ. The old Puritan John Owen really helpfully said that our greatest hindrance in the Christian life is not our lack of effort not our lack of effort but our lack of acquaintedness with our privileges.

Lack of acquaintedness lack of knowing our privileges. Not grasping the riches that we have in Christ. Not seeing how much cause we have to rejoice in Christ.

So rejoice in the Lord. But another thing we do throughout this chapter is press on. We press on. You spot that as we were reading it?

[19:12] He wants to keep on knowing Jesus in verse 10. He wants to press on in verse 12 and then again in verse 14. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

He doesn't say great I know Jesus now and I'm sorted. No he presses on. So when John gets home from his business trip and hangs up the suit jacket with the photo in the pocket that this photo he'd been carrying around he doesn't just sit down and say oh I'm home now and leave it at that.

No he goes and finds Jane and the kids doesn't he? He gives them a big hug. He takes them out to dinner. He wants to spend time with them. But when the building is complete you're not just going to walk in and say well that's done now isn't it?

That's nice. No you're going to work hard to make the most of having this building. Now in verse 15 you see it's not necessarily obvious to everyone that knowing Christ leads to striving and pressing on.

Some may think that's just knowing Christ saying that it's all about knowing Christ is an excuse to be lazy. That might be one strategy to get you to keep these rules. if all you need is knowing Christ won't you just be lazy?

[20 : 32] But Paul is saying that is the immature understanding of the gospel. The mature way of understanding it is that knowing Christ leads to a confident striving.

It's a striving to know Jesus in every circumstance. To know Christ everywhere in every way. To let him impact every part of your life.

if Jesus is better than all things then he is always better than all things. And so press on he says in every circumstance to know Jesus better.

Get to know the amazing riches he provides for you. This full righteousness that he gives you.

Verse 9 Get to know him. Get to know the power of his resurrection.

Verse 10 Get to know all that his resurrection means for your life and rejoice in it. Get to know him to the point even that suffering and death are places where you can know Jesus who walked those dark paths before you and does so now with you.

[21 : 43] That is the amazing thing about the good news of Jesus. There is no pit that is so dark that Jesus hasn't been there before and so that you cannot be there with him.

He has been to the pits of suffering and death and he can meet you even there. You can have fellowship with him even there. So strive to know him.

Press on to keep knowing him. We are the people who say Jesus and my cross have taken all to leave and follow thee.

Destitute, despised, forsaken, thou from hence my all shall be. Perish every fond ambition, all I've sought or hoped or known, yet how rich is my condition.

God and heaven are still my own. Jesus is better. We see in verse 12 that knowing Christ, that while it gives us great comfort and security because Christ has made us his own, in verse 12, it doesn't lead us to rest on our laurels but to press on, to know him all the more.

[23 : 00] And so if we are to press on, we see in verse 17 that we're to join together in imitating Paul and anyone else who imitates Paul. We saw this a bit last week, didn't we? That the key part of growing in holiness and godliness is imitating godly people, that there is no copyright on godliness.

And here we're specifically told that imitating Paul is a group project. Join in imitating. Be fellow imitators. Get together to work on imitating Paul.

And imitate other people who are godly who also imitate Paul. Imitate them here in this chapter specifically in their heavenly mindedness. That we are not to be like the enemies of the cross of Christ in verse 18, who are earthly minded, but rather in verse 20, imitate those who know their citizenship to be in heaven.

Those who are waiting for Jesus. Those who are not depending on any rules they've been able to keep, but those who are waiting for the resurrection, this transformation from humility to glory.

So, when we hear false teaching, that one is to distract us from Jesus, even if it claims only to be adding to Jesus, we need to know that Jesus is better, figure out that everything else is rubbish, and what do we do?

[24 : 28] We press on to know him joyfully. Whenever I think of this passage or I come to read it, I'm reminded of Dr. Helen Rosevear.

She was a missionary. She died only a year and a half ago, and I think she embodied this chapter more than anyone I know of in recent times. She wrote a few books about her experiences, and they're worth reading.

When she was converted as a student, she was at a Christian union conference, a house party around the Christmas holidays, and she became a Christian during this week, and the speaker gave her a Bible, she never had one before, and he wrote in the cover of it Philippians 3, verse 10. He told her, you've entered that first part of the verse now, you know him, and I pray that you might come to know the rest of that verse, knowing the power of the resurrection, and they said, and maybe one day, God will give you the privilege to know something of the fellowship of his sufferings.

It's quite a thing to say to a brand new Christian, isn't it? You might get the privilege of sharing in Christ's sufferings, but she took it to heart, and she made that prayer as well.

[25 : 47] Later on, she went to a missionary meeting, she was thinking about going to be a missionary, and at this meeting she told everyone, yes, I'm going, I'm going to be a missionary. And after that she went for a walk in the mountains, I think somewhere in North England, and she prayed, and this is her account of what she prayed.

Okay, God, today I mean it. Go ahead and make me more like Jesus, whatever the cost. but please, when I feel I can't stand anymore, and cry out to stop, will you ignore my stop, and remember that today I said go ahead.

She'd later be a medical missionary in the Congo, but she was so captivated by this Jesus that loved her and died for her. She said she was willing to go anywhere and do anything for him. So when she was there in the Congo, it was during the time when Congo fought for independence from Belgium, and there were great uprising and troubles, and she was imprisoned, and she suffered awful, unspeakable brutality for quite a while.

But she would understand that this too was part of the fellowship of Christ's suffering, all leading to knowing the great power of his resurrection. She once said that of the people that she was imprisoned with, she was the only one that slept.

[27 : 14] And they were all amazed that she was able to sleep, but it's because she knew that Jesus was with her. She was sharing in that fellowship of Christ, even there. She knew and experienced that even following Jesus to Calvary, following him to the cross, is still following Jesus, knowing Jesus, being with Jesus.

And her testimony was indeed that it was all privilege. That's the word she said more than any I've ever heard in videos and talks I've heard from her. She said the privilege was greater than the price. It would be great in a way to have Helen Rosevear still among us, or even just the Apostle Paul, who is writing this while he's in chains, in prison or in the house arrest.

So that if somebody came, and said you need all this extra stuff, you need these rules, we just say well try telling that to Paul, try telling that to Helen Rosevear.

And that is part of the point of joining together to imitate them, isn't it? So that we too can be living proof that Jesus is better and Jesus is all we need.

[28 : 29] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's