

The Letter to the Philippians

Lesson 17: Giving Up to Gain

Philippians 3:4-11

“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: 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, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 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—that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

MacArthur finished our last lesson, Spurgeon will begin this one. In fact, if Spurgeon had a mic, he would've dropped it after this lengthy quote: I'll read pages 104-106 of his commentary on Philippians. Your attention to this reading will stir your hearts.

The text of this lesson is built upon verse 3, and serving to detail and underscore Paul's point in verses 1-3. The false teachers, the Pharisees of that time, were teaching that true religion, true righteousness was found in Judaism, in the keeping of the law, in circumcision, and following many Jewish practices. It was concerning many of the Gentiles converts to Christ, who thought that they needed to become a Jew first by the prescription of the Pharisees before they could ever truly follow Christ and be one of His. Paul will obliterate this false teaching in this lesson, by detailing every element of his life that would've guaranteed his salvation according to the formula of these teachers, and he calls accomplishments (his one-time assets if you will) collectively worthless.

For any who may have wondered if Paul were pushing Christianity because he tried Judaism and it just didn't work for him, he gives his pedigree. He wasn't boasting in his flesh, he was making the point that compared to the Pharisees, he beat them in every category. If salvation were to be earned by their standards, he would have earned it faster. Paul said in Galatians 1:14, **“And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.”** This is why Paul said in Philippians 3:4, **“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.”**

But what follows in this list in verses 5-11 is a pattern of loss and gain. Paul lists those things from his past that he once considered gain, but are actually loss. And then he lists things that he now considers gain in his life. Paul lists seven items in verses 5-6 that he once considered gain in his life, that he now considers loss, completely useless for salvation. They are: (1) circumcised on the eighth day, (2) of the people of Israel, (3) of the tribe of Benjamin, (4) a Hebrew of Hebrews, (5) as to the law, a Pharisee, (6) as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, and (7) as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Let's look at each in turn.

Circumcised on the eighth day (3:5a): We've already spent some time considering the mind-set of the people concerning circumcision and its importance. What should be noted about Paul's inclusion here is that it tops his list. Recognising the weight of righteousness that it carried with the Jews, Paul is sure to declare it as foremost on his list of former gain. Secondly, and equally as important, is the inclusion of being circumcised on the eighth day. This was done in accordance with the law of God in Leviticus 12:3,

“And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.” Paul’s inclusion of his circumcision declared that he was a Jew by birth, and that he had grown up in Judaism, being sure to keep its law from his youth.

Of the people is Israel (3:5b): This does help to underscore the truth that there were some believers who were Gentile converts to Christ. If being Jewish by birth, however, were some advantage, Paul would have had it. But why would the Jews have considered themselves to be of some advantage salvifically? The OT repeatedly records that Israel is God’s chosen people. One example is Amos 3:1-2, **“Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.”** The name Israel was the self-designated title of the Jewish people, it carried a religious message that said that they were God’s chosen people, and none other. This is why many Jews carried themselves above the fray. Salvation was theirs alone, according to the teaching they received, all other peoples were under God’s eternal judgment.

So Paul’s inclusion of being one of Israel’s number is also included here to challenge the Jews, because it is listed here as one item that has NO value, or factor, in his salvation. Paul is making the point that being Jewish by birth does not mean that you are God’s chosen child. He spoke about that further in Romans 9:6, **“But it is not as though the Word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.”** Not every person who is a Jew is one of God’s elect according to this verse. But Paul’s point is that there is a remnant who are chosen in Israel, which wasn’t a new teaching, but has always been the case throughout the OT. Even in Romans 11:13-24, Paul speaks of the natural branches being cut from the olive tree so that wild shoots may be grafted in. IOW, not every Jew is saved by birth.

Of the tribe of Benjamin (3:5c): There is a lot of history around this tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the youngest son of Jacob (Israel) and was the only son born in the Promised Land. From Benjamin would come Israel’s first king, Saul. When the Promised Land was divided into its twelve tribes, Jerusalem was included in Benjamin’s territory. When the kingdom split after Solomon’s death, only Judah and Benjamin’s tribes remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty. So, it is to say that there was a higher honour to be from the tribe of Benjamin than many others. In Paul’s day, because of the distance of time and faithfulness of the people, most Jews had intermarried and had no clue which tribe they came from, but not Paul’s family. His family had remained pure Benjamites, which meant that Paul’s pedigree as far as being a Jew was a cut above the rest. And this had no value in his salvation.

A Hebrew of Hebrews (3:5d): There is a slight division that we could insert in Paul’s list of invaluable assets here. The first three that we’ve mentioned are “assets” that Paul had nothing to do with, he inherited them. The remainder of his “assets” are his accomplishments which did separate him from his contemporaries, and would have given him reason to boast if there was reason too.

Unlike some Jews in that day who lived in the Greco-Roman culture, and spoke the Greek language, Paul remained firmly committed to speaking Hebrew. Paul was not born in Jerusalem, he was actually born in Asia Minor, but he moved there later. Acts 22:3, Paul says, **“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers.”** Paul devoted his life to Judaism, he studied it with all of his might. As far as the watching world was concerned, his life was impeccable. Acts 26:4-5, **“My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee.”** Yet even Paul’s climb to the top of the ladder in Judaism proved to be nothing more than a detriment to his salvation in Christ.

As to the law, a Pharisee (3:5e): This was the pinnacle of Judaism. The Pharisees were supremely devoted to the law, which included the Old Testament law, but also included many traditions that added much weight to the law. The Pharisees sought to bring about a reformation in the Jewish society by promoting their strict applications of the law to everyday life. The name *Pharisee* comes from an Aramiac term which means “separated ones, separatists”. And separatists they were! They drew the commoner away from the culture of the world, into a life of strict law-keeping, by holding a carrot in front of their nose that they would never eat. The Pharisees promoted a religion that than completely antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Instead of pointing to a Savior, their religion pointed inward to their own righteousness, a righteousness the commoner would never know. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for how they were so overbearing and discouraging to the people in Matthew 23:2-4, **“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works that they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.”** Jesus also rebuked them for their mutilation of the law in Matthew 15:1-9. This was Paul’s life. This is what he did, this is where he came from. Even being at the top of his game, so the speak, amounted to nothing but detriment to his salvation.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church (3:6a): Paul, then Saul, taking his zeal for his religion to its end, sought to remove any opposition to his perception of God’s law. Acts 9:1-2, **“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”** Paul’s violence towards Christians was so fierce, that after he was converted, those who belonged to the Way said, **“Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring us bound before the chief priests?”** (Acts 9:21) Paul, speaking to the angry crowd in Jerusalem in Acts 22:4-5 said, **“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.”** Paul described his persecution of Christian to Agrippa in Acts 26:9-11, **“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”**

Paul, feeling the guilt of his former life, said to the Corinthians, **“For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”** (1 Cor. 15:9) To the Galatians he wrote, **“For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.”** (Gal. 1:13) Zeal for God can be good, and zeal for God can be evil. There are people who are sincerely wrong in their faith, yet are convinced that they are doing God’s will. Paul’s zeal was something that he put great stock in at one time. Paul thought that he had earned God’s favour for advancing Judaism. Paul now lists his zeal as a detriment to salvation.

No one becomes right with God by keeping religious rituals. No one becomes right with God by the good fortune of having righteous parents. No one becomes right with God by achieving a religious office. No one becomes right with God by being faithful to the religious traditions. No one becomes right with God by sincerely believing heresy. And no one becomes right with God by being a legalist.

As to righteousness under the law, blameless. (3:6b) A few words need to be said concerning this word *blameless*. Paul did not mean that he was, or is, sinless. It would have contradicted even Jewish teaching to call yourself sinless. Part of being *blameless* was having the ability to rightly follow the

written law for the prescribed means of atonement for sin. I think it's clear enough what Paul means. He is saying that he is confident that the general public would all affirm that his moral conduct and character were impeccable, above reproach.

This idea of being *blameless* isn't egotistical or prideful. Paul, writing to Timothy and giving the qualification for an Overseer, said that **"an overseer must be above reproach."** (1 Tim. 3:2) Our Pastors shouldn't be considered or thought of as those who are above the fray, untouchable, sinless. But they should be considered as those whose moral conduct and character are impeccable. If the general public could expose all sorts of gross sin in a man's life, he is unqualified for the office of Pastor.

So why does Paul add being blameless under the law as a detriment to salvation, when being blameless under the law ought to be the aim of every believer? Paul is combatting the Jewish leaders who were promoting the advantages of belonging to Israel and the perfection and righteousness that could be gathered by obeying the law. Paul's point to them is that as far as belonging to Israel, he had the purest of pedigrees. And as far as obeying the law was concerned, no one obeyed it as much as him. All of it is worthless, and is in the loss column of attaining a right standing with God.

Paul's long list of loss is now culminated in verse 7-11, **"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 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—that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."**

When we look at the life of David, do we see someone who fits this description? Do we not see David coming before God empty of all virtue, pleading to see or know more of God? In Psalm 63:1, I see comparable wording from David, as he strives for God, leaving behind all everything useless here, **"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water."** I don't want you to miss the point and passion of his words. He is earnest. Think through his words, and remember the thirstiest you've ever been, water becomes the all-consuming thought when you're that thirsty. David was thirstier than that. He is essentially saying, "God, I HAVE to have more of you NOW." He continues in the Psalm, **"So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips."** (2-5)

Do you get the point that God is not small, and shelved in David's heart for convenient use, as we see so often in modern Christians today? David continues, **"When I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me."** (6-8) David clung to God all the moments of his day. God was on his mind in the morning, and through the day and night. David wanted more than God, he realized that he desperately needed God. As a people today, we love David's heart in Psalm 42:1-2, **"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?"** We love those verses, we print them everywhere, we sing them, but do we live them? Do we stand with David again in Psalm 27:4? **"One thing I have asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple."**

We won't join the thinking of Paul and David in pursuing God with all of our hearts, standing before Him naked and in need of clothing, while we cling to our own righteousness. Paul's long list of loss that we just went through challenged the self-righteous Pharisees of that time. We naturally stand with Paul as he exposes those self-righteous claims to be nothing more than sin, but have you ever considered how close you may be to a modern day Pharisee?

Matt Chandler re-words Philippians 3:4-6 in a way that may challenge the little Pharisee that lives in each one of us. Matt says, "*Oh, you think you have reason to boast? I have reason to boast all the more. I have never missed Sunday School. I have never missed a Sunday-morning worship service. I read my Bible every day. I've memorized the New Testament. I've shared the gospel with all of my neighbors. I've never said a cuss word besides invented Christian expletives like, "Oh, dingbat!" and "Shazbot!" and stuff like that. I don't listen to secular music. I've never seen a rated-R movie (that wasn't about Jesus being crucified). The dogs [the Pharisees, the self-righteous] stay focused on "I do. I don't. I have. I never." And look at what they have done. Look at what they have accomplished. Paul here, as loudly as he can, is saying, "Who cares? I did all that too. On the scale, I'm even better than you!"*"⁸⁸

Philippians 3:8-9, "**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 and be found in Him.**" Jesus said in John 17:3, "**And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**" Paul has been using the language of 'gain' and 'loss' and 'worth' throughout this passage. Every effort to be self-righteous is loss, and the only gain is to know the only true God, knowing Christ is of surpassing worth, and inestimable fortune. Your self-righteous list is rubbish, Paul says. 'Rubbish' or 'garbage' in other English translations, is a harsh word, *skubalon* is the strongest of words, meaning "waste, dung, manure, excrement." Paul chose the sharpest word in his vocabulary show the utter disgust of our filthy rags in God's estimation. Because Paul's goal is to gain Christ, anything that got in his way, anything at all, even the things that he and all others would have considered good and right and noble, was garbage.

Charles Spurgeon, the Master of Illustrations, tells this story, "*From the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born from Hebrews. Paul shakes out the whole lot for the dogs, and is glad to be rid of it all for Christ's sake. It reminds me of a ship in a storm. When the captain leaves the harbor he has a cargo on board of which he takes great care, but when a tremendous wind is blowing and the ship labors, being too heavily laden, and there is great fear that she will not outride the storm, see how eagerly the sailors lighten the ship. They bring up from the hold with all diligence the very things that before they prized, and they seem rejoiced to heave them into the sea. Never men more eager to get than these are to throw away. There go the casks of flour, the bars of iron, the manufactured goods. Overboard go valuable bales of merchandise; nothing seems to be worth keeping. How is this? Are not these things good? Yes, but not good to a sinking ship. Anything must go to save life, anything to outride the storm*

And so the apostle says that in order to win Christ and to be found in Him he flung the whole cargo of his beloved confidences over, and was as glad to get rid of them as if they were only so much dung. This he did to win Christ.

That fact suggests another picture: an English war ship of the olden times is cruising the ocean, and she spies a Spanish galleon in the distance laden with gold from the Indies. Captain and men are determined to overtake and capture her, for they have a relish for prize money, but their vessel sails heavily. What then? If she will not move because of her load they fling into the sea everything they can lay their hands

⁸⁸ Chandler, Matt, *To Live is Christ, To Die is Gain* David C Cook, 2013 (p. 90-91)

on, knowing that if they can capture the Spanish vessel the booty will make amends for all they lose and vastly more. Do you wonder at their eagerness to lose the little to gain the great?

So it is with the man who is in earnest to win Christ and to be found in Him. Overboard go circumcision and Pharisaism, and the blamelessness touching the law, and all that, for he knows that he will find a better righteousness in Christ than any which he foregoes. Indeed, he will find everything in Christ that he now for His Lord's sake counts but as a slag for the furnace.”⁸⁹

Do we see Christ as that great treasure in the distance? Is He a treasure so big and so grand that we recognize that we must take hold of Him, and that we cannot fit Him into our home apart from clearing out all that is presently in it? Jesus knew of the cost of attaining the treasure of God. He said in Matthew 13:44-46, **“The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”** Is God that valuable to you? If you can honestly say in your heart that he isn't, Jesus is telling you that your heart is set on the wrong treasure. You must empty yourself of every earthly treasure, and cling to the one treasure that surpasses the worth of all the others combined, Jesus Christ. It is impossible, Jesus says, to try and fit Christ onto the shelf alongside all of your other shiny objects. Well, he didn't say that, but He did say this, **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”** (Matt. 6:19-21, 24)

Not only was Paul's worth found solely in knowing Jesus Christ, his righteousness was solely found in Him too! Philippians 3:9b, **“[I am] 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.”** The law can't save. It never has been able to, and it never will be able to. There has never been any merit derived from the law that helps to repair the broken relationship between you and the Father. In fact, contrary to saving sinners, the law actually condemns sinners. This is why Paul clings to Christ and seeks to be clothed with His righteousness, because Christ is the only one who is truly righteous. Paul, speaking of crushing weight of the law, said, **“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”** (Romans 3:19-20) How much clearer can Paul get? The entire law is written and speaks judgment to every person alive on every line, to the point where no person will have an excuse left to fall back on, but will stand silently and accept the punishment due them. No person will ever be justified before God by keeping the law. We need the righteousness of another. We need the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Paul continues in verse 23-26, **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”**

Every single person stands condemned by the law in their sin. None can be justified by lawkeeping. We are only and forever justified by the gracious gift of God, given to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Christ was the propitiation of God's wrath against us. Jesus

⁸⁹ Spurgeon, C.H., *Commentary: Philippians* Lexham Press, 2015 (p. 98-99)

has extinguished the white hot flaming arrows of God's wrath that were aimed at our hearts in judgment, and He has ushered us into a familial relationship with this same God now as our Father. He did this to display His righteousness. And at the same time that He has justified us, He still remains a just God who is Holy, and cannot be in the presence of wickedness, and who will not let any sin go unpunished.

This doctrine of justification is the central doctrine of the reformation of the Christian church, as they broke away from the Roman Catholic idolatrous system. As the scriptures were being mass-printed and distributed to the common people in their native language, zeal for the Word of God grew. Many were becoming acquainted with the scriptures, and the straying away of the Roman church was creating quite a stir. Many people came to know Christ, and left the Roman church in order to worship the Lord in a manner that lined up with the scripture alone. Of course, the Roman church did not sit idly while their numbers shrunk over this new-found theology. So they gathered together and held the council of Trent. They met three separate times, spanning the years of 1545-1564. During those meetings they defined what would be for all time the official and final position of the Roman church on many fronts: the eucharist, the Mass, transubstantiation, the sacraments of penance – extreme unction – marriage and so forth. They detailed how the only authorized version of the Bible was the Latin Vulgate Bible, the doctrine of purgatory, the veneration of the saints and relics, and the nature and application of indulgences. And most importantly to this discussion, they condemned Protestant theology as heresy, and threatened to damn any Catholic who would dare tangle with it.

In their sixth session, which spoke solely upon the doctrine of justification, the Roman Catholic church said this, in response to what the Protestants were teaching from their Bibles: *“After this Catholic doctrine on justification, which whosoever does not faithfully and firmly accept cannot be justified, it seemed good to the holy council to add these canons, that all may know not only what they must hold and follow, but also what to avoid and shun.”* Therefore, at the outset of their coming canons that the Church is about to declare authoritatively and eternally, is the threat that any who stand opposed to the Church's position CANNOT be justified. Let's take Canon 9 for example, *“If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema.”* Why would anyone say that we're justified by faith alone, apart from our actions or will to be saved? Galatians 2:16 might be one of many reasons, **“Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”** It sounds to me like Galatians 2:16 is directly contradicting Canon 9. So why don't more Catholics see this error? The first reason I would suppose is that they've never read Galatians 2:16. Which does say something of their character, but also reflects the teaching and encouragement of the RCC to read the Bible at home. But the main reason why I think many have failed to see the truth from scripture is because of the source of authority in Roman system. The Church is the sole authority. She wrote scripture, and she alone interprets it. So, while we cite the Bible, the serious Catholic would just as seriously cite Papal decrees, various creeds, and the canons and decrees of the this Council of Trent as their authority. There is much power from the top in the RCC to teach what it wants to teach. But let's not also forget the threat that is found at the end of every canon. *Let him be anathema.* “You are removed from the Church, you are never allowed back in.” If all else fails...scare them. In order to ensure that the people stay as far away from scripture as possible, we'll scare them with Hell if they get too close. The RCC has trained their people, even today, to mindlessly follow the lead of the clergy, since they alone have the capacity and authority to handle and spoon-feed the complex word of God. So, if my logic is correct, any Catholic who whole-heartedly affirms the truth of Galatians 2:16 isn't actually a Catholic anymore, since they would now be under the condemnation of the church.

Canon 11, *“If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and remains in them, or also the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema.”* Isn't this exactly what Romans 3:23-26 was saying?

I draw out the errors of the Roman Catholic church to compare them to the Pharisees of Paul's day. As we've talked at length about the Jewish system of work-righteousness that was prevalent and drawing people astray at that time. We equally live in a predominantly Roman Catholic culture where to perhaps a lesser degree the same concept is taught. Paul has spent Philippians chapter 3 highlighting every element of his life that would have been considered righteous to most, and calling it worthless in the end. Now that he has stripped himself bare of all righteousness, he points to the only source of righteousness, Jesus Christ. Paul preached Christ crucified, **“a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, and an anathema to Catholics.”** (1 Corinthians 1:23... sort of.)

Galatians 3:10-14, **“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”**

Even later in the letter, Paul talks about the foolishness of pointing to a religious achievement for righteousness. He uses circumcision as the example. Galatians 5:2-6, **“Look: I Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law, you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”**

Paul is essentially saying, “Look, if you want to make this a contest of rule keeping, than you'd better be prepared to ace this test, because you only pass this test with a perfect score.” The law was not written so that people could practice acing the test. Those types of people are the ones who don't need a Savior, Christ is no advantage to them. The law is written to condemn. It's like the signs on the side of the road, if there isn't a sign, any speed will do. But as soon as a speed sign is posted, immediately there's a law and a punishment for breaking it. Paul wrote about the law being written to condemn again in Romans 7:9-13, **“I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in my through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.”**

Once upon a time, Paul thought that he found life in Judaism. What he ultimately found was a law that killed him, not proved him to be righteous. This is why Paul says in Philippians 3:9 that he did not have a righteousness of his own that came from the law. His righteousness was found in Christ alone. His hope and trust were in Christ alone. Paul's sin was placed upon Christ, and the righteousness of Christ was placed upon Paul. It's the great exchange at Calvary, “His Robes for Mine” we sing! *“His robes for mine: O wonderful exchange! Clothed in my sin, Christ suffered 'neath God's rage. Draped in His righteousness, I'm justified. In Christ I live, for in my place He died.”* Paul said it in 2 Corinthians 5:21,

“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Not only did Paul find his righteousness in Christ alone, but he also found his power there too. Philippians 3:10, **“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.”** There was no righteousness to be found in lawkeeping, and it’s important to remember that there’s no power in lawkeeping either. All have fallen short of the glory of God. Paul knew that nothing good dwelled within him. He had godly desires, but he lacked the ability to meet those desires in his flesh. (Rom. 7:18) He found his strength in the power of Christ, and in His resurrection. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is the same power that brought life into his dead heart, and would most certainly sustain him and raise his body to eternal life with Christ someday. It was this power that sustained Paul, who lived and moved and breathed in the power of Christ, and whose main objective was simply to know Him more. Romans 6:4-5, **“We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.”**

Paul wanted to know more than Christ, he wanted to know the power of God through Christ in his life. He wanted to know the power of God who **“raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.”** (1 Cor. 6:14) The power of God is found in the gospel Paul said, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”** (Romans 1:16) Paul also said that God’s power is found in His creation, **“For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world.”** (Romans 1:20) The power of God is found in the cross, **“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”** (1 Cor. 1:18) And as Paul is alluding to in Philippians 3:10, God’s power is manifested in believers, **“And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”** (1 Cor. 2:4-5)

Philippians 3:10b, **“And may share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death”**. Jesus Christ lived a life of perfect holiness, and walked perfectly righteous before God, and yet suffered more than any other in history. His suffering was unjust, he deserved none of it. And Jesus reminded His followers that the same sufferings would come upon them if they walked in obedience, because the same world will continue to hate Him through their lives’. Suffering that leads to death ought to be the expected path of the serious Christian. Not that all Christians will face that path, especially in this culture, but that no Christian ought to taken back when it comes. We must be conformed to the death of Christ. Romans 6:11 says, **“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”** There is a death that must come to a believer, a death that always results in a life devoted to God. Galatians 2:20, **“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”**

Philippians 3:11, **“That by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”** We shouldn’t confuse Paul’s words at the beginning of this verse. It may sound like he’s uncertain about his future salvation “that by any means possible”, or “maybe this way might work...I’ll try it!” His words speak of his humility, not his uncertainty. He new with perfect clarity that he was in Christ, what he is expressing here is how undeserving he is of this union with Christ in His resurrection.

MacArthur wrote, *“What do believers gain by their union with Christ? The knowledge of Christ in their identification with Him; the righteousness of Christ imputed to them in justification; the power of Christ*

for their sanctification; participation in the sufferings of Christ; and sharing Christ's glory in their glorification. No wonder Paul gladly exchanged the religious credits in his loss column for the surpassing benefits of knowing Christ."⁹⁰

Will you join Paul and empty yourselves of all religious accomplishments, or will you cling to your own righteousness?

⁹⁰ MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 240)