

The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Christ Jesus Our Lord
Philippians 3:1-21

D.A. Carson:

If I have learned anything in 35 or 40 years of teaching, it is that students don't learn everything I teach them. What they learn is what I am excited about, the kinds of things I emphasize again and again and again and again. That had better be the gospel.

We want to be a people who are emphasizing the **gospel, again, and again, and again.**
We believe the gospel is not just **the A,B,C's** of the Christian life, but the **A-Z.**
We must seek a better understanding of and application of the gospel for all of life.

Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*:

Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually.

Yes, we need to keep hammering the gospel for so many reasons. But we need it not just in our head, but we need it to work itself **into our hearts** so that it changes the way we live. You might imagine this like a **coke machine** that doesn't work very well – like an old one. Remember the kinds you used to have to hit three or four times in order for the change to settle in the bottom before it would dispense of the coke? That's the way the work of "gospeling" one another works. **We need believers to give us some gospel taps so that the gospel will drop from our head to our heart that we may produce fruit.**

I'm thankful for friends who do this for me.
Here, Paul is doing that for the Philippians.

3:1, He says that he's told the Philippian congregation the **"same things"** before.

- He's probably referring to what he taught them in person: **trusting in Christ Alone, treasuring Christ above all.**

He loves this church. It was a church he planted – the first church in Europe (Acts 16) – and now, writes with deep affection to them. They have been a faithful group of people to him.

What does he decide to talk to them about?

- While there are many themes, a dominant one is the fact that **nothing compares to Jesus.**
 - This book is filled with references about the glory and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.
 - Paul speaks of His life, death, resurrection and the privilege of knowing Him.
- **At the heart of the good news is Jesus.**
- In the first century, one could be killed for saying **Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord.**
- Yet, that's what Christians did.
- **How was it that these ordinary people turned the world upside down?**
- Luke writes that they were "saying there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7, ESV).

What is Paul most passionate about? What is he trying to beat into the heads/hearts of people? The gospel. The Supremacy of Jesus Christ, the King.

Jesus had radically changed Paul, and **here he teaches us about the life-transforming gospel by way of his testimony.** One scholar calls verses 7-11, **"The Essence of Pauline Theology."** Paul teaches us to trust in Christ Alone for salvation, and to treasure Christ Above all things.

We are to follow His example (3:15-19).

Introduction/Warning/Clarification (3:1-3)

Paul's testimony (3:4-14) is set in the context of a **warning about false teachers**.

1. Introduction (v. 1)

Rejoice! The happiest man in Rome was in jail! Joy is "in the Lord" not in our circumstances.

Paul says **it's no trouble** for him to repeat these things, and **it's safe** for the congregation.

- **Safe:** The church would be **protected from legalism** and other false gospels by studying the true Gospel.
- **Repeating the gospel is a safeguard.**
- This is an **expression of love for one another.**

Every church should be a "same things church."

- Oh, we must change some ministry methods, and we must "contextualize," but the message must never change.
- **We're like a band with one song! The Eagles?**
- **Like a coach at half-time. "We need to block better."**

2. Warning: Beware Dogs (v. 2)

For those of you who like dogs, you must realize that Paul had a different context.

- Dogs weren't viewed as **cute little pets**. They were nasty, unclean, and dangerous.
- They often wandered where they didn't belong. Paul viewed these false teachers like dogs.
- They were entering the church, and damaging it.

These particular teachers were known as "Judaizers." Same problem as the Galatians.

- They believed that the Gentiles must become Jews first.
- That involved the act of **circumcision and taking on the law of Moses** (Carson, 81).
- We read about them in Acts 15.

He calls the Judaizers "evildoers" and "**mutilators of the flesh.**"

- They were evildoers **because their mission was evil, not good.**
- False religions **have missionaries too.**
- **Just because someone goes on a mission trip, doesn't mean they're to be commended.**
- **If they're exporting a distorted Gospel, then they're dangerous and deadly.**

"Who let the dogs out?" **Answer: the evil one.**

- He would like nothing more than to have people believe in a false gospel. **So beware of dogs.**
- **Like physical dogs, there are all sorts of religious dogs.**
- Many dogs do the same thing that these Judaizing dogs were doing, namely, **adding to the Gospel.**
- **When you add to the Gospel, you lose the Gospel!**
- It's not Jesus + your good works. It's Christ and Christ alone.

3. Clarification (v. 3)

Paul clarifies who the people of God are...

A. We have changed hearts (3a)

3a: Paul says, "**we are the circumcision,**" to speak **not of a circumcision of the flesh, but that of a changed heart.** (cf., Gal 6:15).

- Not external ritual, but internal transformation. (cf., 2 Corinthians 5:17)

- We have been united to Jesus Christ and consequently we are not the same!

B. We Worship By the Spirit of God (3b)

- When Paul uses the word “worship,” he isn’t speaking of simply that which we do on a Sunday morning gathering. He’s speaking of “service” as the HCSB translates it. He’s talking about a life devoted to God in spiritual service (cf., Rom 12:1).
- True Christians **possess the Spirit**.
- “But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (Rom 8:9).
- Does the Spirit of God dwell in you? Do you worship/serve God by the Spirit?

C. We Glory in Christ Jesus (3b)

- We make much of – we exalt – we treasure – Jesus.
- He’s of “surpassing worth”
- Personal boasting in salvation is excluded for the Christian, for salvation has come to us through the work of another, as a gift of a sovereign and gracious God (Rom 3:27, Eph 2:8-9).
- To the Corinthians Paul says, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Cor 1:31)
- **The Christian life is a Christ-exalting life.**
- **Churches can be known for all sorts of things. Let’s be known for boasting in Christ!**
- **What’s this look like? Phil 1:20-23**

D. We Put No Confidence in the Flesh (3c)

- The Christian’s confidence is in Christ, not their own effort or goodness.
- That is why the Christian boasts in Christ, and rejoices in Christ.

Where is your confidence? **In whom are you trusting for salvation?**

Trusting in Christ Alone/ Treasuring Christ Above All (3:4-14)

Here Paul goes off. We see a radically Christ-centered follower of Jesus.

He teaches us who to trust for salvation, and what it looks like to treasure Jesus Above all things.

#1: Trust in Christ Alone (3:3-9)

The Judaizers appealed to their impressive Jewish credentials, so Paul now flashes his own credentials, which were unparalleled. He says, “If you want to brag, I can brag even more!”

- His point in doing this is to show the Philippians of the emptiness of fleshly confidence.

He contrasts **“salvation by human achievement” with a “salvation by Christ’s achievement.”**

You could essentially summarize major world religions with those categories: **divine accomplishment or human achievement?**

Seven Sources of False Confidence

- While we can’t make a one for one correlation between Paul’s self-portrait and contemporary non-Jewish, religious people, surely we can make some general applications for people today who aren’t trusting in Christ alone for eternal life.

First, Don’t put your confidence in a ritual. “circumcised on the eighth day” (3:5a)

- Paul was an “eighth-dayer.” He wasn’t a Jewish proselyte. Those who were converts to Judaism could never claim to have been circumcised on the eighth day.

- Today, people may put their confidence in other spiritual rituals, like being baptized as an infant, or attending religious meetings.
- **Salvation is about becoming a new creation in Christ, not about going through a particular ritual.**

Second, Don't put your confidence in your race. "of the nation of Israel" (3:5b).

- This phrase means of the "race of Israel" (Hanson, 223). Paul was a physical descendent of Abraham. He was no Gentile convert to Judaism, but the real thing. **Yet, this special privilege didn't give him reason for assurance of salvation.**
- He had to look to the offspring of Abraham, namely Christ.

Third, Don't put your confidence in your rank. "the tribe of Benjamin" (3:5c).

- Paul didn't come from a disrespected Israelite tribe, but from this distinguished tribe.
- When the Promised Land was divided among the twelve tribes, Jerusalem, the holy city, was in Benjamin's territory. When the kingdom split, Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty. Yet, Paul says, as proud as that could make a Jew, it was of no ultimate value for granting one salvation.
- Many who are exalted in the world today will one day be humbled because they've failed to bow the knee to Christ. Salvation isn't by your rank. It comes by trusting in the David's greatest son, Jesus Christ.

Fourth, Don't put your confidence in your tradition. "Hebrew of Hebrews" (3:5d).

- While he was fluent in Greek, he didn't abandon his Hebrew culture. He was fluent in Hebrew and devoted to his traditional culture.
- Traditions can be fine in and of themselves, but you should place no confidence in them when it comes to salvation.

Fifth, Don't put your confidence in your morality "Pharisee" (5e).

- They loved their rules. They even added to all the commands of the Bible. So much so, that it was hard to know what the actual biblical commands were. That's who Paul was.
- He adopted a Pharisaical lifestyle. He belonged to a morally superior group Jews.
- **You will meet people today who think that salvation comes by being a moral person.**
 - To be clear, I'm not encouraging rule-breaking.
 - We must simply note that rule keeping won't earn salvation.
 - Many have the idea that moral people will go to heaven.
 - It's still around today, and is the default mode of the human heart.
 - **Many people think they're somewhere between Mother Theresa and Ted Bundy, and that God somehow grades on a curve**

Sixth, Don't put your confidence in your zeal. "regarding zeal, persecuting the church" (6a).

- "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere and really believe it." Well, it would be hard to fathom anyone more "sincere" than the Saul of Tarsus. He wasn't a Pharisee in name only. He was zealous.
- "Just follow your heart" is terrible advice when it comes to salvation because your heart is wicked! Bill Murray, **"I followed my heart and it led me to the refrigerator."**
- Salvation doesn't come by passion.
- People can be sincere, but be sincerely **wrong**.
- Paul told the Romans that some have "zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom 10:2).
- One must know Christ; one must be "found in Him" (Phil 3:9).

Seventh, Don't put your confidence in your obedience to the law. “as regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless” (6b).

- While Paul isn't claiming sinless perfection, he is saying that his life was exemplary when it came to obeying the OT law. He was self-righteous person, who boasted in his ability to keep God's law, like the Rich Young Ruler.

“Where is your confidence?”

- Are you trusting in your rituals, your race, your rank, your tradition, your rule-keeping, your zeal, or your obedience to the law?
- Paul says that a genuine Christian puts no confidence in these things.
- **Our confidence lies elsewhere – Christ.**

Put your trust in Him!

A Christ-Centered Confidence

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

Paul calls his religious accomplishments **“filth” or “rubbish” (ESV) or “dung”** (KJV) compared to knowing Christ.

- Paul uses a term that refers to animal excrement.
- At the risk of sounding crass, he says it's all dog crap compared to knowing Christ.

Verse 9 is extremely important for understanding how one becomes a Christian – you need Christ's righteousness. **We find the doctrine of justification by faith alone here.**

Believers have received the righteousness that comes from God through faith in Christ alone (cf., Rom 3:21-26).

We call this “imputed righteousness.” It's a righteousness from outside ourselves.

- This is **the opposite of works-based righteousness, or self-righteousness.**
- That's all rubbish. We need the righteousness of another, an alien righteousness.
- We need God's righteousness.
- **Don't trust in your “dung” trust in “It is Done!”**

To the Corinthians, Paul says:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21)

In Christ Alone, we are made righteous!

The essence of sin/salvation: substitution([Stott](#))

Paul teaches two truths here:

First, justification is a gift from God.

- Paul says that this righteousness comes “from God.”
- We can't earn it, and we don't deserve it.

- God in infinite grace gave His only Son to live and die for law-breaking people that they may be saved.

Secondly, justification is received by faith.

- Paul says it clearly, doesn't he? And he actually says it twice, "but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith." (3:9b).
- Salvation doesn't depend on any your record, your rank, your race, your religious attendance, your good deeds, etc.
- It depends on faith alone in Christ's perfect work alone.
- Justification is God's work, secured by Christ's death, and appropriated by faith.

You should see now how infinite different Christianity is from other religions.

- In other systems, **you have to do the work.**
- In Christianity, Christ did the work.

#2: Treasure Christ Above All (3:7-14)

The doctrine of justification by faith is not just a doctrine to believe, though it is.

- **The doctrine leads us to the Savior Himself – who is to be treasured above all.**
- **If theology doesn't lead to doxology then it is just cold orthodoxy.**
- **The gospel changes our affections.**

7-8: Paul speaks of the "surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus"

Nothing is greater than this!

What do you treasure? Is there anything of surpassing value? Is there anything that deserves our life-long, passionate pursuit? The answer is "yes." Paul describes it in verse 8:

Paul reminds us that nothing on earth compares to knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You will never regret pursuing Christ.

There's no greater privilege than to know him.

Illustration: MJ knows who I am

V. 10: Paul's Goal/Our Goal

My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (3:10)

Is there a better example for believers than this?

Dr. Stan Norman was one of my (Tony) favorite professors in seminar. His Systematic Theology class was incredible. I used to say "We should type notes on our knees" because the content was so worshipful at times. In one of Dr. Norman's classes, the subject of the day involved the resurrection from the dead, and the deep implications of it. In the midst of dealing with this subject, a frustrated student said, "I didn't come here to study this stuff. All I want to do is to know how to pastor a big church." Dr. Norman didn't like this response to put it mildly. After a scolding, he said to the student, "You are here to know Christ."

To think that you can pastor, and not need to know about the Christ, His resurrection, and how it applies to people's lives is foolish. Paul says this is of first importance (1 Cor 15:3-5)!

This student's attitude didn't reflect the life of the apostle Paul who considered everything as dung compared to knowing Jesus. He should have realized that the very reason he was in seminary was to know Christ more and to become more like Him.

J.I. Packer put it well: "Once you become aware that your main business here in life is to know Christ, then most of life's problems fall into place"

What do you think your main business in life is?

- Everything in life flows from this fountain: knowing Christ.

What do you want to pass on to your kids?

- Alistair Begg said a man once quipped to him, "When I was young I had six theories and no kids. Now I have six kids and no theories" (in DeYoung *Crazy Busy*, 74).

Specifically, Paul mentions knowing Christ and **"the power of his resurrection,"** and **"the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death."** Let's unpack this.

We should first note that believers **have the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (cf., Eph 1:19).**

But Paul wants more. At this point, everyone may be "amening!" You might say, "Yeah, I want to know Christ. Yeah, I want the power of Christ." But we may be tempted to skip this next line, and jump to the resurrection part. We must not skip over this line **about suffering** because we'll miss something very important.

Paul says that he wants to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Earlier, he told the Philippians that we have been given the gift of suffering for Christ (Phil 1:29). This flies in the face of prosperity theology that says if you have faith you will be healthy, wealthy, and will have no trials.

We shouldn't read this like Paul enjoys suffering in and of itself. That's not what he means. Rather, he understands that to follow the man of sorrows, means that we too will encounter suffering and sorrow, and as we follow along this Calvary Road, we will know the Master better. **If you want to know Christ more than anything in life, and it's through suffering for Him that you'll know Him better, than you won't mind suffering.** It will be worth it! You will actually find joy in it (Acts 5:41).

V. 11: Paul concludes this amazing passage of Scripture saying:
assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead (3:11).
This is not statement of doubt, but of humility.

In verses 12-14, Paul shares three ways we can know Christ more.
What does it look like to treasure Christ Above All?

1. Humbly Acknowledge That You Haven't Arrived (12a, 13a)

Twice Paul uses a negative to *correct* any misunderstanding that the Philippians might have regarding spiritual maturity in general, or with Paul's Christian life in particular. He writes:

Not that I have already reached the goal Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it

Some false teachers in Philippi had adopted a *perfectionistic view of spirituality*.

Paul says that even though he has counted everything as loss for the sake of Christ, that doesn't mean he has arrived. **He isn't perfect. He hasn't entered the resurrected state yet.**

Mature people humbly acknowledge that they haven't arrived.

The Gospel **humbled** Paul.

His words surely brought **hope** to them as well!

- **Paul is identifying with them as a fellow Christian.**
- **He doesn't want them to think that he is somehow super human and superior.**

What happens when you humbly realize that you need to grow in Christ-likeness?

- **Your view of others will change.**
- **You will grow less smug and less critical of others because you will believe you need to grow as well.**
- **You will use your words differently.**
- **You will grow less self-righteous, and you will be quicker to identify evidences of grace in the lives of people.**
- **And, your love for the Savior will grow, because you will realize how much you need His grace!**

#2: Passionately Pursue a Greater Knowledge of Christ (12-14)

Many Christians can identify with point #1. We need to grow. Check. But many Christians use this point as an excuse to be complacent. That's not the case for the apostle Paul!

Even though he knows he isn't perfect, that doesn't mean he isn't exerting passion to grow in His knowledge of the Savior.

What's the prize? What's Paul after? Based upon the previous passage, **it's a fuller knowledge of Christ.** It involves "**knowing Christ fully**" (so O'Brien and Hanson, et al).

A Passionate Pursuit

To illustrate this pursuit, Paul uses athletic imagery to convey his passion for the Savior.

Growth in Christ-likeness isn't an impassioned stroll.

Paul uses disciplined athletic imagery elsewhere to describe the effort that's involved in growing in Christ. (cf., 1 Cor 9)

Forgetting and Straining

Consider Paul's running image closely. This passionate run involves **forgetting and straining** (13). Both are essential for running a good race, and both are essential for spiritual maturity.

One commentator:

He [Paul] will not allow either the achievements of the past (which God has wrought) or, for that matter, his failures as a Christian to prevent his gaze from being fixed firmly on the finish line. In this sense he forgets as he runs. (O'Brien, 429)

I love that express: "**He 'forgets as he runs.'**"

Your past doesn't have to determine your future.

If you had an awful childhood, or have made some awful mistakes, that certainly has consequences, but it doesn't have to determine the rest of your life.

- The Gospel is more powerful than that!
- Look at the guy who is writing this!
- **He persecuted Christians "to the death" (Acts 22:3)!**

Yet, we don't find Paul saying, "**Oh, I'm limited now. May previous experiences have made me damaged goods.**" You don't even find him saying anything like, "**I need to pay God back now.**"

He simply forgets, as he runs. You can too!
The Gospel really is good news!

Forget failures and run

We must deal with sin. But if you've been forgiven, and sought to make wrongs right, then forget and run. Don't let Satan bring up accusations against you, if Christ has forgiven you. Flee to Christ, remind yourself of the Gospel and press on.

Forget past achievements

Don't use past victories as an excuse to live complacently today.

- **"Successes" can create in some an unhealthy grasp on "the glory days."**
- These "glory days" Christians remind me of Uncle Rico in the movie of Napoleon Dynamite.
- He's a middle-aged former athlete, who lives in a camper van, and regularly videos himself throwing a football. Don't be Uncle Rico. Move on with life in the present season.
- We must not let former victories create a relaxation and self-satisfaction in the present. Consider the [NCAA tournament](#). When teams win games, and advance, what do they often say? We hear something like this: "We will enjoy this victory for the moment, but we've got to get ready for the next game."

Paul's not letting accomplishments make him lazy. He's forgetting accomplishments, as he runs. [Donnie to me: Man, you just need to say "I ain't done jack. Let's go!"]

One Thing

I love the simplicity of these words: "**one thing I do**" (13b). Here we find a "one thing guy."

There **are a million implications of this one thing**, but one dominant pursuit: Christ.

What's your "one thing?" **If we asked people who know you well, "What's his or her one thing?" what would they say?**

- **Mahaney: "What one change could you make in order to pursue the one thing that matters the most?"**

Don't underestimate the power of making one change.

David Powlison notes that change in one area affects every area of our life.

We don't typically think this way. We tend to think of spiritual growth in boxes, that is, after we work on one area, we can move to the next. But when you change one area of life, by God's grace, it moves through the totality of your life.

#3: Never Lose the Wonder of the Gospel (12b, 14b)

Paul mentions two phrases that highlight the wonder of the Gospel.

- **“I press on to make it my own,” (ESV)**
- **“because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (12b, ESV, my emphasis).**
- **Verse 14, “the upward call of God” (ESV), which is another beautiful statement about God's grace in salvation. God is calling us heavenward.**

What was Paul in awe of? It was the fact that “Christ made him, His own.”

What a concise and accurate statement of Paul's conversion.

Jesus made Paul, His own.

But that's not just Paul's story.

That's our story too! Christ has made us His own!

How did this happen? **It happened by grace!**

Paul mentions “God's call” in verse 14. Christians are those that have responded in repentance and faith to the call of the Gospel. God called us by grace. We heard the Gospel as a gift of grace. We are sustained by grace. For all eternity, we will sing the praises of the God of all grace.

It's only because God has made us His own that we can press on!

The wonder of this gospel is that we know him.

And the best is yet to come!

Paul says this in **Phil 3:20-21**

Never lose the wonder of that.

Let that affect the way you live individually.

Let that affect the way we interact as a church.

We aren't from around here! We're citizens of heaven. Let's reflect the values of the King until we see the King.

May God grant us grace to trust in Christ alone and to treasure Christ above all.