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“Nothing Compares to Jesus”

Philippians 3:1–11

Pastor Gary Hamrick



Most people pursue things that bring them happiness or pleasure in this lifetime: accomplishments, awards, degrees, rank, money, likes, and followers. But at the end of the day, nothing compares to knowing Jesus! In Philippians 3, Paul wrote about his many accomplishments and accolades that he achieved in his lifetime, but he said it was all “rubbish” (dung) compared to the excellence of knowing Christ! Do you know Jesus? There’s a difference between knowing “about” Jesus and knowing Him personally. In this study, we explain how nothing compares to Christ.

1. Context

a. The theme

- i. In Philippians, Paul emphasizes joy more than a dozen times.

b. Reasons to rejoice

- i. In Philippians 1–2, Paul gave Believers five reasons to rejoice.

1. God will finish what He started concerning us (**Philippians 1:6**).
2. God will use our “chains” for His divine purposes (**Philippians 1:13**).
3. To live is Christ, to die is gain (**Philippians 1:21**).
4. Unity comes through humility; humility comes from following the example of Jesus (**Philippians 2:2–5**).
5. Our witness impacts our world (**Philippians 2:14–16**).

- ii. In Philippians 3, Paul gives a sixth reason.

1. Nothing in life compares to knowing Christ (**Philippians 3:7–11**).

2. **Philippians 3:1–11** – “[1] Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. [2] Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, [4] though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: [5] circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; [6] concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. [7] But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. [8] Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

[10] that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, [11] if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

3. **Philippians 3:1-3** – “[1] Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. [2] Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”
 - a. A transition
 - i. “Finally” is **loipon** in the Greek.
 1. This word means “furthermore” and indicates a transition into an important point.
 2. Paul was transitioning to speaking of the error spreading into the church.
 - b. The error
 - i. Paul said that it was “safe” and “not tedious” for him to repeat the basics of the Gospel.
 1. He wanted the Believers at Philippi to be free from doctrinal error.
 2. He told the Believers at Philippi to beware of those spreading error three times in verse 2.
 3. **DISCUSS**: What are the repetitive habits that are “safe” for you to stay close to Christ and avoid error?
 - ii. Paul called those who spread the error “dogs,” “evil workers,” and “the mutilation.”
 1. In the first century, dogs were scavengers and were considered unclean.
 2. By calling the false teachers “dogs,” Paul was saying that they were acting like animals.
 3. Paul called the ones spreading error “mutilators” because these false teachers were Judaizers.
 4. Judaizers were Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah but also thought the Mosaic Law—especially circumcision—was necessary for salvation.
 5. The mark of the Mosaic covenant was circumcision, signifying the Jews were not to belong to the flesh but to God.
 6. God commanded the Jews to circumcise their boys on the eighth day.
 - a. Newborns develop their natural clotting ability on the eighth day.

- b. Circumcision was well-known to Jews but was unfamiliar to the gentiles.
 - c. The truth
 - i. A false gospel
 - 1. The Judaizers believed in the gospel of “Jesus plus” and confused the exclusively gentile church at Philippi.
 - a. Philippi, Greece was a Roman outpost.
 - b. This Roman colony was even called “Little Rome” due to its influence.
 - 2. Jesus plus anything ruins everything.
 - 3. Practicing Jewish customs was not the problem, for they testify of Christ.
 - 4. Believing Jewish customs to be necessary for salvation is the problem.
 - 5. **DISCUSS**: What is the proper place of traditions in the church? How do we avoid turning our customs into requirements (**Romans 14:1–13**)?
 - 6. This false gospel was a problem not only for the Christians at Philippi, but also for those in Galatia.
 - a. **Galatians 1:7b** – *“There are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”*
 - b. The NIV says, “Some people are throwing you into confusion.”
 - ii. The real Gospel
 - 1. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
 - d. True circumcision
 - i. God’s call for us to circumcise our hearts is a call to moral purity.
 - 1. **Romans 2:29** – *“He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”*
 - 2. **Jeremiah 4:4a** – *“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts.”*
 - 3. We must cut away any fleshly instinct trying to dominate.
 - 4. **DISCUSS**: What fleshly instinct do you need to cut away?
- 4. **Philippians 3:4–11** – *“[4] . . . though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: [5] circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; [6] concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. [7] But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. [8] Yet indeed I also*

count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; [10] that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, [11] if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

a. Paul's qualifications

- i. Paul argued that if any could claim to "have confidence in the flesh," it would be him.
- ii. Paul was circumcised on the eighth day.
- iii. Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin.
 1. Benjamin was one of Jacob's favored sons.
 2. Saul, the first king of Israel, came from the tribe of Benjamin.
 - a. Paul was named after Saul, **Šā'ûl**.
- iv. Paul was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews."
 1. This was a superlative, meaning that both his parents were Jewish.
- v. Paul was taught by Gamaliel.
 1. Gamaliel was a scholarly rabbi.
- vi. Paul was a religious Jew.
 1. Paul was a Pharisee, the strictest sect in Judaism.
 2. Paul persecuted the church, zealous for the traditions of his fathers.

b. Gain and loss

- i. Paul moved his qualifications from "gain" to "loss" (verses 7–8).
 1. Paul realized that his every work paled in comparison to Christ.
 2. **DISCUSS**: How has this reevaluation of what matters changed your priorities, aim, and ambition (**1 Thessalonians 4:11**)?
- ii. Paul counted his works as "rubbish."
 1. "Rubbish" is **skybalon** in Greek, meaning "dung."
 2. The KJV and some other translations use the word "dung."
 3. **DISCUSS**: How do you view the accomplishments and accolades that you once trusted in? How has knowing Christ changed your view of what this world prizes?
- iii. The most important question
 1. Upon death, Jesus will not ask about our wealth, popularity, or followers.
 2. Upon death, Jesus will ask if we know Him.
 3. **DISCUSS**: Do you know Jesus, or only know about Him? Who or what have you put your trust in?

4. Nothing in life compares to knowing Christ and receiving His righteousness by faith (**Philippians 3:7-11**).
 - a. Paul was speaking of an experiential knowledge.
 - b. Those who know Christ and receive His righteousness by faith will rise with Him.
- c. Modern Judaizers
 - i. The gospel of “Jesus plus” continues in present-day Catholicism.
 1. Jesus plus nothing is everything.
 2. Some young Christian men have been drawn to Catholicism for its structure and the pseudo-safety net it provides.
 3. But by making salvation works-oriented, we nullify the cross.
 4. Salvation is not about what we do, but about what Christ already did.
 - ii. Catholics are not the only ones who prop up the gospel of “Jesus plus.”
 1. **DISCUSS**: What are some ways the gospel of “Jesus plus” sneaks into the church? How should we respond?

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)