

Text: Philippians 3:4-11, Part 1

Title: Paul's Theological Autobiography

Truth: Paul realized his religious works were useless to attain God's righteousness.

Date/Location: Sunday March 13, 2022 at FBC (rev. from April 2011)

Introduction

We are going to cut into the middle of a passage of Scripture. We examined verses 1-3 before. Now, our focus will be on verses 4-11, with specific attention given to Paul's old religious way of life in contrast to the new.

Like Paul, all of us have a "before Christ" time in our lives, and sometimes we put some stock in religious practices that were useless to save our souls. Are you in the "B.C." period of your life now, without sure knowledge that you are delivered from sin? Or are you in a new "A.D." period of your life where you follow Christ as Lord and Savior?

The dividing line between the B.C. and A.D. states of life is when you come to understand what Christ did in dying for you. That is:

1. The Lord Jesus lived a perfect life to provide you with a righteous standing before God;
2. He died in your place to pay for your sin penalty so that you can be forgiven your sin and guilt;
3. He rose again from the dead to demonstrate the completion of His salvation work and to provide the Christian with spiritual blessings like freedom from sin's dominion, newness of life, and sanctification in union with Christ, as well as hope of our own future resurrection.
4. If you believe in Christ in accordance with the above truths, you will be saved.

Let's see how the apostle Paul thinks about the transition in his own life.

I. Former Confidence in the Flesh, v. 4-6

⁴ though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:

- A. In the larger context, the point of this section is to say that Paul could compete with any Judaizer on the basis of their qualification system. Of anyone, Paul had the most reason to be confident in the flesh—if that were a *thing* that was worthwhile. The Judaizers were boasting of their supposedly meritorious law-keeping works, but Paul had them beat by a mile. If they could boast, so could he, and twice as much. Paul is using a technique of argumentation in which he has already undercut the premise of the opposition. But he now supposes for sake of argument that their method of righteousness is useful. He reasons “according to their folly” (Prov. 26:5) and will show how inadequate their approach is.
- B. The List of Fleshly Qualifications in verse 5. Note the following list of seven qualifications that put him above the competition.

1 circumcised the eighth day,
2 of the stock of Israel,
3 of the tribe of Benjamin,
4 a Hebrew of the Hebrews,
5 concerning the law, a Pharisee,
6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church,
7 concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

1. None of this has anything to do with Christ’s death. It is all a fleshly boast. It is trust in ethnic background (1-3) and self-effort (4-7).

- C. How many humans think the same general way that Paul formerly did? We might not be religious at all, but we trust in our philanthropy or good behavior. Or we might be very circumspect about our religious observance. If we believe those approaches will get us somewhere, while Jesus Christ is not at the forefront of our consideration as to how one achieves a right standing with God, then we are outside of the boundaries of God’s word. This bad thinking is what Paul talks about using the terms *gain* and *loss*.

II. Transfer to Newfound Confidence in Christ, v. 7-11

⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

A. Verse 7's *gain* and *loss* are investment terms. They have to do with gaining or earning something versus damage, disadvantage and loss. For a real material example, see Acts 27:10, 21. The works of the flesh in verses 4-6 were a kind of investment that Paul made to earn favor from God. But he came to realize that these things were a bad investment which have no return!

B. The Re-Characterization of Losses and Gains, v. 7

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.

It is interesting to observe that there are seven things Paul lists that were positives for him before he realized how God thinks about the matter. An eighth summarizes and expands on the seven. These moved to the *loss* column and were replaced with eight different investment *gains*.

Gain / Profit Column, v. 8-11	Loss/Trash Column v. 4-6, 7
Knowing Christ the Lord 2x	Circumcision
Christ	Jewish lineage
Be found in Christ	Tribal association
Righteousness from God through faith in Christ	Observant Hebrew
Know the power of Christ's resurrection	Pharisee
Know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings	Zealous to point of persecution

Gain / Profit Column, v. 8-11	Loss/Trash Column v. 4-6, 7
Be conformed to Christ's death	Blameless in terms of law-righteousness
To attain to the resurrection of the dead	All things, which refer to his own righteousness from the Law

1. The items in the right-hand column are clear enough, and I will give modern examples in just a bit. What might be difficult for you if you do not yet know Jesus is the contrast to those gain items in the left-hand column.
2. There is nothing we do that amounts to profit when it comes to achieving righteousness and knowing Christ. Paul summarized his loss column (last item) to include *all things* that he was, did, or could have done. He gives all that up, because he recognizes that it is fruitless. It is vaporized when compared to Jesus.
3. How might we understand these items today? In some cases, very much the same as how Paul did. In other cases, we have to "update" the concept a little bit to make it fit our setting. Often what happens is that people believe in themselves and their religious speculations. "My intellect will carry me through." They have a high view of their own intelligence and self-autonomy. They do not want to be underneath the directives or truth of someone else, so they think like Paul did, but in a modern adaptation, like these ideas:

Paul's Loss	Modern Version
Circumcision	Baptism, circumcision, other religious sacraments or traditions
Jewish lineage	Any mindset of ethnic superiority
Tribal association	Socioeconomic group. Do you think that you are economically oppressed, poor, or blessed, so this indicates God's favor?
Observant Hebrew	"I am a spiritual person."
Pharisee	A religiously disciplined person. "I go to church every week." "I give a tithe."

Paul's Loss	Modern Version
Zealous to point of persecution	"I am a religious zealot, a militant." "I zealously criticize other religious groups."
Blameless in terms of law-righteousness	"My good works will outweigh my bad." "I am a good person."
All things, which refer to his own righteousness from the Law	See all the above.

4. Paul not only counts his former ways to be in the loss column, he considers his former works as *rubbish*. This term means trash, garbage, manure, refuse, kitchen scraps, or excrement. It is a fairly crude term in Greek, only used here in the Bible. It is used once in the apocryphal literature to denote that which a sieve sorts out as refuse and what is left as good. In a real sense, these things are worse than zero—worse than a loss: they are negatives in one's approach to God.

C. The Reason for the Re-Characterization of Losses and Gains, v. 8

1. It turns out that Paul realized he was originally investing in the loss column rather than in the profit column. He was, in a financial illustration, throwing good money after bad.

On account of Christ, Paul's thinking about the gains and losses totally changed. Now looking at what Christ did, it became evident that his previous inheritances and investments were actually moving away him from eternal life instead of toward it. So, he left them behind like so much cargo and anchors of a sinking ship (Acts 27:10, 21) so he might not be dragged down with them, but instead be saved.

2. The previous losses were also far surpassed by the "excellence of knowing Christ." There is nothing that compares to knowing Jesus and God the Father. In fact, this is eternal life (John 17:3). Knowing Him surpasses all the other gains one could amass. For Christ's sake, Paul gave up everything. He "suffered" a loss only from his previous point of view before he was saved. From his new saved point of view, this was no loss at all!

3. We should note the focus upon Jesus Christ in Paul's new thinking. He *knows* or *counts* (consider, regard) three times in the passage. **Christ** or pronouns that refer to Christ occur 10 times in verses 7-10. In contrast, all the bad investments were centered on Paul himself or his behavior. This is what happens when someone is truly saved. Their eyes turn away from themselves and confidence in themselves and turn upon Jesus. You see this in how they speak and think about everything that they face in life. They have the Lord in their thoughts and plans.

D. All the gains Paul saw in the Lord Jesus.

1. Knowing Christ the Lord (twice). A close kind of knowledge is suggested here, for "my" Lord indicates the personal nature of it.
2. Christ Himself is the object. "That I may gain Christ." Anything is worth trading in or throwing away to gain Him. Imagine losing your spouse. Imagine losing your child. Your parent. Now imagine losing *Christ*. The *opposite* of *losing Christ* is what it means to gain Christ. You cannot imagine losing Jesus Christ.
3. Be found in Christ. I would much rather be found *in* Him that outside of Him! Outside of Christ, all people are *in* Adam, sin, and death.
4. Righteousness from God through faith in Christ. Carefully read Romans 3:21-26 on this. The entire point of the Christian gospel is that Jesus Christ died and rose so that you could be forgiven *and* justified with a righteousness from Him, not your own.
5. Know the power of Christ's resurrection. To "know" the power of the resurrection is not just to understand it in the mind. To "know" means to "experience," to *really* know by life what the power of God is in the resurrection. And what is that power? The resurrection-of-Christ-grounded life means that we are dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6), that we live a life devoted to good works (Ephesians 2:8-10), that our minds are set on things above (Col 3:1), and we have presently and look forward to an eternal living hope (1 Peter 1:3). The resurrection means that we have in Christ conquered sin and live for God.

We are “disconnected” from the ways of the world (dead to it) and alive to the ways of God in Christ.

Correlate this “power of the resurrection” to Ephesians 1:18-20 and Ephesians 3:20.

Some Christians used to speak about not knowing the power of the resurrection as living in constant state of spiritual defeat. I ask you and myself: Do you really know the power of the resurrection in your *life*, not just your *mind*?

6. Know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. Once again, to *know* is beyond mental knowledge. Do you share in the sufferings of being a Christian because you belong to Jesus? Paul believed that suffering was beneficial for the Christian, if for no other reason than to learn to trust God and be comforted by Him and be able to share that with others. Paul wanted those benefits.
7. Be conformed to Christ’s death. See below.
8. To attain to the resurrection of the dead. This is the last goal of the apostle Paul in throwing out his old investments and instead knowing Christ. He doesn’t arrogantly lay claim to the resurrection from the dead, but he is looking forward to it. We often overlook that hope and think about dying and going to heaven and that is all. But in truth, you will die and go to heaven temporarily, then come back and be re-united with your resurrected body, then reign with Christ for 1000 years, and *then* move to the new heavens and new earth which will be your permanent dwelling. The real watershed moment is when your body is resurrected and you are “put back together” forever (or, if alive at the rapture, immediately glorified).

E. One of the Gains: Being Conformed to Christ’s Death

1. Conformed means to take on the same form or style as something. In short, it means to be like Christ in his death. This is a tall order. Obviously there are limitations, because no one else’s death is propitiatory in effect. But there are similarities.
2. One way we might think of is this: in light of Christ’s obedience to the point of death (Philippians 2:8), our being conformed to

His death could mean that we likewise are obedient to the point of death. We may never be put into a situation where we will die as a martyr, but we ought to have the mindset of being always obedient no matter what.

3. In death, Christ loved us. Romans 5:8, John 15:13. 1 John 3:16 and 4:11 urge us to behave similarly, loving our brothers even to the point of dying for our brothers.
4. I got the idea that the meaning is to be conformed to the *purpose* of Christ's death. Though this initially seems to be an addition of the word *purpose* to the text, I believe it is correct.

The purpose of Christ going to the cross was what also animated Paul. Christ's purpose in death was Paul's purpose as well. Christ's purpose in dying was to redeem us from every evil work and gain for Himself a people who were zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

We should not only want to have those results in our lives, but also, if we would follow Paul's example, we should work to see that same purpose accomplished in the lives of other people.

Christ died to redeem people; we should be conformed to his death by living as redeemed and living to redeem others.

Conclusion

Christ died on a cross and bore in His own body our sins that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 2:24, 3:18). This destroys all other righteousness-seeking programs in the sight of God.

Christianity is not a righteousness-earning system. We are talking about Paul's highest desire, a total change in his thinking from his prior legalism. Now his life is animated and directed toward Christ, the person of the God-man. He wants to fully know Christ— resurrection power, sufferings, righteousness, etc. Is Christ your highest prize, deepest desire?

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