



Counted As Loss

When Paul opened what we know as [chapter 3](#) of his letter to the church in Philippi, he began with a stark warning to look out for false teachers that led believers astray with errant doctrines. One of those was the assertion that certain religious rites must be followed for a Christian to obtain or maintain salvation (contextually: circumcision). Paul spoke strictly against this teaching, and today we get a glimpse into just how serious he was that the Philippians put no confidence for their salvation in works of the flesh.

for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [Philippians 3:3-7](#) NASB

Here Paul lays out his remarkable qualifications as a religious leader and Pharisee, one of the top positions in the Jewish culture of that day. Considered the most pious of all and extremely influential even in political circles, Pharisees were scrupulous observers of the law as interpreted by the Scribes, and many resided at the peak of religious and societal class in the first century A.D. But as we read in the gospel accounts, many of their teachings were nothing more than man-made religiosity and baseless restrictions burdened on those placed in their spiritual care. Jesus had many stern and cutting words for the hypocritical Pharisees and other religious leaders; read [Matthew 23](#) to see just how much our Lord had to say about these guys. And it was these same Pharisees and chief priests who schemed to put Christ on the cross (cf: [Matt 26:59](#), [Luke 22:2](#)).

As a Pharisee, Paul had devoted his life from youth to meticulously following the Jewish rules, regulations, and rites. He touches only briefly on them here, but to be clear, this was not his weekend hobby. Being a Pharisee was your life and was all encompassing. Paul *was* a Pharisee and his qualifications read like an esteemed professor's resume. For comparison, it is like someone who trains their whole life to be a professional athlete. What they do *is* who they are.

So, picture spending your entire life pursuing what you believed to be your calling from God, and then one day the Messiah you've been trained to watch for stops you on the road (literally) and asks, "why are you persecuting me?" ([Acts 9:4-5](#)). Imagine the heartache in finding out that your life's work and service had culminated to be the exact opposite of what you thought and



expected! The slice of humble pie handed to Paul that day on the road to Damascus is much bigger than you and I can comprehend.

Spelling out his Pharisaical credentials, Paul touts that if anyone has any reason to boast in the works of the flesh, or have confidence in what they have done or achieved in order to gain favor with God, it would be him. None of his readers likely could match his religious qualifications, so if God's blessing or salvation was based on these things, Paul would be escorted to the front of heaven's line among this crowd.

But no, that is absolutely not the case. And Paul makes that abundantly clear when he says, ***"but whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."*** Amplifying this, he's saying, "these things I've done and attained by religious acts, things that I thought were so important, are in fact worthless. They have no effect on whether or not I am saved or find favor with God. All that matters and has any value is Christ."

What an incredibly important lesson for us, too. While as Christians we are undeniably called to do good works (cf: [Matt 5:16](#), [Eph 2:10](#), [James 2:18-20](#)), these things cannot save us. Faith alone in Christ Jesus, by grace alone from God the Father, is what saves us. There is no substitute, there is no other path, and there are no other means to find salvation other than through faith in Christ. [Acts 4:12](#) plainly states, ***"there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*** Our good works follow as evidence of our faith and fruit of the Holy Spirit working in our heart, but those works cannot cleanse of us of the sin which only Christ's blood can.

Next time we'll look a little more into Paul's rejection of his religious credentials and see just how much he wanted the readers of this letter to understand that nothing else matters besides our faith in and submission to Christ. His words are thought-provoking and convicting, and worthy of our time to deeply consider how much we value earthly achievements and possessions over a humble, obedient faith in our Savior.

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