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Be Like Me

Philippians 3 v 12-21

Introduction

I can't dance.

People say you should just relax and let your body follow the beat. But mine doesn't do that. If I relax it just stops moving. I have to concentrate to move my limbs about, and moving all four at once in time to a beat is beyond me.

However I can copy. We had a video game a few years ago called Just Dance. But it shouldn't be called Just Dance, it should be called Just Copy. Because the point of it is to do exactly what the on-screen characters are doing. And I can do that. I think if I practised enough I could memorise the moves well enough to make it look like I know how to dance.

In our reading today, Paul wants to encourage the Christians in Philippi to walk with Jesus. But what does that mean? How do I go about it? It's not in our nature to do things to please God rather than ourselves. And so Paul's solution is "Be like me". See what I'm doing, and do that too.

Let's see what he means by that.

Previously

Now these first two weeks of the year are free choice weeks for the speaker, before we dive back into Romans. Will spoke on the first half of Philippians 3 last week, so I thought it would be good to continue that and finish the chapter.

If you remember the first half, Paul is emphasising that salvation comes from faith and not works. He said he puts no confidence in the flesh. False teachers have been saying that the Philippians need to carry out certain acts, like circumcision, to be properly saved.

Paul says he deserves commendation for what he is and what he's done more than anyone else. But he doesn't rely on those things. In fact he counts them as rubbish. It's only by faith, and all by grace, that he is saved.

But if it's all by grace, why should we try to do good?

The Problem

This is the conundrum in the Christian faith. The external view of a Christian is someone who is a good person. Yet we say (because the Bible says) that none of us are good enough. The proper view of a Christian is one who wholly trusts in the goodness of Jesus for salvation. Yet we try to be as good as possible.

We even tell our children to be good. Shouldn't we be telling them they're bad and there's nothing they can do about it, other than turn to Christ? And if they do turn to Christ, shouldn't we tell them that it's all sorted, that they can relax now?

Striving

What does Paul do? At the end of last week's reading he said he counted all his supposed good points as nothing, as loss, because his righteousness comes from Christ, and knowing Christ is the best thing, even sharing in Christ's sufferings, that he might know the resurrected life in full. Now, verse 12-14:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[Philippians 3 v 12-14]

Paul doesn't seem to think it's all sorted. He's pressing on, he's straining, he wants to win the prize. Christ has made him righteous, but hasn't yet made him perfect. One day he will be made perfect, as God takes him up to be with his saviour, but Paul doesn't want to sit and wait for that day - he wants to try his best to reach towards that perfection. Why? *Because Christ Jesus has made me his own*. You see Jesus had saved him and he wanted to give back all that he could to honour his saviour.

There is a famous devotional book by the Scottish evangelist, Oswald Chambers, called My Utmost for His Highest, that reflects this same attitude. As Christians we should not be sitting back, but pressing forward, dedicating ourselves to prayer, to the Word of God, and to sharing him with others. Because these are things that honour God, and the highest achievement we can make in life is to honour him.

Paul said to Timothy that *godliness with contentment is great gain. [1 Timothy 6 v 6]*. And that's true. We should be content with what God has given us. But what Paul is saying here is that the Philippians shouldn't be content with what they are giving him. He says forget about the past, keep your eyes on Christ and the goal - the upward call of God.

We Should Too

And we should too.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

[Philippians 3 v 15-16]

We should all be like this, pressing on for God. That's what Paul wants. And don't argue with him, he's right.

Have you ever tried arguing with someone who you know is wrong, and it seems impossible to turn them around to your way of thinking? It can be very frustrating. No matter how much

you explain, you just can't change their mind. Maybe they're too set in their ways to change. Or maybe they're just sticking to their guns to annoy you. Or maybe there's just the remotest chance that you're wrong. Pride can set in when we try to argue our position.

Paul knows he's right here. We should be striving for the Lord in our lives. But he doesn't endlessly try to make the point, he just leaves it to the Lord. God will show them!

And anyway, what you do know, what God has already shown you, hold on to those things.

Be Like Me

So, Paul has given them the "what" - strive to be more like Jesus in everything, to better serve the Lord and love others. But what about the "how"? What does that actually look like? This is where Paul makes a brave move:

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

[Philippians 3 v 17]

So we should copy Paul. The Philippians hadn't seen Jesus. They only had descriptions of him from Paul and others. It was hard for them to know how to be like him. But they had seen Paul. And Paul was confident enough that he was living out the gospel while he was with them, to tell them to copy his example.

Do you know someone who displays the love of Christ in their life? Someone you can take as an example? I can think of Christians I know who are really caring. Or excellent prayers. Sacrificial givers. Or hard working servers. God puts these people in our lives to help us see how we should be striving, how to be more like Christ.

But be careful, not every Christian is a good example:

For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

[Philippians 3 v 18-19]

Paul isn't talking about those outside the church here, but those who seem to be in the body of the church, but are not striving. They're living for themselves, and will take every opportunity to point out their achievements. They've taken their eyes off Christ and put them on to the world.

So be discerning. See how Christians behave and follow the good examples. Let God challenge you to improve in an area you're weak.

None of us are going to reach perfection in this life. But we know we will in the next:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

[Philippians 3 v 20-21]

We wait for Jesus - to complete our salvation. Our souls are saved but we are still living in earthly bodies. So we fight to deny the flesh and live in the spirit until Jesus comes and changes the flesh.

Conclusion

I'm not a dancer.

Some people say that the Christian life is like a dance. You just have to relax and let the Spirit take control and it will go well with you.

But I don't think a professional dancer would say it's like that. I've seen "Strictly". The competitors in that show have to work really hard. They practise the moves over and over again, learning what to do by copying the professional.

That's what Paul wants us to be like. Press on, work hard, strive. And take the examples of others further down the road than us as patterns to follow.

Maybe in this life I'll never be a perfect Christian. But I can be a better one.