
The Loss that Gains Christ

Philippians 3:1-11

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Religion, everyone has one even if it is irreligion:

Atheism as religion...

Religions as false and fatal to the soul...

When Christianity is a religion...

Religion is all about self-salvation projects – where my performance gains me access or acceptance to the deity...

Personal testimony: lost in self-righteousness. The entrapment of religion...

In our text this morning, Paul declares that his adherence to Judaism was self-righteousness, a self-salvation project. In order to truly be saved from sin and sinning, he had to set it aside.

So we must lose our religion in order to gain Christ.

A Significant Repetition

(v. 1)

We all know people who repeat themselves. They seem to talk about the same things over and over again. This was Paul. This subject came up over and over again. Not because he had nothing else to talk about, but because nothing else was as important.

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

In the Command

Rejoicing in the Lord is going to take on more meaning than just being happy in Jesus. It is a radical call to change what we prize so that we praise what we should. The call here will be from being happy over what I am doing for Jesus to being happy over Jesus and what He has done for me.

From the Writer

It is no trouble, partially because the repetition is not merely reinforcing, it is re-defining. Paul is writing in a context where there was a call that Christians were to go back to the Law, back to Judaism, back to living under the Mosaic Code. Having been committed to that system of religion, Paul understood its true glories and its now grave danger.

For their Safety

So here is a terrific irony: there is spiritual safety in guarding against the scalpel. It has its proper uses – but it is dangerous and deadly in the wrong hands used the wrong way.

A Serious Warning**(v. 2-7)**

We have all seen the road signs, “Watch for falling rock.” (And no, Falling Rock was not a lost Indian girl we are all supposed to be looking for). “Watch out.” We have all heard this from others as we approached a dangerous place or decision. Paul here leans over into our lives and sternly and loudly says, “You watch out for...”

² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Against Certain People**(v. 2)**

All error in teaching and practice comes through people. Yes, may come to us in books, radio shows, TV, blogs, internet sites – but behind all error are people. And ultimately, behind them is Satan, the father by whom all errors and lies are spawned.

Here is another twist. The Jews considered Gentiles to be dogs, evil doers and body mutilators because they did not do circumcision. Since the coming of Jesus, those who insist on Mosaic rites are outside the faith, wicked and mutilate the flesh. There are faces that go with this description. These are not, in his day, a nameless, “they” or “them”. This is real people who formed a faction in the church at Jerusalem who went around behind Paul, entered the newly founded churches and tried to teach a performance based substitute for grace.

From Biblical Truth**(v. 3)**

Our identity in Christ, our Biblical self-definition, our “who we are” is the root of all real Biblical practice. "I am the true circumcision and therefore I do not put confidence in what I can do." The true circumcision are not those who have something done to them in the flesh. They do not need to become a Jew. Rather, the true people of God are those who:

...worship by the Spirit of God. They do not depend in religious ritual, even ones that were originally given by God, to have access to or to be accepted by God.

...glory in Jesus Christ. Why say this? Because to glory in the Law, in Moses, in what I do, is to depend on and boast in something besides Christ.

...put no confidence in the flesh. True Christians have no confidence in themselves or in what they do.

When we think that we have access to God, or are accepted by God or are seeking God’s approval by *anything* we do, we have placed our confidence in the flesh. So, why are you here at church? Why do you give? Why do you teach Sunday School? Why do you try to live a life that is pleasing to God? Why do you wear or not wear certain clothes? Why do you *do*...?

With a Personal Illustration

(v. 4-6)

Now, if anyone was going to have God's approval, it was going to be Paul. If anyone had the right, had reasons to be confident in "the flesh", in his religion and religious doing, it was Paul. Here is his personal, national, religious, denominational heritage.

He had the right surgery. He was part of the right nation. He knew his tribe and by implication, his family roots and lineage. He was the epitome of being Jewish, of being a Hebrew, of living out what it meant to be a son of Abraham. He had the right interpretation of the Bible and was formally a member of the correct denomination. He was so committed he was willing to persecute and if necessary, execute anyone who taught differently. When it came to what his religion required, he was perfect. He fully practiced everything that his conservative, orthodox, religion required.

This used to be his identity. Do you see the problem? Before he was converted, he had a certain identity. He was a Jew, an Israelite, a Pharisee. Because this was so, he therefore was one of God's people.

This was how he pursued a right standing with God. It was more than just being in God's people, but having a right standing and relationship with God. God would approve of him and accept him because he not only had this identity but he was doing everything that could be expected of someone claiming to be of God's people.

By a Surprising Declaration

(v. 7)

Here is a gain that was deadly. Rather than giving him access to God and being accepted by God, it made his condemnation worse. All this gain had to be put aside. Like Paul, all that we were and all that we have done has to be counted up as loss. We have put it all on the positive side of the ledger. We think it will all add up to a credit, a righteousness that God will honor. But that is wrong bookkeeping. We must realize that all we have gained in our self-salvation projects put us ever deeper in the hole. We have to stop seeing it as valuable, trustworthy and accredited to our account.

Instead, here is a loss that gained Christ. In one saving transaction of faith, he moved all that to the loss side of the column. In doing so, God credited the righteousness of Christ to his account.

But there is more than just an understanding of righteousness here. It is a radical change in the "why" of who we were and what we did. Now, all that was put in the trash can because of, for the sake of Christ. He is no longer looking primarily out for himself; he is seeking to gain Christ – to have the right evaluation of his own righteousness because of Jesus. Is this true of you as well?

A Saving Achievement**(v. 8-10)**

If we assess our good place, position and performance as loss, then what? By believing in Christ, we will have a saving achievement.

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—

What must be Lost**(v. 8)**

What is it here that must be lost? Is this just our past? Are we turning over a new leaf? Are we moving on from past failures? Is this a turning away from material gain and an embracing of some form of “simplicity” or even asceticism?

No, that is not what Paul is gladly willing and wanting to lose. The “all things” here are all the things of verses 3-6. These are what he must lose. For a Jew, as proud as he was of it, this is a great loss; it would feel like suffering. What if, in order to become a Christian, you have to come to understand that your birth, your family, your nationality, your country, your ethnicity, your religion and every good thing you had ever done had to be treated like this? It had to be treated as garbage and thrown away, never to be brought out again.

O, that’s right. That is exactly what you have to do to be saved. You must have exactly the same attitude toward anything and everything that brought you significance, worth, value and acceptance by God. You have to count it as rubbish, trash, garbage. Then, and only then can God’s salvation be yours.

What will be Gained**(v. 9)**

Two inseparable gains will come when we turn away from our self-salvation projects. When we give up relying on our station in life and our good works, then we will gain Christ and His righteousness. This is our true investment. This is our greatest treasure. This is what is to be valued above all.

We will gain a true relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Our salvation is first about a person. It is God accepting us and giving us Himself. In our sin, we are separated from Him. In our salvation, we are brought back to Him. We are reconciled to God. And so, we are given the greatest treasure there is – to have the Lord Jesus Christ as our redeemer and ruler.

We will gain a true righteousness from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The righteousness of Christ is put to our account. In the sense of this text, we are added to Christ so that the account of His own holiness becomes our own. This transaction takes place by faith. Believing God’s promise is the means, the way, you become righteous. Faith is not righteousness. Believing God is the way it is accounted. So, you do not receive a self-earned righteousness achieved by the hard (and impossible) works of the Law. You do receive a person, the Lord Jesus, whose righteousness is simply, freely, totally given to you by believing in Him.

We have come to recognize the worthlessness of all that we usually trust to save us. There is no spiritual achievement award in our self-salvation projects, only despair, doom and eventual damnation. But, by believing in Christ, we do have a saving achievement.

A Shaping Aspiration

(v. 10-11)

So here then comes that radical reorientation. He now has a goal, an aspiration that will shape his life in a radically new way. These are what we aim for as the trajectory of our life. Is this the way we think? Do we talk like this?

¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Now don't isolate this from the sentence it is a part of. What is aimed for here is not some dim aspiration that he may achieve if he does everything right. No, what is being put before us is an aim, a desire, a purpose in life that we will achieve if we, by faith, have gained Christ and His righteousness.

In this Life

(v. 10)

What great aspirations in this life! I want to know Jesus. I want to experience the power of His resurrection. Yes. All that. By faith. Banking on His promises. Not trying to perform to get it but resting in His word that says I already have it. Yet, wanting this above all this – that I may experience the realities.

Here is the result of this aspiration – sharing in Jesus' suffering and being like Jesus in His death. There it is. Give me this too. I will trash all my good stuff in order to gain Jesus and salvation and righteousness. And what do I get? To suffer and die. Sharing in Jesus' suffering and dying with Jesus is the greatest perk of becoming a Christian. Not what we usually think of.

If you truly want to know Jesus and to experience His resurrection power, then one of your aspirations in life is share His suffering and be transformed until and in the day you die.

In the Life to Come

(v. 11)

Believing in Jesus, knowing Jesus in His suffering, being like Jesus in His death in order that I will be there on the day we are raised from the dead. Here is the final irony. What keeping the Law and being good was supposed to bring us can actually only come through faith in Jesus. The Law cannot give you life. Being good cannot raise you from the dead. Only faith in Jesus gains you, will attain for you, life and resurrection from the dead to eternal life.

So, isn't it a great thing to aspire for something you will most certainly receive? Isn't right here the connection between faith and hope? Faith is believing in what God promises and hope is aspiring, aiming, pursuing what God has promised. We do so, not in order to have it, but because we are already assured of having it.

Reflect and Respond

So is this your reality? Are these words true of you?

⁷I once thought these things [all that I was and all that I had done and accomplished] were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else [all my past and present good works], counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, ¹¹so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! [Adapted and expanded from the New Living Translation]

What makes you happy spiritually?

What is your religion? What are you banking on to save you?

Do you rejoice in Christ?

Are you still on a performance treadmill?

What is your greatest aspiration and goal in life?