

Study 3: Philippians 3:1 – 4:1

Philippians 3:1-11. The foundation of confidence

- Imagine you are going away on holiday for a couple of weeks to somewhere new and unfamiliar. What would you pack to take with you?
- Now imagine that new travel restrictions have come into force and you can only take your hand luggage. How would you pack differently?

Background.

In contrast to the encouraging and supportive examples of Timothy and Ephaphroditus, Paul goes on to warn the Philippians about two sources of opposition based upon a false understanding of the gospel.

Read Ch. 3:1-11

- The first form of opposition is described in these verses. What is it?
- Jews and the prophets used the terms “dogs” to refer to opponents of God’s truth¹. Paul uses this same term about the people we’ve just identified. Why does Paul object to them so much?
- Why does Paul consider circumcision unnecessary for gentiles?
- If Paul says all these things are irrelevant, why does he stress them in verses 4b-6?

¹ Matt. 7:6, Deut.23:18, 1 Sam 17:43, 24:14, Prov. 26:11

In verse 8, Paul uses the word “rubbish” to refer to the qualifications that the Jewish Christians were placing their confidence in.

The Greek word translated “rubbish” occurs only here in the New Testament. Its derivation is uncertain, but it appears to have referred to excrement, food gone bad, scraps left over after a meal, and refuse. Elsewhere it describes a half-eaten corpse and lumps of manure.

- Why would Paul use such offensive language to describe his former advantages?
- If Paul no longer places his confidence in these advantages, in what does he place his confidence now?
- In verse 11, Paul says “and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Given everything he’s said before, he is obviously not in doubt, so what might he be getting at? ²

² Rms 8:15-17, Gal. 4:6-7

Philippians 3:13-4:1. Running the Race

Paul states that at conversion his views about what was important in life changed drastically. He learned to place his confidence in Christ and his death as the only assurance of forgiveness and acceptance with God. But Paul tells the Philippians that this was only the beginning.

The second source of opposition facing the church in Philippi was those who claimed that having come to faith they were now made perfect before Christ.

- It's clear from our previous two studies that this view is incorrect. Where in the earlier chapters has Paul already touched on this?

Paul pictures the Christian life being like running a race.

- Where did the race begin (look back at vv. 7-9)?
- How did Paul become a runner?
- Where is the finish line?
- How far has Paul got?
- How does he run – which direction, what focus, what level of effort?
- What is his attitude to other runners?
- What is the prize? And who gets it?

“Finally...”³, all of these questions are good ones to ask of our own Christian race, and it would be good to take time out, following this study, to use them as a personal reflection on what we have

³ Chapter 3:1

been discussing. But, thinking of St. Andrew's as a whole, in light of the question "How does he run – which direction, what focus, what level of effort?" Where do you think our strengths and weaknesses lie?