



PHILIPPIANS

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But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Philippians 3:7

Paul now sums up all of the confidence in the flesh of the previous two verses in one thought, beginning with "But..." The word is given to contrast those things of supposed high accolade and honor. Instead he says, "...what things were gain to me." The word *kerdos*, or "gain," in Greek is plural. Thus it says, "gains." He lumps all of these worldly badges of honor and distinction into one, using a word which indicates profit which is "acquired through 'faith-trading'" (HELPS Word Studies). In other words, he had put his faith in these things as that which assured him his high status in this world, and his right-standing before God in the next.

Instead though, he continues with the words, "these things I have counted loss for Christ." He contrasts the "gains" of the first clause with *zémia*, or "loss." The word signifies "damage (detriment); a mercantile term for "loss"; a "bad deal" (unsuccessful business transaction) which results in a *fine (penalty, forfeiture)"* (HELPS Word Studies). In other words, it is as if he first gambled on those things to secure his status, and then found that the bet was a loser. They weren't a sure bet, or even a break-even one. Instead, they were a losing bet, and a source of loss.

The contrast of using a plural word for the supposed gains, and a singular for the actual loss is striking. All his supposed gains were realized in one great loss which was "for Christ." He had to walk away from it all in order to come to Christ. And so come he did, with empty hands concerning each and every one of them. And not only that, but the perfect tense of the word "counted" signifies that they were loss, and they continued to be loss. There would NEVER be a time when he could use those things as a benefit. They were cast to the dust bin of the history of his life. All was Christ, and Christ was his All-in-all.

Life application: Think hard on the words of this verse. The highest honors and achievements that the greatest in Hebrew society could obtain were utterly useless in establishing a right relationship with God. If this is so, and it is, what more could you add to what Christ has done? Nothing. Diddly-doo. Trust in Christ, rest in Christ, and be content that His work alone is sufficient for your passage into the heavenly realms.

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... Philippians 3:8

Paul's amazing statement here is an explanation and expansion of the previous verse. Taken together they read –

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yet 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...”

The words “what things” of the previous verse was speaking of his great personal qualities of lineage and heritage, along with his special status within Israelite society. However, setting those things aside was not all that Paul considered “loss for Christ.” Rather, he continues on with “Yet indeed I also count all things loss.”

There was nothing that he had worked for or accomplished in his life that was of any value to him in relation to true satisfaction or boasting he now made in his Lord. When he met Christ, the most precious memory, and the most hoped-for goal, were alike considered as loss. His very being was converted from that which is earthly and carnal to that which is heavenly and spiritual. Nothing of this world mattered and was “loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

The word for “excellence” here is actually a verb. It indicates “the excelling knowledge.” In other words, whatever is of note is vastly outshined by knowing Christ. If one carries a dab of perfume into a perfume factory, what was considered a sweet and powerful smell will be lost in the overwhelming amount of fragrance which fills the building. If one were to have a flashlight on a path while walking in full sunshine, the light of the flashlight would not even be noticeable. If one were to be in a dry desert with but a drop of water left in the canteen, it would be forgotten if that person were to come upon a large flowing river of the purest water.

Paul is trying to describe that which cannot be fully described. The superlative nature of Christ and what He offers simply overwhelms anything that we could hold up as of value. In

comparison to Him, it is nothing. For this reason, he continues with words of strength by saying, “for whom I have suffered the loss of all things.”

One would think of loss as a weakness, but when that loss is compared to what has been obtained in its place, it is the greatest Source of strength of all. No thing, and no accumulation of things – even to an exceedingly enormous amount of stuff – could ever compare to the infinite gain which is experienced in knowing Christ.

Understanding this, he then describes what all of his “gain” actually means in relation to knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. He says he counts “them as rubbish.” The word is *skýbalon*. It is only found here in the Bible, and it is believed to be a combination of the word “dog” and the word “throw.” In other words, all of his gain is that which is only worth throwing to the dogs, such as filthy refuse, table scraps, and the like. It is good for nothing and it simply discarded. Considering that he has called the Judaizers of verse 2 “dogs,” he is indicating that their teachings and the things they boast in are just that, refuse.

Instead of being pleased with these things and trusting in them, he has cast them away so that he “may gain Christ.” The play on words seems evident. He says the loss that he suffered from his supposed “gains” is a gain in and of itself. The treasure and honor of knowing Christ is of infinite value because it stems from the infinite Creator. Nothing else could compare to this, and so any loss is – by default – gain.

Life application: We live in this world and we can and should enjoy what this world provides, but we should never allow those things to have us. Rather, we are to have them, but only with a loose grasp of them. When the time is right, Christ will come and those things which we now possess will seem as the most useless and unimportant things imaginable. Let us not hold fast to this world as we pass through it.

...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; Philippians 3:9

Following up on his words of the previous verse where he said, “that I may gain Christ,” Paul now shows what that means. It is to “be found in Him.” In dying to the world, we live to Christ. We positionally move from Adam to Jesus. Whereas we once were fallen and destined to eternal separation from God because of both inherited and committed sin, we become alive in Christ, having both cancelled. Our sin debt dies with Him on the cross and we are granted His righteousness.

Paul explains this by saying, “not having my own righteousness.” This should be worded, “not having a righteousness of my own.” It then eliminates any other type of righteousness than the

one he will identify; something which could be implied in this translation. Paul is stating clearly and unambiguously that he possesses no such righteousness “which is from the law.” This idea is explained by Paul elsewhere. In Galatians 2, he says –

“We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” Galatians 2:15, 16

The law could not justify, or make righteous, anyone. Rather, it stood opposed to that. Only a person with inherit righteousness could satisfy the law, but other than Jesus, there is none righteous. Instead of being justified by the law, Paul states that he is found in Christ Jesus by possessing a righteousness “which *is* through faith in Christ.”

Faith in the work of Christ is what grants someone righteousness. This is explained in Ephesians 2:8, 9. However, Paul is showing the contrast of this to that of those who apply adherence to the law into their life and conduct. In Romans 10:3, he explains it this way –

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Christ bears inherit righteousness, and He also fulfilled the law. Through faith in Him, righteousness is imputed to us. If we reinsert the law, we seek to establish our own righteousness apart from Christ. In this, there can be no hope. Only by faith in Christ can we possess His righteousness, “the righteousness which is from God by faith.” Charles Ellicott states this concerning the final two clauses of this verse –

“This verse is notable, as describing the true righteousness; first imperfectly, as coming ‘through faith of Jesus Christ,’ a description which discloses to us only its means, and not its origin; next, completely, as ‘a righteousness coming from God on the sole condition of faith’ — faith being here viewed not as the means, but as the condition, of receiving the divine gift.”

Life application: What do you suppose you could add to the work of Jesus to satisfy God’s righteous demands? Let’s see – He was born without sin. Were you? He lived under the Law of Moses perfectly. Have you? He died in fulfillment of the law. Did you? He annulled the law through its fulfillment. Did you know? He offers us salvation by grace, imputing to us His righteousness, if we simply believe. Do you? Ok then, what more can you add to these things in order to be “more righteous” before God? Think it through, and then put away your childish attempts to be “super holy” by reinserting a law which can only condemn you.

...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, Philippians 3:10

These words now continue to explain the words of “that I may gain Christ” from verse 8, that in turn, was tied to the “knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” of the same verse. By gaining Christ, he (and thus we!) can then “know Him and the power of His resurrection.” This is an immediate act of knowledge. In other words, by putting all other things behind, we come to know Christ.

However, this knowledge will be something that we can and should build upon for all of our lives. Despite this, it is the immediate act which is being referred to. There is a time in a person’s life when they come to “know” that they are separate from God, and that Christ is the answer to that separation. It is He who can and does fill the need which cannot otherwise be met. And further, knowing Christ includes, and indeed hinges upon, knowing the power of His resurrection. If Christ was not raised from the dead, then as Paul says –

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁴ And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. ¹⁵ Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. ¹⁶ For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! ¹⁸ Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” 1 Corinthians 15:12-18

Without the resurrection, everything else falls apart. There is no atonement for sin, for example. If that is true, then the death of Christ was pointless. He died as any other criminal died, and He did so bearing sin, because death is the wages of sin. Unless He came out of the grave, proving that He had no sin, then sin He had. And so knowing the power of His resurrection allows us the desire, and even the confidence, to know Him in a fully assured and wonderful way. From this point, we simply grow in our knowledge of Him. This knowledge includes “the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

Once it is accepted and believed that Christ is resurrected, it then should lead us to wonder why He was resurrected. Someone who is resurrected is someone who was dead. If a person is dead and then resurrects, we have full confidence in what that resurrection implies, but we should then look back on what caused the death in the first place. What is the significance of what occurred?

In Christ's death comes atonement for sin. Thus, we can see that He died for us. We stand justified before God because of His death, of which the resurrection is the proof. As noted above, if Jesus died in a state of sin, then He was no Christ, but rather a false Christ. But if He died without sin (proven by the resurrection), then He is the Christ and His work is sufficient for the work God promised in Him, even from the foundation of the world.

From this understanding, we then should desire to know the fellowship of His sufferings. He died for sin for us, and so we should also die to sin through Him. This isn't simply the state of justification which we are granted by faith in Him; this is the process of sanctification where we grow to become more like Him. In this, we conform to His death – dying *to* sin because He died *for* sin.

But there is more to consider. Christ's death wasn't just an atonement for sin, but it was an act of selfless love. It was an act of devotion to His Father, and it was a pattern to follow. In all ways (of which we could ponder so many more), we are to join to Christ and become Christ-like. This theme literally permeates the New Testament. Of numerous passages and verses, we can go to Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 1:5, Colossians 1:24, and 2 Timothy 2:11. Even Peter wrote of this in 1 Peter 4:13.

Life application: When we give the gospel to someone and they accept it – that he has sin, that he deserves death because of sin, that Jesus took his place in the payment of that sin-debt, and that He rose again to prove this – we merely start that person on a journey which should then be pursued with every fiber of his being. We should not be content to say, “You are now on the highway to heaven (which is certainly true), but we should say, “You have just started on the assured highway to heaven. Use your time until you get there wisely, and get to know Christ in every detail and every way imaginable. In doing so, you will live a life far more satisfying than any other way you could live it.”